

SARTRE'S CONCEPTION OF GOD

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PREFACE

Jean-Paul Sartre is one of the foremost atheists of this century. Although Sartre is not studied and quoted now as much as he was immediately following the Second World War, he has made a significant contribution to the twentieth century understanding of man. His major work of the earlier part of his career, Being and Nothingness, An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology, provides the most systematic philosophical account of Sartre's thought. It is for this reason that I have chosen Being and Nothingness as the basic text for understanding Sartre's atheism. I have concentrated primarily on the earlier part of Sartre's life (before 1952) as it best articulates his views concerning man and God.

Besides Being and Nothingness (1943), I have taken Nausea (1938), Existentialism of Humanism (1946-7), and The Devil and the Good Lord (1951) as being the most representative of Sartre's writings concerning atheism. In doing so, I hope that I have come to "grips" with the core of Sartre's atheism.

In Chapter One, I examine closely the line of argument in Sartre's sections entitled "The Pursuit of Being" and "The Origin of Negation." These two introductory divisions provide the basis for the rest of Sartre's essay. When one reads these sections, it

soon becomes apparent that Sartre is setting up two different realms of realities--consciousness and objects. Furthermore, by employing the concept of "transphenomenality," Sartre separates "the act of consciousness" from "the foundation of to-be-conscious," and "the act of appearing" from "the foundation of appearances, i.e., infinite series of appearances." This bifurcation has definite implications for Sartre's conception of nothingness because it eliminates any purely subjective projection of non-being. Furthermore, I have noted that Sartre's notion of nothingness has important repercussions for Sartre's nihilism and atheism. That is, if nothingness is not solely a subjective reality, it then becomes important to understand the conditions for the "existence" of non-being and subsequently, nothingness.

In Chapter Two, I examine Sartre's remarks concerning God in Being and Nothingness. On the one hand, considering the length of this essay, Sartre's comments about God are surprisingly very few. However, on the other hand, considering the quasi-phenomenological structure of Sartre's thought, it is even more surprising that he refers to God at all. I propose in this thesis that Sartre's arguments for the non-existence of God are not entirely convincing. Nonetheless, I do agree with many scholars that it is essential to acquire an understanding of Sartre's ontological thought before one is able to truly appreciate Sartre's

existential writings. Certainly, Sartre's literary and existential comments are better known than his ontological and psychological writings. Therefore, any discussion about Sartre's atheism would not be complete without referring to these well known remarks concerning the absence of God in man's world.

Finally, in Chapter Three I attempt to follow Sartre's line of argument beyond the point where he finishes. That is, modern man expects a "god" to come and rescue him from his plight. However, since modern man, using Sartre as an example, defines in a limited manner and without the aid of faith, the conditions for such a revelation, it is almost impossible for man to recognize a god even if a god did decide to reveal himself. In short, the purpose of this thesis is to show that it is entirely possible that man is the one who has abandoned God and not vice versa. The debate of whether God exists or not is still unsettled despite what philosophers may have concluded. This, I think, is significant because it requires that philosophers go back to their initial departure point and examine their presuppositions. However, I am not suggesting that these past two centuries of debate have been in vain. On the contrary, this debate, especially Sartre's contribution, have shown exactly what is at stake. Modern man thinks of God as being absent, but he will never know for certain until he knows who God is.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE ORIGIN OF BEING

Sartre's major ontological work, Being and Nothingness (hereafter B.N.),¹ is at first sight both intriguing and intimidating. It is intriguing because of Sartre's promise of writing a phenomenological essay on the subject of ontology. It is intimidating at first glance because of Sartre's unorthodox use of terms. However, any expectation that the promise will be kept seems to disappear after the reader sorts out Sartre's terminology and discovers that the implied unification of these two branches of philosophy, namely phenomenology and ontology, is largely the result of Sartre's confusion in method and procedure. The purpose of this present chapter is to follow closely Sartre's argument in both the Introduction, "The Pursuit of Being," and Chapter One of Part One, "The Origin of Negation," and to briefly comment on Sartre's inadequacies. A further analysis will be warranted after Sartre's existential writings have been discussed, as these two sets of problems are not unrelated.

It is no accident that Sartre in B.N. attempts to

¹ J.P. Sartre, Being and Nothingness, tr. and intro. by H. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956).

establish an ontological framework before going on to discuss the subject of nothingness. Sartre believes that the concept of nothingness cannot be discussed without referring to being. In the introduction of B.N., Sartre, in trying to get at the structure of being, proposes a radical phenomenological reduction that distinguishes him from many of his predecessors, including Husserl. Before exploring how Sartre does this, one must follow his line of argument in order to ascertain whether or not he actually succeeds in performing the phenomenological reduction.

In his opening remarks, Sartre notes the progress of modern philosophical thought in ridding itself of metaphysical dualisms which plagued thought for so long.¹ He also notes that the dualisms of interior and exterior and of appearance and being, are no longer valid in describing ontology. Sartre concludes: ". . . then the appearance becomes full positivity; its essence is an 'appearing' which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it."² Sartre reduces objects to their appearances in that they are no more than appearances. He likewise rejects the dualism of appearances and essence on the same grounds. There are no essential

¹ B.N., xlvii.

² B.N., xlvi.

characteristics which appearance hides. "The phenomenal being manifests itself; it manifests its essence as well as its existence, and it is nothing but the well connected series of its manifestations."¹ Furthermore, there is no dualism of potency and act, because phenomena cannot be other than what they are, pure act. By rejecting these metaphysical dualisms, Sartre seems to be arguing for a monistic interpretation of being.

However, this is not the case since Sartre replaces these dualisms with a dualism of the infinite and finite. This dualism accounts for change in appearances. If the series of appearances had a finite structure, then there would be no possibility for a previous appearance to reappear. And this conclusion Sartre considers to be nonsense. Change is not a subjective projection because the phenomenon is transcendent in so far as the object is not spatially a part of the subject, and thus

. . . it is necessary that the subject himself transcend the appearance toward the total series of which it is a member. . . . Thus the appearance, which is finite, indicates itself in its finitude, but at the same time in order to be grasped as an appearance-of-that-which-appears, it requires that it be surpassed toward infinity.²

¹ B.N., xlviii.

² B.N., xlix.

In this first section Sartre establishes that consciousness is immediately aware of existence. That is, consciousness is directly confronted with the appearance of an object. However, that appearance is limited to the particular moment because the perceiver is only able to perceive one appearance at a time. Sartre establishes the object's objectivity by saying that the object has an infinite number of possible appearances because the object can be seen from an infinite number of perspectives. He refers to this dualism of the object and its appearances as ". . . the infinite in the finite."¹ The object is both located within and outside of appearance. It is inside of appearance because the object manifests itself qua appearing. However, it is outside of appearance because the series of appearances will never appear all at once. To do so would be for the object to lose its objective nature. In spite of this distinction, one wonders that, since the series of appearances of an object cannot be revealed to consciousness all at once, then how is it possible that consciousness knows that there is a "series of appearances" qua itself? In order for Sartre to establish the substantive nature of appearances he must assume an objective point of view. By that, I mean, Sartre epistemologically moves outside the realm of

¹ B.N., xlix.

perception to the point of assuming notions that cannot be substantiated within perception.

By making the distinction between finite/infinite appearances, Sartre has laid the foundation for saying that objects have a nature that is unknown to consciousness qua consciousness. In other words, Sartre has expanded his phenomenology to the point of exceeding the epistemological boundaries of pure description.

In the next section, entitled "The Phenomenon of Being and the Being of Phenomenon," Sartre states that being is not reducible to phenomenon. He does so by saying "The appearance is not supported by any existence different from itself; it has its own being."¹ This statement seems to refer to phenomenon of being since phenomenon of being is that of which one is aware. Phenomenon is that which manifests itself or makes itself known.² Phenomenon of being, for Sartre, is a concept which describes the process of how existents have meaning. Sartre defines ontology as ". . . the description of the phenomenon of being as it manifests itself; that is, without intermediary."³ Sartre asks

¹ B.N., 1.

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem.

Whether or not the phenomenon of being corresponds to the being of phenomenon. The expression "being of phenomenon" is used to describe the existence of objects. The question presupposes that there is a different character of the existent which exists somehow apart from appearances. Being is not an appearance but the condition for the revelation of appearances.¹ However, the phenomenon of being cannot be the condition of revelation since it is itself something revealed. He expresses this by saying that ". . . the being of the phenomenon can not be reduced to the phenomenon of being."² In other words, like the series of appearances, being of phenomenon gives rise to phenomenon of being. That does not mean that the series of appearances is hidden behind a present appearance. On the contrary, an appearance is one in a succession of appearances.

The result of this section of his work is that Sartre believes that knowledge cannot completely capture existence. He expresses this by coining the concept of "transphenomenality." Thus he writes that "The phenomenon of being requires the transphenomenality of being."³ The term "transphenomenality" indicates that being exceeds our conception of it and also it

¹ B.N., li.6

² Ibidem. 7

³ B.N., lii.1

provides the foundation for such conceptions. That is, in using transphenomenality Sartre is saying that phenomenon or appearance not only exists in so far as it appears, but it is an appearance qua apart from appearing. Transphenomenality is used to give appearances ontological independence apart from the act of appearing. In first saying that objects qua series of appearances have an ontological nature separate from awareness, qua the perceiving of an appearance, and secondly, in saying that the existence of appearances cannot be reduced to the awareness of appearances, i.e., appearing, Sartre has separated phenomena from awareness. In short, he distinguishes that which appears, or is revealed, from the act of perceiving the revealed. (Sartre is here falling into the trap of an ambiguous mode of objectivism). To say that awareness and existence are separate is to artificially objectify what should be a single fact of experience.

This is quite evident in the use of the term transphenomenality in that consciousness has a foundation apart from perceiving and objects have a basis for revelation apart from what consciousness is directly aware of. It is an artificial objectification because it does not make sense to talk about awareness qua awareness without referring to the awareness of something; and likewise it does not make sense to speak about existence qua existence without referring to the act of perceiving of existence. Sartre can only do this by moving away from descriptive analysis towards metaphysical speculation. How

can Sartre conclude that the phenomenon of being is not equivalent to the being of phenomenon without presupposing that there is something other than phenomenon of being?

Furthermore, Sartre reduces the phenomenon of being to a state of perception rather than an act of perception. That is, being is changed from a condition for revelation to the state of an appearance. This gives Sartre further ammunition to conclude that knowledge cannot give a full explanation of being.¹

Phenomenon of being is a conceptual term which depends upon existence but cannot give a complete explanation of the nature of existence. The question that needs to be asked is how do we know that concepts are not able to capture existence, if that is the only way of understanding. Nevertheless, by not making this equation, Sartre has refuted any idealist basis for knowledge because knowledge cannot determine being or provide the conditions to know an object.

In the section "The Pre-reflective Cogito and the Being of the Percipere," Sartre reaffirms that knowledge qua knowledge cannot be an epistemological foundation for knowledge of objects. Berkeley's esse est percipi is rejected because "Consciousness is not a mode of particular knowledge which may be called an inner

¹ B.N., lii-liii.¶

meaning or self-knowledge; it is the dimension of transphenomenal being in the subject."¹ Appearances, loosely speaking, are that which are presented to consciousness.

We have already noticed that Sartre is not satisfied with describing objects or that which appears to consciousness, but he also wants to describe the "ontological status" of those objects. Thus it is essential to define Sartre's use of the term "being" before attempting to unravel "transphenomenality." Being can be used to mean existence, the basic reality of an object or concrete being. However, Sartre defines being as ". . . simply the condition of all revelation."² It seems that Sartre is saying that being provides the means by which objects are presented to consciousness. Transphenomenality of consciousness is not just that which appears to consciousness, but that which is conscious.

By using transphenomenality, Sartre is giving an ontological status to consciousness. "For the law of being in the knowing subject is to-be-conscious."³ I have already pointed out that in employing transphenomenality Sartre distinguishes between appearances and appearing; similarly he distinguishes between the act of perceiving and the perceived. That is the transphenomenality

¹ B.N., liii. ^{to}

² B.N., li. ⁸

³ B.N., liii. ^{iv}

of consciousness indicates that the perceived, although coextensive with the act of perceiving, cannot be reduced to the act of perceiving. The perceived provides the foundation for perceiving. Sartre advocates that the perceived has an independent ontological status apart from perceiving. He does so because he believes that knowledge should be grounded in existence and not vice versa.

Sartre establishes this primordially by giving existence or the being of phenomenon objective status apart from consciousness' ability to grasp existence qua infinite series of appearances. However, it should be pointed out that when Sartre talks about transphenomenality of consciousness, he is not referring to the subject and the world per se. He is referring to consciousness and its basis. The transphenomenality of consciousness has an independent status apart from perceiving. Since consciousness has being in so far as "The existence of consciousness comes from consciousness itself,"¹ it is itself a series of appearances. But by the very fact that consciousness cannot grasp the series of appearances qua itself, its existence is independent from consciousness' awareness of it. The foundation of consciousness is to-be-conscious. Nevertheless, that does not mean that consciousness is substantial. On the contrary, it is pure appearance in so far as it appears.

¹ B.N., lvii.^{ib}

But it is precisely because consciousness is pure appearance, because it is total emptiness (since the entire world is outside it)--it is because of this identity of appearance and existence within it that it can be considered as the absolute.¹

Sartre leads the discussion back to the relationship between the perceiver and the world. It is in this way that the perceived provides the foundation for perceiving. Nevertheless, if consciousness has an ontological status, then that would raise the question of what consciousness reveals. Sartre will attempt to answer this question later in his first part of B.N.

We can see how Sartre is setting up two separate realms of being. First, by making the distinction between finite and infinite, he objectively sets up a realm of being which exists apart from perception. I do not mean that Sartre is proposing a type of realism. Rather, he moves outside the bounds of description to posit the foundation of consciousness and of objects which lie beyond the scope of awareness. That is, the transphenomenal phenomenon of objects is that there are appearances which do not appear; and the transphenomenal phenomenon of consciousness is that there are appearances that exist even when they are not perceived.

Second, he states that the being of phenomenon cannot be

¹ B.N., lviii.

reduced to phenomenon of being. In other words, that which is revealed to consciousness is not the same as the condition for such revelation. However, he has not stayed within the pure descriptive mode because a phenomenologist would make the equation that phenomenon is equivalent to being. So much so, that the term "being" is no longer useful or needed because it becomes redundant. That is, the phenomenologists would equate awareness with existence and would find it difficult to refer to existence that is not directly perceivable by consciousness. Furthermore, Sartre gives consciousness an independent status apart from appearances. He gives an ontological status to consciousness by referring to the transphenomenal being of the subject. Sartre has again fallen into the trap of objectivism by indicating that consciousness is more than that which is known; but consciousness has the nature of "being conscious." Therefore Sartre has provided the grounds for saying that consciousness is a thing-in-itself and the object perceived is a thing-in-itself. Consciousness qua consciousness cannot directly know about the objectivity of objects and the transphenomenality of consciousness without first presupposing that there is an objective nature of consciousness.

Sartre employs the phenomenological reduction in this section. He repeats Husserl's famous dictum that "All consciousness . . . is consciousness of something. This means that there is no consciousness which is not a positing of a transcendent object, or if one prefers, that consciousness has

no 'content'."¹ It first appears that this move is not so significant. However, in view of Sartre's earlier work entitled The Transcendence of the Ego (1937), we see the significance of consciousness having no content because Sartre is refuting Husserl's notion of the transcendental ego. In the essay he writes:

The ego is not the owner of consciousness; it is the object of consciousness. To be sure, we constitute spontaneously our states and actions as productions of the ego. But our states and actions are also objects.²

Sartre interprets Husserl as positing an ego as being "in" or "behind" consciousness. The ego is intentional in that it directly interprets the contents of consciousness, i.e., sense data, into objects. Sartre rejects this as being a form of idealism. It is from this perspective that, in the introduction to B.N., Sartre makes a radical phenomenological reduction.

No doubt Sartre had Husserl in mind when he wrote:

The first procedure of a philosophy ought to be to expel things from consciousness and to reestablish its true connection with the world, to know that consciousness is a positional

¹ B.N., liii.

² J.P. Sartre, The Transcendence of the Ego, tr. and intro. by F. Williams and R. Kirkpatrick (New York: The Noonday Press, 1957), p. 97.

consciousness of the world. All consciousness is positional in that it transcends itself in order to reach an object, and it exhausts itself in this same positing.¹

Sartre makes it clear that consciousness is empty or transparent. The necessary condition for consciousness is knowledge of the object.² It is certain that Sartre holds that epistemological concepts must be rooted in ontology.

We have seen how consciousness is a type of being qua itself by examining Sartre's term "transphenomenality." While Sartre establishes this fact, he goes a step further in the radical phenomenological reduction. Consciousness is a being which is completely transparent. It is important to distinguish Sartre's different uses of consciousness as there are three types of consciousness which he refers to in B.N. They consist of the dyad of pre-reflective consciousness and reflective consciousness. When Sartre speaks of intentionality in the section entitled "The Ontological Proof," he is referring to the pre-reflective consciousness. Boudreaux has provided a helpful scheme in order to distinguish the types of consciousness from each other.³ Consciousness₁ is consciousness which is directed

¹ B.N., liii. ^

² B.N., liv. ^^

³ M.M. Boudreaux, "Nothingness: The Adventure of the For-Itself" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Philosophy, University of Missouri), pp. 65-6.

towards the world of objects. This consciousness, a first order consciousness, does not create its objects but instead discovers an object which is other than itself. Another way of expressing it is to say that consciousness is present to an object. It is a positional consciousness because it is directed towards the object or being-in-itself. Consciousness₁ is used to express a distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself.

The second part of the pre-reflective's dyad is consciousness₂ which is conscious of itself. However, it is not conscious in the reflective sense because consciousness₂ does not posit an object like consciousness₁ or like reflective consciousness. Rather it is a non-positional consciousness which is indirectly aware of consciousness/object. "In other words, every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself."¹ Sartre uses the dyadic structure of the pre-reflective consciousness because if consciousness was not non-positionally aware of itself, it would not know itself being aware of objects. Nothing separates consciousness₁ from consciousness₂.

The last type of consciousness that Sartre refers to is reflective consciousness. This is a second order consciousness since consciousness turns in upon itself to posit consciousness

¹ B.N., lv.

as an object for itself. This is known as reflexive consciousness. Consciousness₃ is experientially prior to but is ontologically dependent upon pre-reflective consciousness. Consciousness of consciousness can only exist reflectively. Both pre-reflective and reflective posit an object for itself. In short, since consciousness is completely transparent, consciousness needs an object before it is able to realize it is conscious.

Returning to the first part of B.N., we see that Sartre establishes the pre-reflective cogito. The pre-reflective cogito is not ". . . a new consciousness, but . . . the only mode of existence which is possible for a consciousness of something."¹ For example, pleasure cannot be distinguished from the thought of that pleasure. "Pleasure is the being of self-consciousness and this self-consciousness is the law of being pleasure."² This example illustrates that consciousness in its being is its source and essence.³ Sartre's phenomenological reduction is used when he says that there are no laws of consciousness, but instead only consciousness of laws. The argument is beginning to shift from a realistic position towards an idealistic position in that consciousness plays an important

¹ B.N., lvi. ¹⁴

² B.N., lvii. ¹⁵

³ Ibidem.

role in determining itself. It seems that Sartre wants to provide a neutral basis for knowledge by first saying that consciousness is consciousness of something and by saying that consciousness is free from any restraint that might hinder consciousness from determining itself.

The argument moves another step in confirming the independence of consciousness by saying that it does not have the property of self-generation in the sense of becoming, and also that it is a plenum of being. "The existence of consciousness comes from consciousness itself."¹ Sartre foreshadows his thesis about nothingness when he discloses that consciousness cannot arise from nothingness because it is prior to nothingness and is the source of nothingness.² The thesis that consciousness has plenum of existence is not questioned because Sartre claims that, since B.N. is not a metaphysical work, there is no need to speculate on why this thesis is true. He does substantiate this claim by saying there are no causes other than "self-activated" causes which explain why beings come into existence.

Part of the difficulty of understanding Sartre's so-called phenomenological ontology is his employment of terms. An evident example is the ambiguous use of "being." This ambiguity comes through the statement "Since consciousness is not

¹ B.N., lvii.

² B.N., lviii.

possible before being, but since its being is the source and condition of all possibility, its existence implies its essence."¹ Is Sartre referring to the being of consciousness or the being of object? If he is referring to the being of object then surely he is advocating a form of realism. However, this does not appear to be the case because later he states consciousness is a plenum of existence and determines itself.² Thus Sartre must be speaking about the being of consciousness. Therefore, the statement is saying that consciousness is not possible before "a condition for revelation." This is completely self evident and does not need to be said. It is tautological.

Sartre takes the middle course between idealism and realism and though he seems to think that he has escaped both, it seems to me that he is in fact operating at two levels. First, he wants to get rid of any notions of idealism by disregarding the primacy of knowledge. He does so by grounding his epistemology in existence rather than knowledge. Second, in doing so, he attempts to link the nature of consciousness with existence. But the problem which then arises is How is one able to capture the existential character of consciousness if consciousness is pure appearance and thus is not substantial?

¹ B.N., lvii.

² Ibidem.

That is, consciousness is a revelation of reality other than itself. To indicate that consciousness is pure appearance is, by the very nature of the statement, to indicate that consciousness has a nature by saying it has no inner nature. This is self-contradictory. The only way that Sartre could escape this dilemma would be to go beyond the realm of phenomenology, to the ontological nature of consciousness. This, for the time being, is left unresolved as Sartre seems quite content to leave it so.

At the beginning of the fourth section entitled "The Being of the Percipi," Sartre is convinced that he has successfully reduced objects to the totality of appearances, thereby establishing their objectivity. Surely this statement is clearly non-phenomenological: "We have reduced things to the united totality of their appearances, and we have established that these appearances lay claim to a being which is no longer itself appearance."¹ By assuming that knowledge cannot determine being, subjectivism is no longer a serious consideration. "The table is before knowledge and can not be identified with the knowledge which we have of it; otherwise . . . it would disappear as table."² Consciousness does not create the ontological status of objects, but objects provide the

¹ B.N., lix. 17

² Ibidem. 15

foundation for knowledge.

Sartre is setting up the argument, to use Husserl's concept of intentionality, to provide the ontological foundation of objects. Not only does Sartre differ from Husserl by the manner in which he applies the phenomenological reduction, but he will also modify Husserl's concept of intentionality. Sartre is critical of Husserl's concept of intentionality for not going far enough in establishing the objective status of objects. It is evident that Sartre has Husserl in mind when he writes: "The perceived being is before consciousness; consciousness can not reach it, and it can not enter into consciousness; and as the perceived being is cut off from consciousness, it exists cut off from its own existence."¹ In saying this, Sartre provides the basis for the separation of consciousness from objects. He does so because past concepts of intentionality failed to recognize that consciousness is ontologically distinct from objects.

Sartre attempts to escape the mind-body problem by using the phenomenological method to account for the two modes of being. Nevertheless, without a clearly established method, Sartre seems to be heading towards a position which would be difficult to substantiate. He wants to have the best of both worlds, but unfortunately he cannot because of his confusion between phenomenology and ontology. The confusion arises because

¹ B.N., lxi. ²¹

of Sartre's use of "transphenomenality" which artificially separates awareness from existence.

Phenomenology attempts to elucidate thoughts about the perceived world. The concept of existence is an implicit fact of that elucidation. Although this may be so regarding phenomenology, Sartre, thinking he is describing the world, posits awareness and existence to be things in their own right. This conclusion does not belong to phenomenology but to ontology because the latter does make such distinctions. Thus, confusion arises when Sartre fails to recognize the limitations of phenomenological description when exploring ontological questions.

In the section entitled "The Ontological Proof," Sartre uses the concept of intentionality to provide the ontological foundation of objects. He repeats Husserl's description of consciousness saying that consciousness is consciousness of something. According to Sartre, this can be interpreted in two ways: ". . . either we understand by this that consciousness is constitutive of the being of its object, or it means that consciousness in its inmost nature is a relation to a transcendent being."¹ The first interpretation is rejected at the outset because consciousness cannot determine objects since the objects provide their own basis for being. Rather, he accepts the second interpretation, by inverting the relationship between

¹ B.N., lxii.²²

consciousness and the object, saying that ". . . transcendence is the constitutive structure of consciousness; that is, that consciousness is born supported by a being which is not itself. This is what we call the ontological proof."¹ Sartre no longer describes appearances but now describes "full being." This is evident when he states: ". . . consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself."² Sartre uses an epistemological concept of intentionality to provide the ontological basis for objects. If consciousness is consciousness of something other than itself, then this "something" must be real. Sartre is "playing" consciousness off against objects.

Throughout the introductory sections, Sartre continuously refutes subjectivism. Since he thinks that he has succeeded in doing so, he uses the so-called objective nature of consciousness to prove the objective nature of objects. Notice that he reverses the argument from the previous section. That is, Sartre first states that the transcendent is the constitutive structure of consciousness; and in the latter section consciousness provides the ontological basis for the transcendent.

¹ B.N., lxiii. ²³

² B.N., lxiv. ²⁴

He appears to be in an "epistemological circle." It is one thing to hold, as phenomenologists do, the position that both consciousness and objects together provide the epistemological basis for describing the world. However, it is quite another to use the noetic or consciousness to prove the existence of the noematic or the object.

It will be recalled that Sartre's definition of being is that which is the condition for revealing. What does that mean for the study of ontology? Besides Sartre's methodological mistakes of making objective assertions, there is some confusion regarding the very concept of a phenomenological ontology. Phenomenology is a study of what is presented to consciousness. Sartre's definition of ontology raises the question of what the conditions for revelation are apart from that which appears. It would suggest that this definition does not add very much to Sartre's phenomenological essay. At times it is confusing and redundant. In short, Sartre "plays" consciousness and objects off against each other in order to establish their so-called respective independent nature.

In the final section of this first part entitled "Being-in-itself," Sartre is firmly committed to two modes of being, being-for-itself and being-in-itself (hereafter as for-itself and in-itself). Although Sartre does not go into detail regarding for-itself at this time, he does give some indication of the direction in which he intends to proceed. That is, consciousness or for-itself may be able to grasp the meaning of

the existent but is unable to grasp the existent.¹ In other words, it is consciousness which gives meaning to objects; consciousness determines whether a table is used for setting a meal or for firewood. In each case, consciousness defines the meaning of an object by projecting the function of the object. Nevertheless, the meaning of being is based upon the being of phenomenon or the existent. Sartre reminds the reader that the phenomenon of being qua itself does not have being but is founded upon being. This gives Sartre's ontological proof significance. He makes it quite explicit that for-itself is a different type of being from in-itself since for-itself is the revealed-revelation of another type of being. Consciousness is very distinct from concrete being by the fact that the phenomenon of being cannot be reduced to being of phenomenon. In-itself is the direct result of Sartre objectively elucidating the character of the being of phenomenon.

Sartre reminds the reader that he rules out any realistic foundation for knowledge since being of phenomenon cannot determine consciousness. Furthermore, Sartre also dismisses any idealism since knowledge cannot create being and be at the same time distinct from being.² Sartre rejects the idea that in-itself was created by a creator because, if it were, then it would not be

¹ B.N., lxv.

² B.N., lx; lxvi.

independent. He ends this introductory part by indicating the characteristics of in-itself. In-itself is neither passive nor active since ". . . man is active and the means which he employs are called passive."¹ Being is itself because in-itself is completely realized because it is ". . . an affirmation which can not affirm itself, an activity which can not act, because it is glued to itself."²

Being is what it is. In-itself is completely revealed in that there is no inner nature which manifests itself on a gradual basis. Furthermore, in-itself is detached from other beings because it ". . . is isolated in its being and . . . it does not enter into any connection with what is not itself."³ It is complete and thus does not need any other being in order for it to exist.

In-itself is. That is to say, in-itself is contingent such that in-itself cannot be derived from other beings. "Uncreated, without reason for being, without any connection with another being, being-in-itself is de trop for eternity."⁴ In other words, there is no conceptual reason which determines being.

¹ B.N., lxvi. 27

² B.N., lxvii. 27

³ B.N., lxviii. 28

⁴ Ibidem. 27

Is is simply there before consciousness. This is a crucial point for Sartre as it has major implications for his existential writings. Being is gratuitous. However, for the present, it is essential to understand that there is no conceptual relationship between for-itself and in-itself, and thus Sartre has to find other ground for determining this relationship.

It is imperative to keep in mind the outline of Sartre's argument in order to understand how he reaches the conclusion that consciousness and objects are radically distinct from each other. At the beginning, Sartre affirms that objects exist apart from what consciousness can be aware of because consciousness can only perceive one appearance at a time, whereas objects, by definition, must have an infinite series of appearances in order to account for change. Since consciousness can only apprehend one appearance at a time, it can not see the object qua series of appearances all at once. Furthermore, Sartre insists that existence, and not knowledge, is the basis for epistemology. In this way, Sartre notes that the being of phenomenon can not be reduced to the phenomenon of being.

Sartre attempts to demonstrate that the transphenomenal character of objects illustrates that appearances can not be reduced to appearing because they can exist apart from being perceived. The transphenomenal character of consciousness illustrates that to-be-conscious cannot be reduced to consciousness. In this way, consciousness and objects have an objective status that consciousness is not directly aware of. As

it turns out, since consciousness is completely transparent, it depends upon objects for its content and, subsequently, its basis for knowledge.

In section four, Sartre makes it plain that consciousness in no way creates the ontological foundation of objects. This is because awareness is based upon existence. The object exists before consciousness but the object is not in consciousness; therefore consciousness is quite distinct from objects. Nevertheless, this provides Sartre with the grounds for the Ontological Proof in so far as consciousness is consciousness of something other than itself. In other words, Sartre uses the notion of awareness to prove the existence of objects.

At each step in the argument, Sartre has clearly established the objective nature of consciousness and of objects by saying that existence precedes knowledge in providing an epistemological basis. The establishment of the primordality of existence over knowledge is apparent when he states that awareness is separated from existence. The break between consciousness and objects is firmly maintained when consciousness is given a nature of its own and this nature helps to establish the existence of objects. Therefore, by the end of this introductory section, it is quite obvious that consciousness and objects are completely independent phenomena.

The Problem of Nothingness

When dealing with in-itself and for-itself, Sartre

realizes that he is faced with a problem that other philosophers have faced when dealing with the mind-body dilemma. Ever since Descartes, philosophers have had to deal with the problem of establishing the relationship between the mind and the body. Descartes maintained that the mind is distinct from bodies. That is, whereas the mind is a spiritual entity, essentially a mental activity, the body has extension. Extension is characterized by size, shape and number.¹ The mind-body problem has plagued modern philosophers ever since.

Not until the advent of the phenomenological movement has this problem been adequately dealt with. For instance, Merleau-Ponty tried to solve this problem by holding that it is a pseudo-problem, and in actuality, the human body provides the cogito with a point of view.² It would seem that at this point in the argument Sartre has reverted to Cartesianism.

In spite of this, Sartre quickly asserts that consciousness is an abstraction without in-itself and in-itself is an abstraction without consciousness. It is essential to understand the difference between these two terms. For-itself is empty of any content and depends upon in-itself for content.

¹ Descartes, The Philosophical Works of Descartes, tr. by E. Haldane and G. Ross (Cambridge: The University Press, 1977), I, pp. 149-57; 221-3.

² M. Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, tr. by C. Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), pp. 88-9.

In other words, for-itself is a lack, "The for-itself is the being which determines itself to exist inasmuch as it can not coincide with itself."¹ Therefore, for-itself is continually in flight. The flight of for-itself is a form of negation because it does not exist in the same manner as in-itself. In-itself is used to describe the concrete or static objects. For our present purpose, both for-itself and in-itself play important roles in Sartre's discussion of nothingness.

In the first section, called "The Question," Sartre affirms Heidegger's view of man as a "being-in-the-world."² This leads Sartre to ask two questions: "(1) What is the synthetic relation which we call being-in-the world? (2) What must man and the world be in order for a relation between them to be possible?"³ In answering these questions, Sartre proposes to examine several forms of conduct, one such example of being human is questioning. In doing so, Sartre believes that this can serve as a guide for understanding conduct in general. The interrogative mode of experience is the source of negation.

Also in this section, Sartre conceives human conduct in ontological terms when he states: "Every question presupposes a

¹ B.N., 78. 125

² B.N., 3. 34

³ B.N., 4. 34

being who questions and a being which is questioned."¹ This statement parallels what Sartre has been advocating in the introductory part, that is, in-itself has objectivity. Likewise, the question is based upon a being who questions, i.e., consciousness, and a being which is questioned, i.e., the existent. He will attempt to prove that the question indicates the objective status of a negative reply as it does with a positive reply. The questioner expects a reply whether it be negative or positive. Furthermore, this reply has a transcendental nature, in that it is based in the world of objects. "This means that we admit to being faced with the transcendent fact of the non-existent of such conduct."²

Sartre answers those who would say that the negative response or non-being is just a subjective phenomenon or fiction, by stating that they destroy the reality of the reply in doing so.³ There exists a possibility for the questioner to receive an affirmative or a negative reply. "Thus the question is a bridge set up between two non-beings: the non-being of knowing in man, the possibility of non-being of being in transcendent being."⁴

¹ B.N., 4.³⁵

² B.N., 5.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ibidem.

He goes on to say that there is a third form of non-being, that of the non-being of the answer currently being sought. In other words, there is a triple non-being which governs every question: the questioner admits to the non-being of his knowledge; the question itself entails non-being in the sense of lack of knowledge; and finally, the question points towards non-being or being. The discussion is no longer restricted to for-itself and in-itself, but also includes the discussion of non-being. This third term defines the relationship between for-itself and in-itself.

In the section entitled "Negations," Sartre inverts the relationship between negation and nothingness: "Is negation as the structure of the judicative proposition at the origin of nothingness? Or on the contrary, is nothingness as the structure of the real, the origin and foundation of negation?"¹ The argument progresses from the discussion of interrogation to the discussion of human expectation. It is within the framework of human expectation that non-being appears.² That is to say, if Pierre did not expect to find fifteen hundred francs, but only expected to find thirteen hundred francs in his pocket, Pierre would not be disappointed about the absence of the two hundred

¹ B.N., 7.

² Ibidem.

francs. Sartre succinctly writes: "The world does not disclose its non-beings to one who has not first posited them as possibilities."¹

Negation is not a quality of judgement but is a pre-judicative attitude. The question forms a relationship between it and being. The judgement is only one method of expressing this relationship. Human expectation ". . . is not a judgement; it is a disclosure of being on the basis of which we can make a judgement."² To expect the revelation of being is also to expect the revelation of non-being. It is essential for Sartre to establish ontological grounds for the disclosure of non-being because of his previous assertion that to be conscious is to be conscious of something other than itself. If non-being does not have ontological status, then Sartre's ontological proof would be invalid. Nevertheless, defining non-being provides Sartre with other problems.

Sartre reaffirms his previous remark that there are other forms of conduct, besides that of questioning, which are similar structurally. For example, man is a being who can posit destruction. Nature rearranges masses of things, but the meaning of destruction presupposes ". . . a relation of man to being--

¹ B.N., 7. ²³

² Ibidem. ²³

i.e., a transcendence; and within the limits of this relation, it is necessary that man apprehend one being as destructible."¹ Fragility comes about when there is a concrete possibility for being to turn into non-being. Man considers buildings, cities and other things to be destructible because he takes precautions and reacts in ways which show that man posits these objects as destructible. Nevertheless, destruction is not merely a subjective response; rather it is an objective fact as well because cities and objects are destroyed. "There is a transphenomenality of non-being as of being."² In effect, what Sartre is saying, regarding the transphenomenality of non-being, is that non-being cannot be reduced to mere awareness of non-being. In other words, non-being is not solely due to the act of perception. Sartre proposes that non-being is not just a projection of subjective responses, but has an objective status. He views destruction as a form of a pre-judicative comprehension of nothingness and as a form of behavior in view of nothingness.³ Thus, negation is not a quality of judgement; rather it is the pre-condition for that judgement.

This is explored further in Sartre's example of expecting

¹ B.N., 8.

² B.N., 9.

³ Ibidem.

to meet Pierre in the café at a certain time. The café provides the ground which is formed by the totality of other objects. In other words, the café is neutral ground on which Pierre may or may not appear, as the ontological grounds are the same in either case. That is to say, if Pierre does appear, then the café is seen as organizing itself around the presence of Pierre. Likewise, the café organizes itself around the non-presence of Pierre. Pierre is absent from the whole café:

. . . it is Pierre raising himself as nothingness on the ground of the nihilation of the café. So that what is offered to intuition is a flickering of nothingness; it is the nothingness of the ground, the nihilation of which summons and demands the appearance of the figure, and it is the figure--the nothingness which slips as a nothing to the surface of the ground.¹

Nothingness is the necessary condition for making the judgement regarding the absence of Pierre. And yet there is a relationship between the person who does the expecting and the circumstances which allow for that expectation. It is expectancy that makes the absence of Pierre to be a concrete event.

Sartre distinguishes between an intellectual and a concrete judgement. That is, statements like "Wellington is not

¹ B.N., 10.

in the café" are purely abstract and thus have no real foundation because these statements do not form a real relationship between the speaker and the café. This negative judgement is conceptual and therefore has no "ontological status." Sartre is convinced that this example illustrates that non-being is not the result of a negative judgement but rather the negative judgement is the result of non-being.¹ According to Sartre, to say that negation is a judgement implies that negation is a positive experience. This is a contradiction of negation's function: "For negation is a refusal of existence."²

After concluding, in the introductory part, that epistemology is based upon ontology, it is not surprising that Sartre is committed to the ontological nature of negation. This is the reason why Sartre writes: "Consciousness moreover cannot produce a negation except in the form of consciousness of negation."³ Since consciousness has no internal content, it cannot be the source of negation.

The implications of Sartre's ontological-epistemological relationship for knowledge can be seen in the relationship of negation and lack of being. For it is the absence of objects

¹ B.N., 11.

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem.

which gives rise to negative judgements. Nothingness provides the foundation for objects to be absent. "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."¹ Sartre completes the section by asking questions, such as what is the origin of nothingness and what is the original nihilating conduct.

Before answering these questions, Sartre digresses to give a brief sketch of Hegel's and Heidegger's thought regarding nothingness in the sections called "The Dialectical Concept of Nothingness" and "The Phenomenological Concept of Nothingness" respectively. Perhaps Sartre does this in order to show the reader that his conception of nothingness is not entirely original. By examining these two philosophers, Sartre hopes better to elucidate his position. In any case, whether or not it was his intention to show dependence on these two philosophers, many commentators have noted that his thought is clearly linked with them. However, it would be exceeding our present purpose to substantiate this claim.

In the section entitled "The Dialectical Concept of Nothingness," Sartre rejects Hegel's theory of conceiving being and non-being as dialectical opposites. Non-being and being are

¹ B.N., 11.

not contemporaries but rather ". . . nothingness is logically subsequent to [being] since it supposes being in order to deny it . . ." ¹ Nothingness is absence of something. When someone responds to a question by saying that he knows nothing, he knows nothing of the totality of the facts which were asked of him. In a word, nothingness has a reference beyond itself. This is a crucial step in the argument. Being is independent of nothingness whereas nothingness is dependent upon being. "Non-being exists only on the surface of being." ² Being is logically prior to nothingness. Furthermore, being does not pass into nothingness, as in Hegel's dialectical process; rather being is isolated from nothingness.

In the next section, Sartre states that Heidegger conceives being and nothingness as complements: "It is in nothingness alone that being can be surpassed." ³ Man realizes the contingency of the world by facing nothingness. Sartre asks how human reality is able to emerge from nothingness and he concludes "Nothingness can be nothingness only by nihilating itself expressly as nothingness of the world . . ." ⁴ In other

¹ B.N., 15.

² B.N., 16.

³ B.N., 18.

⁴ Ibidem.

words, transcendence cannot establish nothingness, but it is nothingness which enables transcendence to take place.

Sartre criticizes both Hegel and Heidegger in that they do not ground negating activity in a negative being.¹ He desires to link Heidegger's "nothingness beyond the world" with instances of non-being that are encountered in day-to-day experience. However, Heidegger's theory of nothingness provides little explanation for nothingness in the world. Sartre is critical of Heidegger for the same reason that he is critical of Hegel: each philosopher's conception of nothingness is too abstract in the sense that they do not account for day-to-day experience.

Sartre introduces a new term, "négatités," in the discussion. Négatités are not objects of judgement but are human experiences. Examples of négatités are regret, absence, change and repulsion. It is precisely because of négatités that Sartre thinks Heidegger's theory of nothingness is inadequate.

"Nothingness beyond the world accounts for absolute negation; but we have just discovered a swarm of ultra-mundane beings which process as much reality and efficacy as other beings . . ."²
Nothingness is not exterior to being.

In using the term négatité, Sartre wants to advocate that

¹ B.N., 19.

² B.N., 21.

negative structures are an integral aspect of experience. Experiences which indicate regret, absence, and forgetfulness can also indicate praise, presence and remembrance. In other words, *négativité* illustrates how nothingness is immanent in the world. It is too soon to analyse the implications of Sartre's thoughts concerning nothingness; however, the direction of his thought suggests that for-itself might have an important role to play in determining nothingness. For-itself creates its own essence by realizing its own possibilities. However, these possibilities are not always positive or actualized, but can be negative. It is in this light, that we can understand Sartre's well known statement: "Nothingness lies coiled in the heart of being--like a worm."¹

After this brief evaluation of Hegel and Heidegger's philosophies, Sartre returns to the question at hand: What is the origin of nothingness? Sartre reiterates that no question can be asked without there being a possibility of receiving a negative reply. This negative reply originates from nothingness. For our present purpose this section is the most important. It is important because, depending on how Sartre defines the ontological status of nothingness, there could be important consequences in determining the relationship between nothingness and God. This

¹ B.N., 21.

will be explored later in this work.

Sartre notes that only being is able to "nihilate itself." Nothingness cannot nihilate itself because it is the result of nihilation. Loosely speaking, nihilation means "to make a nothing."¹ In short, for-itself brings nothingness through nihilation. When for-itself creates nothingness, it does not remain unaffected by this process. "The being by which Nothingness comes to the world must be its own Nothingness."² For-itself, which is a lack, does this through questioning because questioning forms a "distance" between the questioner and that which is being questioned. In other words, questioning creates nothingness or nihilates this distance. Again, the term nihilation has an ontological function in that Sartre's epistemology--the learning process--must be rooted in ontology. In short, Sartre believes there is an ontological break which for-itself makes through nihilation.

Sartre returns to the nature of the question in order to understand how non-being is possible. There is a double nihilation which takes place when one poses a question. The first nihilation happens when the questioner places the object in question in a neutral state, between being and non-being. The

¹ B.N., 632. *for*

² B.N., 23. *§ 7 8*

second nihilation happens when the questioner ". . . nihilates himself in relation to the thing questioned by wrenching himself from being in order to be able to bring out of himself the possibility of a non-being."¹

By asking a question, the questioner separates himself from the world. For example, when we ask the question whether the book entitled Music Appreciation is in the next room, we place the book in a neutral state between being in the next room and not being there. The second nihilation takes place because an ontological distance is essential in order for there not to be a causal relationship between the questioner and the reality questioned. That is, Sartre is refuting the notion that through universal determinism the question is determined by that which is questioned. Without this second form of nihilation, the questioned reality, i.e., the ascertaining of the whereabouts of the book called Music Appreciation, would not be able to reveal itself to the inquirer. It is the nothingness within for-itself that disengages the book from the totality of things, and disengages for-itself from the book in order to comprehend the book qua in-itself.

Even though *négativité* has an ontological foundation, this transcendent reality is the result of ". . . an act, an expectation,

¹ B.N., 23.

or a project of the human being . . ."1 In other words, it is man who expects someone at the café and when that someone does not appear as expected, he experiences *néгатité*. *Негатité* has a dual relationship with being. First, *негатité* originates from for-itself. Second, *негатité* is externally related to in-itself in that the absence of in-itself is the focal point of the act, expectation or project. The concept of *негатité* is paradoxical in nature. That is, while *негатité* is the result of for-itself's projection regarding an aspect of the totality of reality, *негатité* is rooted in the world of in-itself. The paradox of *негатités* ensures that it is not just a subjective phenomenon and it explains how "little pools" of nothingness originate.

Sartre only briefly discusses human freedom, since he discusses it in some detail in Part Four of B.N. He is careful not to contradict his existential thesis. "Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of the human being is suspended in his freedom."² Freedom is a necessary condition for nihilation.

There is a double negative judgement involved in concluding that a person is not present. First, subjectively speaking, the image of the absent person is not a perception; and

¹ B.N., 24.

² B.N., 25.

second, objectively speaking, the absent person himself is not present.¹ The image is a nihilation of the actual world because the image does not belong to the appearance of concrete objects. Furthermore, the posited image is part of the act of nihilation because of the very fact that it is posited and not based upon a concrete object.

Sartre believes that negative moments in consciousness are not psychologically determined. "Every psychic process of nihilation implies then a cleavage between the immediate psychic past and the present. This cleavage is precisely nothingness."² In other words, the past does not determine the present. Man is completely free. "Freedom is the human being putting his past out of play by secreting his own nothingness."³ Since for-itself is a form of nothingness, it generates this nothingness by realizing its freedom. This nothingness represents consciousness' lack of foundation in which to act. The coward who continues to do cowardly deeds on the basis of his past performance and what others think of him, does not realize his true condition for existing. His true condition for action is the awareness that he alone is the source for action and that there are no determinate factors which will influence whether his next

¹ B.N., 26.

² B.N., 27.

³ B.N., 28.

act will be a cowardly one or not. In this way, nihilation and freedom are co-existing conditions of the same reality.

Nihilation is possible because for-itself is freedom and this freedom is generated by nihilation.

Again Sartre inverts the relationship between consciousness and nihilation by saying that the nihilating consciousness is consciousness which is conscious of nihilating. This consciousness of nihilation takes the form of anguish; ". . . it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself."¹ Anguish is the result of continuously being aware of freedom and nothingness. "Every conscious existence exists as consciousness of existing."² It is man's awareness of his ability to nihilate which leads him to reflect on the awesome position of his being accountable for his actions. In this way, nihilation plays an important role in determining freedom through the existential notion of anguish. That is to say, when man realizes his freedom by knowing he is solely responsible, man might be reflectively apprehensive about his situation. For example, a soldier might be in a state of anguish when he thinks of his possible reactions when faced with battle. Questions like "Will I be able to kill a man?", "Will I be able to defend my position?"

¹ B.N., 29.

² B.N., lvi.

and so forth, are questions which are the result of anguish. Sartre concurs with Kierkegaard's distinction between fear and anguish by saying ". . . fear is unreflective apprehension of the transcendent and anguish is reflective apprehension of the self . . ." ¹ Thus, anguish is a human conduct which results when man faces nothingness.

In anguish, man realizes that he is the source of all possibilities which can be realized or not realized. Man may make excuses for his behaviour by blaming human nature; however, these excuses are not valid because man is still ultimately responsible for his behaviour, and rationalization cannot change this.

Anguish can take two forms: first, anguish in the face of the future; and second, anguish in the face of the past. Man experiences anguish when he realizes that there is nothing to determine him to act one way or another. Man also realizes that there is nothing within his present that will indicate in which way he will or should act. ". . . I am the self which I will be, in the mode of not being it." ² A gambler's resolution not to gamble anymore is an example of anguish in the face of his past. That is, the gambler realizes that there is nothing to separate him from his past habits or his resolutions. Man is conscious of

¹ B.N., 30.

² B.N., 32.

his freedom by being conscious of anguish.

Since nothingness provides the foundation for man's freedom, motives do not determine man's conduct because ". . . the structure of motives as ineffective is the condition of my freedom."¹ It is important to notice the inversion of the relationship between motives and consciousness. Motives are not in consciousness but instead are for consciousness. Since consciousness is empty, it cannot provide its own motivation. It makes motives into objects for itself. The past, resolutions and motives are radically distinct from for-itself. They belong to the world of in-itself. Since they are objects, their meaning depends upon consciousness. Furthermore, this adds to for-itself's awareness that not even self-justification can be used for support: the awareness that motives cannot provide support gives ammunition for existential anguish.

Sartre's stance concerning motives does not mean that the past is not relevant for man. On the contrary, the past provides man with his essence. In this way, anguish is ". . . the manifestation of freedom in the face of self [which] means that man is always separated by a nothingness from his essence."² Therefore, the incapability of man's essence to determine human conduct gives rise to anguish.

¹ B.N., 34.

² B.N., 35.

Sartre finishes the rest of this section by discussing how man faces anguish when he faces nothingness. Man has to be in a "situation" whereby the meaning of that situation completely depends upon man.¹ Sartre sets the groundwork for the next chapter, entitled "Bad Faith," by describing behaviour that man undertakes in trying to escape from complete freedom. It is not relevant to give a detailed analysis of bad faith. However, it is important to keep in mind that man's comprehension of nothingness is the source of existential anguish and thus bad faith. That is, when man realizes his freedom, that sense of freedom may overwhelm him. This is evident when Sartre states that consciousness has no laws and that man has no human nature that would help decide his future.

In the example of the gambler who resolves not to gamble in the future, the gambler may experience anguish when realizing that his past resolutions, as well as the present temptation of seeing the tables, show that his past and present cannot be a driving factor in deciding his future. Bad faith may result when the gambler sees himself as a victim of habit or makes excuses that the environment coerces people to gamble. Bad faith is a form of conduct which seeks to escape the awesome responsibility of freedom by putting off decisions or seeing oneself as a

¹ B.N., 40.

passive object that is caught up in one's environment. In this way, bad faith is a way in which a person tries to escape the anguish of assuming responsibility for his existence.

The discussion of anguish and bad faith is more pertinent to existential than to phenomenological concerns. Sartre, without warning, has moved the argument to another level, a move which will be discussed later because it is not acceptable. Sartre has not methodologically shown how the existential and phenomenological levels are related. Nevertheless, the first two parts of B.N. are important as they provide the background for Sartre's existential thought.

An Analysis of Sartre's Phenomenological Ontology

After examining these two parts of B.N., it is evident that Sartre has methodological problems mainly because no clear articulation of his method seems to have emerged. His intention is to formulate a phenomenological description of being, but problems explicitly arise when he discusses the ontological proof. In this section, there emerges a second strain of Sartrean thought which he is not so eager to admit. This second strain is metaphysical in nature (or a form of objectivism, as I earlier called it) because certain postulates implicitly surface during the course of the argument. The reader has to decide how to reconcile the phenomenological strain with the metaphysical strain. This is one of the major concerns which any serious scholar of Sartre must deal with in order to ascertain whether or not his

conclusions are valid.

When I use the term "metaphysical," I do not mean a form of speculative metaphysics that concerns itself with the origins of being. Sartre clearly has stated that it is not his intention to discover the origin of being, but instead to describe being. For the most part, Sartre does not explicitly attempt to explain the source of his metaphysical postulates. Nevertheless they are affirmed during the unfolding of the argument. For instance, in the Introduction Sartre moves from describing appearances to describing the objects themselves. This is true in the lines ". . . consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself."¹ This is the move he makes in the ontological proof. It is one thing to state that intentionality is consciousness, which is consciousness of something because this epistemological postulate is posited within the descriptive framework. However, it is quite another to say that consciousness is consciousness of something other than itself. That is, the concept of intentionality is a phenomenological one because phenomenology is a philosophy of consciousness.

Intentionality states that consciousness is consciousness of something. Within a purely descriptive framework this is true,

¹ B.N., lxiv.

because consciousness is conscious of objects such as trees, books and so forth, or it is conscious of internal objects such as consciousness qua consciousness. In each instance, there is an object which is posited by consciousness. However, Sartre goes further than this descriptive framework by his employment of the term "transphenomenology" and his manipulative use of intentionality. As stated previously, Sartre formulates the conditions for revealing independent of the revelation itself. This does not make any sense as far as a pure descriptive framework is concerned because phenomenology has a form of epistemological faith which states that which appears is all that can be known by consciousness. The metaphysical postulate in Sartre's ontological proof is that objects have an objective nature apart from what consciousness is aware of. In holding this, Sartre clearly allows for a dualistic interpretation of being. In the final analysis, Sartre uses an epistemological concept to prove what is essentially a metaphysical conclusion.

Sartre might be able to justify his move from appearances to being, if he equates being with appearances. This statement seems to substantiate the following statement: "The appearance is not supported by any existent different from itself; it has its own being."¹ Nevertheless, he goes on to write at the

¹ B.N., 1.

beginning of section four: "We have reduced things to the united totality of their appearances, and we have established that these appearances lay claim to a being which is no longer itself appearance."¹ The being that Sartre refers to in this passage is the transphenomenality of being. That is, there are appearances which do not actually appear. Sartre's conclusion, that awareness and existence are things in their own right, provides problems when discussing the ontological nature of nothingness, God, and the relationship between the two.

The question which needs to be addressed is: Does it make phenomenological sense to discuss the conditions for revelation apart from what appears to consciousness? The concept of transphenomenality asserts that existence, i.e., the conditions for revelation, although coextensive with awareness, are not limited to awareness. Within a phenomenological framework there would be no qualification that states that existence exceeds awareness. In fact, phenomenology--a philosophy of awareness--implicitly assumes existence to be an integral aspect of that awareness. Transphenomenality does not make sense in this type of framework. Sartre defines ontology as ". . . the study of the structures of being of the existent taken as a totality."²

¹ B.N., lix.¹⁷

² B.N., 633. ¹⁸ ¹⁸

However, since Sartre advocates that this "totality" qua series of appearances is beyond the scope of consciousness, it does not make sense to use a method which is essentially inadequate in exploring this totality.

In actuality, many phenomenologists would equate existence with awareness, and thus not be concerned about the transphenomenal foundation of consciousness and objects. Phenomenology attempts to solve the mind-body problem by eliminating the dualism of awareness and existence (for-itself and in-itself) and treating them as one. That is, to exist is to be aware and to be aware is to exist. Therefore, from a phenomenological perspective, Sartre's term "transphenomenality" is a metaphysical one which is not supported by a purely descriptive framework. The reader must allow for this distinction and note that while Sartre does not strictly follow the pure descriptive mode, being is used in a quasi-phenomenological sense. Being continually reveals itself. Therefore, while Sartre's ontology is not purely metaphysical, it is not purely phenomenological either. This is crucial to keep in mind when reading B.N.

Even to describe the theoretical relationship between for-itself and in-itself requires postulates that would exceed the limits of phenomenology. This differs from Husserl's transcendental reduction whereby he bracketed existence, and was only concerned about the way objects appear to the mind. However, Sartre does not bracket existence, but manipulates the concept of

intentionality to affirm the existence of objects. This leads Sartre to go on to the analyses of for-itself and in-itself in the sense that they provide the ontological foundation of the world. This so-called phenomenological analysis leads Sartre to state some metaphysical conclusions such as: "Consciousness is in fact a project of founding itself; that is, of attaining to the dignity of the in-itself-for-itself or in-itself-as-self-cause."¹ It is questionable whether any purely phenomenological study can lead to such metaphysical conclusions. But this is the case when Sartre defines the relationship between for-itself and in-itself.

Another major problem, which is indirectly related to the above, is the problem of defining the ontological status of nothingness. Since consciousness is consciousness of something other than itself, nothingness must have ontological status. Furthermore, as consciousness is a lack, nothingness must have an objective status located in the world. Even though nothingness has a different ontological nature than in-itself, because nothingness is that which is not, the problem is how to affirm the existence of that which does not exist without reducing ontology to absurdity. Sartre gives ontological status to everything that consciousness intends: "Nothing is in consciousness which is not consciousness of being."² The statement "Wellington is not in

¹ B.N., 620. ⁷⁸²

² B.N., 497. ⁵⁴⁴

this café" is a pure abstraction which is an application of the negation principle without having a real foundation.¹ Wellington is not a part of the world now and, therefore, he could not be expected in the café. Wellington is not part of the present realm of in-itself because he died in 1852. While the concept of nothingness helps to define the relationship between for-itself and in-itself, nothingness is rooted objectively in the world. There is a paradox involved in establishing the absence of Pierre. That is, although Pierre actually exists, he is not present in the café. The one who expects Pierre, formulates the absence of Pierre; however, that expectation is based solely upon the existence of Pierre elsewhere. Pierre's existence elsewhere gives rise to Pierre's absence within the café.

How does nothingness fit into Sartre's rigid scheme of awareness and existence? As mentioned above, nothingness does not belong to the realm of in-itself and thus to existence, because nothingness does not exist. Be it as it may, nothingness does stem from awareness because awareness is a constant project of finding itself. In fact, for-itself perpetuates nothingness by thrusting itself towards that which is not. Nothingness is not solely a subjective concept because it is against the totality of objects that nothingness arises. Nothingness is like a hole in the middle of existence. It is in the café that non-being is

¹ B.N., 10. ^{in 2}

apparent. Therefore, without awareness, there would be no apprehension of nothingness, and without existence, there would be only a void. Furthermore, the confinement of for-itself and in-itself leads to restricting what may be absent from the world.

The concept of nothingness is limited to the world of existence. The absence of unicorns, fairy godmothers and so forth does not give rise to instances of nothingness in the strict sense of the word because these things do not exist to begin with. There are two elements which contribute to the experience of absence or negative moments. First, the backdrop of the in-itself; and second, the expectation or projection of for-itself. Both requirements are the result of the constant dialectical interplay between for-itself and in-itself. A closer analysis of the concept of nothingness will be attempted in the final chapter to determine the relationship between in-itself and for-itself in determining the nature of nothingness. For the time being, it is crucial to note that nothingness is not a subjective phenomenon, nor does it causally determine for-itself's actions. It is a paradox.

I shall conclude this chapter by noting two major concerns of mine about Sartre's ontology. First, he has a methodological problem in that he has not clearly established a method, and thus the reader must allow for non-phenomenological moves in the argument of the interaction between for-itself and in-itself. Second, the ontological nature of nothingness needs to be elucidated more because Sartre defines it as non-existent and yet

it has an objective status. This could have implications for the exact status of that which does not exist, i.e., God. I do not think that these two concerns are only isolated within Sartre's ontological writings, as similar problems arise in his existential writings. I wish to leave this present discussion noting his ontological difficulties, and move to Sartre's thoughts concerning the ontological and existential refutation of God's existence. In the final chapter, we will be in a better position to examine the relationship between the non-existence of God and the ontological nature of nothingness. In doing so, a better appreciation can be attained concerning the implications involved in the relationship between ontology and existentialism.

CHAPTER TWO: SARTRE'S ATHEISM

Jean-Paul Sartre is probably one of the best known atheists of the twentieth century. His philosophic and literary writings go to great lengths to establish and explore the implications of this fact. This chapter will examine Sartre's thoughts concerning God in two ways. First, by exploring Sartre's phenomenological ontology in B.N.; and second, by exploring the existential consequences of this position in some of his other works. By doing this, hopefully, a better understanding can be attained regarding Sartre's atheism.

Phenomenologic-Ontological Thoughts About God

The reader should keep in mind that Sartre has a restricted view of experience. That is, both for-itself and in-itself are employed by Sartre to explain the human condition. For-itself and in-itself being things in-themselves, are assumptions which cannot directly be verified within experience. Nevertheless, for-itself is a complete lack which depends upon in-itself to provide its content. In-itself is that which is static, de trop and is completely unified. It is within this rigid framework that any discussion of God must take place. Certainly by traditional

definitions of God, God does not easily fit the descriptions of either for-itself or in-itself. However, since Sartre is somewhat Cartesian, he is more in favour of viewing God in purely subjective terms--pure consciousness. Furthermore, since God is perfect in that He does not lack; God is substantial. Hence Sartre's conception of God, if God existed, would be the unification of these two realities. We will soon see that since Sartre's dualism of for-itself and in-itself is so restrictive, God qua in-itself-for-itself is an actual impossibility.

Certainly Sartre does not devote very much space in B.N. to the Divine. There are roughly a dozen passages in the essay which illustrate why Sartre thinks it is impossible for God to exist. It should be noted at the outset that God qua God is primarily a metaphysical concept. That is, God is beyond the grasp of human consciousness and experience. Thus, it is very surprising that Sartre refers to God at all in this quasi-phenomenological work. Nonetheless, Sartre tries to explain how the notion of God is contradictory by using his ontological framework established at the beginning of B.N. Sartre conceives and deals with the notion of God in three ways. First, God qua Creator; second, God qua causa sui; and third, God qua Absolute Third.

By examining these three ways, it will be seen how the proof of the non-existence of God is founded upon one major concept, man's absolute freedom. Sartre is convinced that man's freedom cannot be reconciled with the existence of God. The

problem of reconciling man's freedom and God's omniscience has plagued philosophical thought for a long time. Sartre's solution to this problem is to say that God does not exist. Man's freedom takes precedence over God. "I am condemned to be free. This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free."¹ The primordially of man's freedom is clearly stated in B.N.

It was seen in the previous chapter that Sartre believes that human freedom precedes man's essence.² In fact, freedom allows man to determine his essence. It was also seen that for-itself is a lack which always desires to be what it is not. "For the for-itself, to be is to nihilate the in-itself which it is. Under these conditions freedom can be nothing other than this nihilation."³ Sartre asserts that freedom is necessary in order for for-itself to be able to strive for something which it is not. For-itself has a fundamental project of being in-itself-for-itself. "To be man means to reach toward being God. Or if you prefer, man fundamentally is the desire to be God."⁴ That is,

¹ B.N., 439.

² B.N., 25.

³ B.N., 439.

⁴ B.N., 566.

consciousness strives to be its own foundation. The difference between consciousness and concrete objects is that the former is completely free, while the latter are determined. For-itself seeks as an end to be its own foundation for knowledge.

For-itself is free in three ways. First, the past cannot determine for-itself's present or future; second, for-itself is non-positionally aware of itself while being aware of other objects, and thus nothing external can act upon consciousness; and third, through transcendence, for-itself projects itself towards a particular end. For-itself is not determined by that which it seeks as an end.¹ "Human-reality is free because . . . it has been separated by a nothingness from what it is and from what it will be."²

Choice plays a very important role in freedom because freedom is only materialized when man chooses: ". . . freedom is a choice of its being but not the foundation of its being."³ It is only when for-itself acts that it is able to have ontological significance. All action is intentional because for-itself only acts when it realizes a conscious project.⁴ (The subject of freedom will be explored in the second part of this chapter as

¹ B.N., 453.

² B.N., 440.

³ B.N., 479.

⁴ B.N., 433.

this is one of Sartre's major themes which runs throughout his literary and philosophic works). Man is free to choose a course of action that will lead to the fulfillment of a certain end. He is able to do so because he lacks an essence which may determine his being. By for-itself choosing action, for-itself manifests its freedom.

In the part entitled "Doing and Having" Sartre conceives of creation in dynamic terms. "Creation can be conceived and maintained only as a continued transition from one term to the other."¹ Furthermore, creation is a form of appropriation such that objects which the creator or artisan makes are those which belong to the creator or artisan. "I am what I have."² And yet the created object is and is not a part of the creator. It is not a part of the creator because he may focus his attention upon something else. Sartre goes on to state that the relationship between the creator/possessor is an ideal relationship because appropriation is like "for-itself possessing" and "in-itself possessed" at the same time. This corresponds to for-itself's project to be in-itself-for-itself.

Sartre implicitly accepts the traditional views regarding the divine as being omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, omnificent and benevolent. According to Sartre, if God existed

¹ B.N., 591.

² Ibidem.

then he would have created the world. But God is pure subjectivity, according to Sartre, and thus it is impossible for God to create an object that has objective status.¹ "The tragedy of the absolute Creator, if he existed, would be the impossibility of getting out himself, for whatever he created could be only himself."² Sartre does not develop this idea in detail; however it appears that he believes that if God did create the world, and thus is continually creating the world, then this would compromise man's freedom. To create an object is to determine its nature. Thus if man is still part of God's creation qua a continual process, then man is not free. However, Sartre fails to make a distinction between the problems of God creating something other than himself and of reconciling God's omnificent nature with man's sense of freedom. Although these problems are related, they are not synonymous. That is, the relationship between the Creator and his creatures provides problems for theologians because it is difficult to determine to what extent God is responsible for the "fruits of his labours." For example, if God created man and if man qua man is morally corrupt, then does this mean that God is responsible for the state of moral decay in the human condition? This problem is slightly different from the problem of God

¹ B.N., 290.

² B.N., 590.

creating man's nature and thus curtailing man's freedom. The former problem is primarily concerned with defining God, and the latter problem is primarily concerned with defining man.

However, if man is outside of God's creation, such that he created man and left him alone, then man is no longer answerable to God. In other words, man is outside of God's subjectivity. Sartre does not explore this notion in detail either. If he had examined a deistic conception of God, he might have stated that this would still interfere with man's freedom. That is, if God were actively involved in the world at one time, then he still would have created man and, therefore, man's nature. In order for Sartre to concede that God created man with an objective status, he would have to reconcile God's predetermination with man's freedom. Sartre rejects Leibniz's notion that God created man's essence but left man's existence to be determined by himself. "Yet the single fact that our essence has not been chosen by us shows that all this freedom in particulars actually covers a total slavery."¹

Two main points should be kept in mind concerning Sartre's theology. First, Sartre sees God as a subjective being, and if man were to be seen as a part of this subjectivity, then this notion of God would have dire consequences for the assertion of

¹ B.N., 538.

man's freedom. Second, if man was at one time, but is no longer a part of God's subjectivity, then this would limit man's freedom as well because man would not be able to choose his essence.

This latter point is similar to a deistic conception of God, if by a deistic conception of God one means a God who creates the world and leaves it to unfold without intervention in the same way that a watchmaker makes and winds up a watch and leaves it to run down. Furthermore, if Sartre accepted this deistic conception of God, then he would have to reconcile God's limited subjectivity with God's omnipotence. This Sartre is not prepared to do.

Another indication of Sartre's thoughts regarding God as an immanent and continuous creator in B.N. is where he rejects God as being a judge of mankind during the "closing of accounts" on Judgement Day. Christians generally believe that the significance of life will be attained when God judges men according to their deeds. But, if man does not choose the moment when he will die or close his account, then his acts are not ultimately based upon freedom as he is not responsible to God for his past. "If one minute more or less may perhaps change everything and if this minute is added to or removed from my account, then even admitting that I am free to use my life, the meaning of my life escapes me."¹ If God is still actively

¹ B.N., 538-9.

involved in the world through determining the time of man's death, then man is still not free. Or if man is responsible to God for his actions, then he is not free to determine his being. Sartre rejects the notion that death gives meaning to life because it suspends man's freedom indefinitely. In the introduction to B.N. Barnes succinctly writes: "Either man is free and does not derive his meaning from God, or he is dependent on God and not free."¹

Sartre clearly believes that the problem of man's freedom and God's omniscient nature can only be solved by seeing both as distinct alternatives. Since freedom fits into the structure of for-itself and in-itself as the condition for nihilation, "God must go." Although the phenomenological structures of freedom are explored, Sartre does not explore the metaphysical structures. Hence, Sartre is operating at two levels, the phenomenological and the metaphysical. And, therefore, a phenomenological concept is used to disprove a metaphysical notion. "It is . . . to the cogito that we appeal in order to determine freedom as the freedom which is ours, as a pure factual necessary . . . As such, I am necessarily a consciousness [of] freedom since nothing exists in consciousness except as the non-thetic consciousness of existing."²

¹ B.N., XXX.

² B.N., 439.

While this may be true at the conscious level, it does not mean that it applies to reality in general. Sartre would respond to this objection by saying that the conscious level is all that there is. Granted, since the concept of God may exceed the limitation of consciousness, one wonders if Sartre should "bracket" God like Husserl bracketed existence. That is, if God is beyond the realm of phenomenological description, it seems that, within this realm, the subject of God cannot be adequately dealt with. This problem will be examined later in this chapter. To limit God to a phenomenological concept is by the very nature of the act to destroy the reality of God before any analysis of what the word "God" refers to.

The second aspect of the Divine that Sartre deals with is that of God qua causa sui. That is, God has no cause other than himself. In Sartrean terms this means that God is in-itself-for-itself. For-itself is

. . . being which is what it is not, and which is not what it is, that the for-itself projects being what it is. . . . It is as the nihilation of the in-itself and a perpetual evasion of contingency . . . that it wishes to be its own foundation.¹

The goal of this project of for-itself's quest of having a

¹ B.N., 566.

foundation is an ideal value that Sartre refers to as in-itself-for-itself or God.¹ It is an ideal value because in-itself-for-itself cannot be realized. That is, if in-itself is contingent and if God is seen as being conscious, and providing his own foundation, then this requires that one part of God nihilates another part of himself. "In short, every effort to conceive of the idea of a being which would be the foundation of its being results inevitably in forming that of a being which, contingent as being-in-itself, would be the foundation of its own nothingness."² In order for God to achieve this end, it would mean he would have to use in-itself--which is contingent--as a foundation.

Sartre falls into the trap of anthropomorphism. That is to say, he assumes that God has the same ontological features that for-itself would have if for-itself succeeded in fulfilling this project. Even though God may be seen as in-itself-for-itself, there is an "ontological distance" between one part and another part of God. Sartre calls it a "recovery of the self by the self" and a "return to self."³ In other words, Sartre sees God as a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous being. The very definition

¹ B.N., 566.

² B.N., 80.

³ Ibidem.

of for-itself--that which is not--and in-itself--that which is-- leads to the conclusion that God is a logical contradiction. However if God is to be seen as a homogeneous being, then he could be self-caused in the sense there would be no separation between awareness and existence. In divine terms, to be aware is to exist and to exist is to be aware. The distinction that Sartre uses to explain human reality need not apply to the divine. The reference point of God, in Sartrean Philosophy, is located in the restricted world of for-itself and in-itself--a world where God cannot possibly exist. Sartre has not clearly shown why God cannot be seen in terms of this ideal. It is clear that Sartre takes an anthropocentric notion and applies it to God.

Furthermore, Sartre states that if God did exist, then He would be contingent.¹ He employs the term "contingent" quite often throughout his writings; and thus it is essential to be clear about its meaning. Contingency means that which is given, brute existence or simply "being-there."² It is closely associated with facticity: "In the For-itself this equals facticity, the brute fact of being this For-itself in the world."³ Facticity can be loosely defined as "a fact of human existence." (For instance,

¹ B.N., 81.

² Dasein.

³ B.N., 630.

one of man's facticities is that he cannot help but to be free). This implies that being has no reason for existing because there is no reason apparent to consciousness. It was already pointed out in the previous chapter that in-itself has no reason for being. For-itself is contingent because it cannot be its own foundation or receive its foundation from other beings.¹ Sartre describes this as absurdity. This notion will be explored later during the discussion of Sartre's existentialism.

Both for-itself and in-itself are contingent because there are no "noumena" behind phenomena, and thus phenomena must be taken prima facie. Things are absurd because that is the way things appear to consciousness. Given these facts, the only way for God to be causa sui is in the form of a possibility. Possibilities, however, according to Sartre, belong to the realm of knowledge and not existence. That is, God, conceptually speaking, could be a necessary being. However, this is only an ideal possibility which has no basis in existence. Ontological possibilities cannot be evoked from conceptual or logical notions. The notion that God is a necessary being does not prove there actually exists a necessary being: ". . . the necessity of being can not . . . be derived from its possibility."² Sartre, in saying this, is refuting any a

¹ B.N., 81.

² Ibidem.

priori notions about God. God must be dealt with in the quasi-phenomenological structure of for-itself and in-itself. That being the case, in order for God to be his own base, he requires reasons or laws that would explain his nature to himself. But to be conscious of these laws qua determinates for consciousness, consciousness would cease to be itself. This brings us back to a point made earlier that Sartre views God as a complex being such that one part of God is dependent upon another. This is clearly an anthropomorphic conception of God. Nevertheless, it is for these reasons that Sartre considers God to be a contingent being.

Sartre views God as a duality. Catalano uses the analogy of the square-circle to illustrate why Sartre thinks God is a logical contradiction.¹ That is, one knows what the properties of a circle are and one knows what the properties of a square are. That being the case, it is not difficult to understand why the conception of a square-circle is a logical impossibility. Be that as it may, the debate of whether logic is determined by God or vice versa has been a longstanding one in the history of philosophy. It is not within the scope of this work to explore the issues of this debate, but to note two things regarding Sartre's rebuttal of God qua causa sui. First, Sartre has rejected the notion of a divine creator and thereby implicitly rejected a divine source for

¹ J.S. Catalano, A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), p. 101f.

logic. Second, since there is no other source for logic but the human sphere, Sartre's refutation is grounded upon this sphere-- everything that exists is contingent, if God exists, then he is contingent. Sartre sets up his ontological system in such a manner that he leaves no room for maneuver beyond his own limited framework. Certainly, the conclusion that God is contingent is a contradiction of traditional theistic notions. In short, one may know that the respective properties of for-itself and in-itself are antithetical, but this does not mean that God is the ontological incarnation of this antithesis.

The third way in which Sartre views God is as an "Absolute Third." He believes that there is no way to ontologically prove the existence of "the other" but instead one can only experience the other through "the look." The look is that which makes for-itself experience itself as an object. For-itself's freedom is enhanced when it sees the other as an object. The look challenges for-itself's freedom by for-itself realizing that the other is not only an object but a subject as well. And thus, for-itself becomes an object for the other. This threatens for-itself's freedom because by being an object for the other, a dynamic for-itself is turned into a static for-itself.

Sartre uses the example of a jealous person looking through a key hole in order to find out whether his jealousy has any basis. The person is so preoccupied with his action that he does not bother to examine his action from an outside perspective. Nevertheless, if another person comes walking down the hall and

sees that person looking through the key hole, then this is an entirely different situation. This is because the key hole viewer experiences shame. "Now, shame . . . is shame of self; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the other is looking at and judging."¹ In other words, shame is the realization that the other can designate meaning upon for-itself and thus for-itself's unlimited possibilities are restricted to what the other sees.

With this in mind, Sartre believes that if God existed, then He would be a third party that sees humanity. Man would become an object for God. Sartre, in referring to the group of others, conceives that group transforming individual objects into a collective object for the eternal subject called God. Shame is intensified because man realizes that he has become an object for a subject that man can never see. ". . . I posit my being-an-object-for-God as more real than my For-itself; I exist alienated and I cause myself to learn from outside what I must be. This is the origin of fear before God."² Fear is the awareness that for-itself's freedom is in jeopardy by the other's ability to judge and choose meaning of a particular situation in which for-itself may be involved.

According to Sartre, for-itself attempts to capture its

¹ B.N., 261.

² B.N., 290.

foundation by identifying itself with others. That is, for-itself tries to realize its subjectivity by establishing a bond with the other's subjectivity: ". . . the for-itself wishes to be identified with the Other's freedom as founding its own being-in-itself."¹ However, this attempt by for-itself ends in failure because there is no way that for-itself is able to appropriate the other's subjectivity. Nevertheless, this is an ideal which man strives for:

This means that my being-for-others is haunted by the indication of an absolute-being which would be itself as other and other as itself and which by freely giving to itself its being-itself as other and its being-other as itself . . . that is, God.²

This passage sees God in a panentheistic light: God, although unique, is in-itself and part of the other. Sartre sees this conception of God as an impossibility because it would destroy the reality of the other qua external negation. "Unity with the Other is therefore in fact unrealizable."³ So, while Sartre half-suggests that God could assist for-itself to its own recovery, in actual fact, given the relationship of for-itself with the other,

¹ B.N., 365.

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem.

the notion of a panentheistic God contravenes the basic structure of this relationship.

In the same way, Sartre, when discussing the problem of solipsism, rejects both the realistic and idealistic proofs for the existence of the other. He rejects the realistic position because it ultimately leads to idealism because a realist assumes that there is consciousness behind the body which for-itself sees. Furthermore, it does not explain how consciousness acts upon other consciousnesses. "If the body is a real object really acting on thinking substance, the Other becomes a pure representation . . . one whose existence is measured by the knowledge which we have of it."¹ He also rejects the idealistic position because it leads to a realistic conclusion. This is because for-itself recognizes that the other is not only an object for for-itself but that for-itself is an object for the other as well. The idealistic position leads to saying that the self is a closed system and the other is a closed system also. The only way to overcome solipsism is to posit the actions of the other as being real because the other qua being external to consequences, cannot be conceptually accounted for.² Both the idealist and realist must face the fact that for-itself is separated from the other by real or ideal space.³

¹ B.N., 224.

² B.N., 228.

³ B.N., 231.

The problem then arises of whether for-itself's image of the other corresponds to the other. Sartre states that only an Absolute Third could guarantee that it would. This Absolute Third could be conceived as being God qua Creator. As it was seen, this conception of God raises problems depending upon how one conceives of the act of creation. If God is continually creating the world, then for-itself would be caught between the distinctiveness of for-itself's existence and panentheistic qualities of God. If God is seen as one who has created the world all at once, then God only knows for-itself and the other externally; and as such could not guarantee whether for-itself's image of the other does indeed correspond to the other. God is essentially placed in a "no-win" situation.

Within the realm of for-itself and in-itself, it is assumed without question for for-itself is an entity by itself. Sartre's establishment of being's objectivity in the early sections of B.N. is a crucial factor in determining the distance between for-itself and the other. And thus if God united for-itself with the other in a panentheistic fashion, then this union would contradict the notion of the individuality of both for-itself and the other. Sartre is again operating at two different levels which he takes to be one. That is, God in panentheistic terms is primarily a metaphysical notion which cannot be verified within experience. Sartre seems to be only "playing" with the idea that an Absolute Third would be able to solve the problem of verification of the other because he knows that his system does

not allow for this to happen. A panentheistic God may be able to guarantee the other's existence depending how one develops this concept. Nevertheless, Sartre's phenomenological framework rejects the solution before any serious feasibility exploration can take place.

Sartre, when discussing the relationship between different groups, also refers to God as being an Absolute Third. During this discussion the terms "us-object" and "we-subject" are employed. He uses the example of class consciousness in that the proletarian sees himself as a factor of production or an object for the bourgeois. The bourgeois are ". . . those who are outside the oppressed community and for whom this community exists . . . It is to them and through them that there is revealed the identity of my condition . . ." ¹ Thus it is through the look of the other that class consciousness emerges. This suggests that there might be an Absolute Third which looks upon the whole of humanity. ² However, this Absolute Third is completely distinct from humanity because he is a being who looks but cannot be looked at. In other words, he cannot be an object for humanity but instead is a pure subject. Sartre writes: "But if God is characterized as radical absence, the effort to realize humanity as ours is forever renewed and forever results in failure." ³ Therefore, the

¹ B.N., 421.

² B.N., 423.

³ Ibidem.

project of for-itself of positing itself as part of humanity qua us-object is an ideal which cannot be realized. "This humanistic 'Us' remains an empty concept, a pure indication of a possible extension of the ordinary usage of the 'Us'."¹ Thus any conception of humanity is empty because the Third's look does not exist. It would appear that Sartre is dismissing the notion of humanism. As will be seen in a moment, he will later modify this view. Nevertheless, this dismissal is based upon the notion that group consciousness arises only in the alienating look of the other. As it stands in this discussion of the other, man has a false sense of self-consciousness because there is no God to alienate man. Sartre does not try to show why this is so, but merely assumes that God does not exist.

It was shown that for-itself attempts to capture itself, i.e., self-aware-of-a-self, by identifying itself with the other's subjectivity. It could be asserted that if all the for-itselfs were to be seen together, then the concept of "totality" may arise. And yet this totality is self-contradictory because for-itself cannot realize the other's consciousness, and thus the plurality of consciousnesses cannot be synthesized. Furthermore, this plurality of consciousnesses cannot be mediated by a "higher" consciousness, i.e., God, because this higher consciousness would be a part of the totality.

¹ B.N., 423.

Sartre further indicates that consciousness may be able to capture its foundation through being-for-others from the perspective of the totality (for-itself and the other). That is, Sartre contends that the for-itself's project of capturing itself through being-for-other's subjectivity, as previously stated, ends in failure. This is precisely because for-itself, by the very nature of the relationship between for-itself and the other, cannot know the nature of the other's subjectivity. The only way to do so, is to take the vantage point of the totality, that is, of God.

Despite what Sartre prescribes for for-itself so that it may be able to succeed, there are problems with this solution. That is, if the nature of God is consciousness, then God would be integrated into the totality. However, if the nature of God is not consciousness, but instead is in-itself, then two things may happen. Either the totality appears to God as an object, in which case, God would no longer try to capture himself qua for-itself's attempt to find its basis through the other; or the totality appears to God qua subject, in which case, God would not be conscious of capturing himself qua for-itself's attempt to find its basis through the other.¹ In each case, God's project of being the vantage point of totality ends in failure. This

¹ B.N., 302.

argument seems to be bordering on the trivial. That is, Sartre sees the relationship between for-itself and the other as being one of between object and subject. Either for-itself is a subject and the other is seen as an object, or for-itself is an object for the other. The subject is automatically equated with awareness. Sartre assumes that, if God is a subject, He is in contact with the totality and thus is not separate from totality. For-itself cannot be united into a totality by the mediation of a higher mind because God would be a part of that totality. However, how else would God be able to know the nature of the other's subjectivity if he was not somehow aware of the totality?

In this passage, Sartre has not given sufficient reasons to show why God could not be aware of totality without being involved in that totality. Could not God be seen in a deistic framework? Sartre's presuppositions about for-itself as being a lack is applied to God. If Sartre sees God as pure subjectivity and the world as a part of God's foundation, then there is no reason why the mediation of consciousnesses by God cannot be successful in for-itself's attempt to capture the other's subjectivity. But the point is, how would God's knowledge assist for-itself? Furthermore, if God's nature is not consciousness, then He would not be aware of the totality, and thus not useful in securing knowledge of the other for for-itself. The question of whether God could assist for-itself is a metaphysical one, and thus irrelevant, because God's mediation cannot be detected by consciousness. Sartre is "toying" with God,

knowing full well that since God is essentially out of reach for man--and therefore does not exist--that for-itself's attempt to ground its own existence is a dismal failure.

By examining various passages of B.N. it is evident that Sartre does not seriously consider the existence of God. This is not surprising because, as was said at the outset, God is primarily a metaphysical notion with which phenomenological description is unable to contend. Sartre's ontological structure of for-itself and in-itself attempts to map out the human condition by quasi-phenomenological means. This structure is primordial in B.N. and as such any disruptive assertions are quickly dismissed.

This is apparent when for-itself's freedom is challenged. Within the scope of awareness, freedom is a basic point of departure. To be conscious is to be aware that one is free to think and act. And since the problem of reconciling God's nature with this basic fact would have required extensive speculation on Sartre's part, God's existence is refuted in order to solve this dilemma. Nevertheless, it was noted that Sartre likes to suggest that a particular conception of God may be helpful in solving ontological problems. (For example, for-itself's attempt to be in-itself-for-itself). In spite of possible solutions that he proposes, man's freedom is taken to be the most fundamental aspect of human reality. And, therefore, if these "possible solutions" interfere with this brute fact of human existence, they are rejected.

Since the well-defined structure does not leave much room for speculation, it is not surprising that Sartre frequently gives anthropomorphic accounts of God. Sartre's anthropomorphism is clearly seen when Sartre asserts that God is basically a logical contradiction. The ontological framework does not (or cannot) take into consideration God's omnipotence, and therefore it is not surprising that he would reach this conclusion.

Furthermore, it is not inconceivable that Sartre would use God as a synonym for the ideal and impossible. The synthesis of in-itself and for-itself is an ideal since Sartre's dualism will never allow this to happen without there being a more basic reality. And Sartre rejects the notion of an underlying reality.

It has been assumed throughout this discussion that God is primarily a metaphysical concept. If that assumption is correct, then this places Sartre's thoughts about God in a different light. B.N., for the most part, attempts to describe the human condition. It is certainly not a metaphysical work, and as such a discussion of God does not belong to it.

Perhaps an analogy will assist in explaining what Sartre has done when discussing reasons why God does not exist. A television set gives both audio and visual representations to the perceiver. A radio, however, only gives audio signals to the perceiver. The difference is in the design of each piece of equipment. The question that needs to be addressed is: why does Sartre insist upon saying that visual signals do not exist, when he is only using a radio? That is, Sartre gives reasons why God

cannot exist within the context of a framework that cannot allow for the possibility of the existence of God.

Since the structure of B.N. intrinsically rejects metaphysical concepts, Sartre explicitly affirms that metaphysical notions do not matter or do not exist as they have no direct access to consciousness. In doing so, Sartre is saying that there are only radios and no televisions. Therefore, there is no need to discuss why visual signals do not exist. This conclusion is quite obvious and thus does not need to be said. Hence Sartre has not provided any sound philosophic arguments for the proof of the non-existence of God.

Nevertheless, Sartre is convinced that God does not exist. The status of God's existence is not an issue in B.N. In any case, Sartre considers himself to have resolved that problem elsewhere. The discussion in B.N. is really only "icing on the cake" as far as Sartre giving reasons for his atheism. Whether this is the case, or whether B.N. is not conceptually equipped to handle a discussion about God, the result is the same--Sartre in B.N. denies the existence of God. Sartre's tone is very dogmatic on this point.

This leads to my reservations about Sartre's approach when he is referring to God. Since God's existence cannot be determined phenomenologically, would it not be better for Sartre to suspend judgement on this question? If B.N. is truly a phenomenological work in the Husserlian sense, Sartre would have "bracketed" this question. But it has been shown that Sartre

radically departs from Husserl's phenomenological method. Natanson is correct to assert that only approximately the first forty pages resemble some form of phenomenological discussion. The rest of the essay can be loosely classified as intuitive and quasi-phenomenological.¹ The references to God seem to support this claim.

The upshot of this section is that since Sartre has developed a framework which cannot cope with a God, perhaps the best way to criticize Sartre is to criticize his whole structure. This would include attacking the presuppositions that awareness and existence are the only criteria for determining human reality. However, before pursuing this line of thought further, perhaps we may find that the key to how Sartre deals with God lies in his conception of nothingness. The discussion of Sartre's notion of nothingness will be reserved for the final chapter. In the meantime it is essential to explore the existential consequences of Sartre's atheism in order to better understand man's relationship to nothingness.

Existential Consequences

God's absence in the affairs of man has a profound impact upon Sartre's literary and existential writings. Whatever

¹ M. Natanson, A Critique of Jean-Paul Sartre's Ontology (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Studies, 1951), pp. 73-4.

obscurity B.N. may have concerning the Divine, his other writings make it quite explicit what Sartre thinks about God. Whether Sartre is willing to admit it or not, God's conspicuous absence has a dramatic effect upon human reality. Man is torn from the secure knowledge of God to the realization that there is no longer anything that will support him in his endeavours to define his humanity. The purpose of this section is to explore the existential consequences of Sartre's immolation of God for the sake of man's freedom.

Sartre's essay entitled "The Humanism of Existentialism" (hereafter H.E.)¹ defends existentialism against various attacks by both the intellectual and general community. In doing so, Sartre illustrates his position on existentialism. Existentialism basically means that existence precedes essence, or that subjectivity is the starting point for realizing the human condition.² The distinction between existence and essence has been a longstanding one in the history of philosophical inquiry. Essence is used to designate the true nature of an object, whereas existence designates the actuality of an object. In Sartrean terms, essence refers to the a priori nature of an object

¹ J.P. Sartre, "The Humanism of Existentialism," Essays in Existentialism, ed. and for. by W. Baskin (Secaucus, N.J.: The Citadel Press, 1977).

² H.E., 34.

and existence refers to being there¹ or brute reality. Sartre points out that objects made by an artisan may have an essence according to the artisan's design. However, this does not apply to man because man does not have an essence or a human nature. This is because God qua creator does not exist. These two notions are linked together, as previously mentioned in reference to B.N., that man's absolute freedom depends upon there not being a God. Existentialism means ". . . first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself."² There is no divine plan for how the universe should unfold. Thus one of the key elements to Sartre's existentialism is that man must determine his own nature.

Another element in Sartre's definition of existentialism is that of contingency. It was previously noted that the notion of brute existence is very much linked with absurdity. In Sartre's novel, Nausea (hereafter N.)³, Roquentin, the protagonist, discovers the Sartrean concept of the human condition. Roquentin writes: "The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as necessity. To exist is simply to be there . . ."⁴ The style of the novel is very much like

¹ Dasein.

² H.E., 35-6.

³ J.P. Sartre, Nausea, tr. by L. Alexander and intro. by H. Carruth (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1964).

⁴ N., 131.

phenomenological description. The work records the day-to-day impressions of Roquentin. Brute existence is a vital aspect of existentialism because man realizes that if objects--including himself--are simply there, then he alone must find meaning for existence.

As previously pointed out, this leads to the conclusion that existence is fundamentally absurd. That is, there is no a priori reason for existence qua existence. This is central to understanding the term "nausea." "I understood that I had found the key to Existence, the key to my Nauseas, to my own life. In fact, all that I could grasp beyond that returns to this fundamental absurdity."¹ Nausea is a reaction to the ontological disgust with one's existence. Contingency is an important concept because one experiences nausea when one realizes that existence is "just there" and gratuitous:

We were a heap of living creatures, irritated, embarrassed at ourselves, we hadn't the slightest reason to be there, none of us, each one, confused, vaguely alarmed, felt in the way in relation to the others.²

In other words, nausea is the aggregate of impressions that for-itself experiences when confronted with the contingent elements

¹ N., 129.

² N., 128.

of existence.¹

The concept of absurdity is prevalent throughout Sartre's writings. The short story entitled "The Wall" is about a group of prisoners waiting to be executed for crimes of subversion. Pablo Ibbieta, the protagonist, is questioned concerning the whereabouts of Ramon Gris, a friend. After spending the night with two other political prisoners, thinking that he is going to die at daybreak, Pablo is separated from the other prisoners and taken back for further questioning. He is asked again where Ramon is hiding. Pablo, thinking that he would rather die than betray this confidence, decides to lead the authorities on a futile search and tells them that Ramon is at a cemetery. Later, Pablo, in bewilderment, is freed. It turns out that Ramon had moved from his previous hiding place to the spot that Pablo had named, without Pablo knowing it. The authorities kill Ramon and let Pablo live because of a freak set of circumstances. One of the themes of this story is that there is no plan in life because everything happens by chance or luck. In this case, it happens to be a stroke of misfortune. "The Wall" illustrates how absurd life can be.

In a word, existence has no order outside of human reality. Since this is true, man must take the initiative to give meaning to the human condition. Existentialism, like phenomenology,

¹ B.N., 338.

starts from what can be known for certain--human consciousness and thus human freedom. Human freedom allows man to create his essence. It is the direct result of existence being gratuitous. Contingency and absolute freedom are different aspects of the same Sartrean reality.

The result of this conception of existence is that man is responsible for developing his being. Responsibility is ". . . consciousness [of] being the incontestable author of an event or of an object."¹ That is, everything that happens is the direct result of our actions. Factors such as heredity, personality traits, environmental conditions and so forth are disregarded as being determinates for man's behaviour. "It is therefore senseless to think of complaining since nothing foreign has decided what we feel, what we live, or what we are."²

Everything that happens such as marriage, having children and fighting in a war, are events for which individual man must assume responsibility. Man is culpable because he could get out of fighting by either deserting or committing suicide. Inaction, in the face of a situation, is in effect a form of action. In other words, to rephrase Sartre's quotation of J. Romains, "In life there are no innocent victims." For instance, to be involved

¹ B.N., 553.

² B.N., 554.

in a war means ". . . to choose myself through it and to choose it through my choice of myself."¹ The only thing man is not responsible for is the very fact that he is responsible. Furthermore, man is not accountable for the fact that he is freedom personified.² Freedom and responsibility are correlates of each other. Man is even responsible for his birth, because man is able to choose the meaning of his birth. Man's birth is a fact of life which he cannot change, but he can change his interpretation of his birth. Therefore, man must accept that he exists, is free and responsible for the way he employs that freedom.

The second part of Sartre's definition of existentialism--subjectivity as the starting point--is developed in connection with the notion of responsibility. Subjectivism means both that man assumes responsibility for choosing himself, and that it is impossible for man to get beyond himself.³ In H.E., Sartre states that, when man chooses himself, he is also creating an image that he thinks man ought to assume. "In choosing myself, I choose man."⁴ That is to say, man is intricately involved with the other since the latter is usually an element of a situation. Therefore, man must accept the responsibility of his actions as it affects the other. Furthermore, since man cannot transcend

¹ B.N., 555.

² Ibidem.

³ H.E., 37.

⁴ Ibidem.

himself outside a given situation, he cannot lessen this burden by sharing it with the other or by dependence on an external set of values.

In the previous chapter it was pointed out that man experiences anguish when he realizes his freedom. In H.E. Sartre connects this notion of apprehension with assuming this responsibility. "For every man, everything happens as if all mankind had its eyes fixed on him and were guiding itself by what he does."¹ For instance, a political leader may experience anguish when making decisions about his country's economy. He must decide what his goals will be: should he fight inflation or unemployment? What measures shall he take in order to restore economic stability? These questions and others can lead a leader to experience anguish because the leader is conscious that whatever actions he does take, he assumes the responsibility for the consequences for the country, his political future and his personal reputation. Sartre states that anguish does not lead to inaction but is the basis for such action.² In short, anguish is the realization that ". . . nothing relieves me from the necessity of continually choosing myself and nothing guarantees the validity of the values which I choose."³

¹ H.E., 39.

² Ibidem.

³ B.N., 629.

Not only does the burden of responsibility give rise to anguish, but it also gives rise to forlornness as well. Forlornness is experienced by man when he realizes that God does not exist and that he must face the repercussions of this fact. Man experiences desolation and abandonment. This is so because with the death of God there is also the death of a priori values which may aid man in his decision making. Man is free to interpret the events in any manner he chooses.

Although Sartre is correct to describe man's apprehensiveness when realizing there are no a priori values to choose, he should proceed with caution when employing terms like "forlornness" and "abandonment." That is, these terms suggest that there is someone who did the forsaking or the deserting. For instance, a lover feels forsaken when receiving a "Dear John" letter. In this case, there was an actual person who did the forsaking. However, this is not the case with man. According to Sartre, there is no God and thus no one to abandon man. This is only a word of caution because Sartre seems to have modified the term forlornness to mean that man must face the results of God's non-existence.¹ Forlornness is more clearly associated with anguish and despair. In other words, Sartre has changed the meaning to reflect man's reaction not to the fact that there was a

¹ H.E., 40.

God that disappeared, but to the fact there was never a God and man is the only one to carry the burden of responsibility for realizing value judgements.

Sartre's play entitled "The Devil and the Good Lord" (hereafter D.G.),¹ is an example of how man experiences forlornness. The protagonist, Goetz, is depicted by Sartre as a character who can change his nature at will. In the first act, Goetz is seen as essentially an evil person, who is ready to seize a small German town, Worms, in order to slaughter its inhabitants. Despite protests from various people not to go ahead with the plan, Goetz decides to go ahead until Heinrich, a priest, tells Goetz that he is not the sole author of his evil. Heinrich tells Goetz that evil, like goodness, is essentially a transcendent quality which man partakes of through action. Goetz, disbelieving him, attempts to prove that man has complete dominion over his being, by changing his evil nature into doing goodness. Furthermore, Heinrich believes goodness is impossible to achieve. Goetz states:

You are wrong. You tell me Good is impossible--
therefore I wager I will live righteously. It
is still the best way to be alone. I was a
criminal--I will reform. I turn my coat and
wager I can be a saint.²

¹ J.P. Sartre, The Devil & The Good Lord and Two Other Plays, tr. by K. Black (New York: Vintage Books, 1960).

² D.G., 58.

This play stresses that man has a "blank cheque" to determine his future. Man can change at will from being an evil person to a good person, back to being an evil person again. Forlornness means that man is left isolated to fend for himself when making decisions.

In the third act of D.G. Goetz, after trying to be good by giving away his property and inspiring peasants to love one another, only to find out that the social structure was not ready to absorb such a radical alteration, realizes that the effort of being a saint was a futile one ending in disillusionment. Goetz succinctly defines forlornness in these lines:

I supplicated, I demanded a sign, I sent
messages to Heaven, no reply. Heaven ignored
my very name. Each minute I wondered what I
could BE in the eyes of God. Now I know the
answer: nothing. God does not see me, God
does not but myself; I alone decided on Evil;
and I alone invented Good.¹

Goetz comes to the conclusion that he was always alone.

This play exemplifies Sartre's convictions about human freedom, solitude and sense of desolation. From a literary standpoint (and perhaps this will best illustrate whether Sartre's play reflects human reality), the characterization is somewhat

¹ D.G., 141.

believes that true human action is intentional, such that man consciously chooses an end.¹ Intentional states cannot be explained by deterministic factors because man's freedom is realized by the nihilation of a given.² Thus freedom is exercised through making conscious choices.

How accurate is Sartre's description of freedom when one examines the day-to-day experiences of man? Certainly he minimizes the role that the past (i.e., heredity, socialization, etc.) may have in determining the outcome of choices. While Sartre's notions of freedom are possible, compared to the degree that man consciously exercises his freedom, they seem to be overrated. The whole basis of this freedom depends upon the conscious awareness that man has about a given situation. For instance, take the example of a mother who grieves over her son recently killed while fighting in a war. According to Sartre, the mother's actions are not completely determined by the situation as she can choose the meaning of that situation. She may not grieve because she chooses to think of her son's contribution to the war effort. In this way, the mother is free to act because her actions are intentional. Nevertheless, this seems to be somewhat of a "stoic" view of experience. Sartre

¹ B.N., 477.

² B.N., 481.

underestimates the role of other factors which are a part of the human condition. While it is possible that the mother could strive for choosing this particular meaning, it seems highly improbable that she would. This example is indicative of the human condition in general.

The human condition is too complex to be explained in theoretical terms which reduce the influence of other factors, in order to give prominence to one factor. In other words, it is questionable that Sartre's thesis of freedom as being the sole condition of man's action is an accurate one. Perhaps freedom is a condition and not the condition for action. Sartre's definition of action being intentional is too restrictive in explaining the human condition. This comes through in D.G. where the characterization is flat and at times unconvincing.

Sartre defines despair as recognizing the fact that man's possibilities are restricted to the jurisdiction of his will. "The moment the possibilities I am considering are not rigorously involved by my action, I ought to disengage myself from them, because no God, no scheme, can adapt the world and its possibilities to my will."¹ Sartre in H.E. states that man cannot depend upon human nature in the other because there is no human nature, and man cannot control that which is outside of his subjectivity. Despair comes through in Roquentin's diary:

¹ H.E., 46.

I am alone . . . it's like the Nausea and yet it's just the opposite . . . when I question myself I see that it happens that I am myself and that I am here; I am the one who splits the night, I am as happy as the hero of a novel.¹

Despair, forlornness and anguish are symptoms of the same disease --man's solitariness. Despair is the manifestation that man cannot rely upon his fellowman to provide a sense of comradeship.

In H.E. Sartre also replies to the suggestion that existentialism is a form of quietism. On the contrary, in opposition to quietism--a doctrine that advocates a form of withdrawal by not making decisions, or being passive in the face of conflict--Sartre asserts that existentialism is a doctrine of action. "There is no reality except in action."² In this way, Sartre wants to put forth the view that existentialism is an "optimistic toughness" rather than a naive pessimism. Man controls his fate, and is not subject to external forces which lead man to his "downfall" such as seen in Greek and Roman tragedies. Instead, man alone is accountable for what he is. If man does not act, then he is nothing.

Sartre's thesis of action is clearly associated with for-itself's dynamic character: ". . . the cogito drives us outside

¹ N., 54.

² H.E., 47.

the instance toward that which it is the mode of not being it."¹ Furthermore, it has been stated this is a direct result of the bifurcation of awareness and existence. Nevertheless, this optimistic toughness and saying that action is the element that constitutes human reality, is the result of Sartre's thesis of freedom. Again, Sartre minimizes the other aspects of the human condition in order to emphasize the dynamic character of for-itself. Surely there is more than action which defines human reality. For instance, part of the reason why Shakespeare's King Lear is considered by many to be one of the greatest pieces of fiction literature written is the extent that the play probes human reality. While action is an important element of the play, it explores the pathos of the human condition through reflecting characters' feelings and thoughts. Certainly this is just as much a part of the human condition as action is. It is highly questionable whether Sartre's optimistic toughness really reflects accurately the human condition when tragedies such as King Lear, which depict the fragility of the human condition more strongly resonate an opposite truth to their audiences.

Even though Sartre rejects the concept of human nature, he does recognize the validity of referring to the human condition. He defines the human condition as ". . . the a priori limits

¹ B.N., 96.

which outline man's fundamental situation in the universe."¹ Factors of the human condition include man existing, working, living among other people and being mortal. In this way, man can relate to the other parts of the human race. However, the human condition is not a state of being but rather is a process of self-perpetuation. In short, it is by being a part of the human condition that man must exercise his freedom by continually making choices. It should be pointed out that there are really only two a priori conditions that define human reality. That is, that man lives and dies. Man does not have to work as he can live off of the labour of society. Man does not have to be in contact with the other as one may be an hermit. Although it is highly probable that man should work and be in contact with the other, the latter more so than the former, they are not necessary factors of the human condition.

As was mentioned briefly, a sense of anguish may be so overwhelming that man may relinquish his freedom by becoming passive and submitting to deterministic forces. Sartre calls this behaviour "bad faith." In H.E., Sartre calls this a logical error in judgement because by refusing to exercise one's freedom or being dishonest, man is undermining the whole foundation of the human condition. Honesty entails that man recognize the fact

¹ H.E., 52.

that he is free to create his essence and that he constantly tries to fulfill that end.

In B.N., Sartre devotes a chapter to the subject of bad faith. Bad faith is a form of inauthentic behaviour. Authentic behaviour is that behaviour which man consciously accepts as being his own. Loosely speaking, bad faith is a lie to oneself about one's authenticity. However, it is a lie which does not succeed because it is based on falsehood. Man is usually called a liar when he purposely deceives another person. "By the lie consciousness affirms that it exists by nature as hidden from the Other; it utilizes for its own profit the ontological duality of myself and myself in the eyes of the Other."¹ But since consciousness cannot hide anything from itself, it is impossible for consciousness to succeed. That is, consciousness cannot be the deceiver and the deceived at the same time. Bad faith does not succeed because for-itself establishes a duality where there is none: for-itself attempts to be in-itself, but since for-itself is still aware of this attempt, it does not succeed.

The final charge that Sartre refutes in H.E. is the charge that existentialism is anti-humanistic. In doing so, he distinguishes between two forms of humanism. The first type involves the notion that man glorifies himself for the

¹ B.N., 49.

accomplishments that he has been able to achieve. Humanism in this sense means ". . . a theory which takes man as an end and a higher value."¹ Existentialism asserts that man is never an end in himself to be admired because he is a dynamic creature. Rather, Sartre conceives humanism in terms of man being ". . . constantly outside himself; in projecting himself, in losing himself outside of himself . . ."² Sartre is careful to point out that this act of projection is not the same as engaging in the realm of the divine. Man cannot transcend his subjectivity. This is what Sartre refers to as "existentialist humanism."³ This is seen in D.G. where Goetz does not transcend his subjectivity throughout the course of the play. Even though in the second and third acts Goetz is supposed to be religious, it is quite evident that he is just going "through the motions." This will be further explored later in this chapter.

Sartre ends this essay by saying that atheistic existentialism does not try to prove that God does not exist, rather ". . . it declares that even if God did exist, that would change nothing."⁴ The absence of God is not the problem at hand, but rather it is man himself who is the subject for concern.

¹ H.E., 60.

² H.E., 61.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ H.E., 62.

An Analysis of Sartre's Atheism

Sartre's basis for atheism lies outside the realm of his philosophy. In the film entitled Sartre by Himself the philosopher speaks about his loss of faith. He was brought up in a semi-religious atmosphere where he was taught to be a Catholic by his mother. It appears that the extent of his faith was limited to the intellectual sphere as ". . . whenever the matter of Catholicism was raised, it was something to be discussed and argued about."¹ At the age of eleven he came to the realization that he had lost any faith that he did have.

When I was in La Rochelle, I remember waiting at the bus stop . . . and while waiting I said to myself: "You know what? God doesn't exist." And that was that: faith left, and never came back. Actually, it was a full realization of something I had sensed earlier, but never completely formulated.²

Throughout his life, it seems that Sartre developed an intellectual foundation supporting this insight.

Even though Sartre states that God's absence is not really a factor in his brand of existentialism, it is certainly evident that many of Sartre's concepts depend upon God being absent.

¹ J.P. Sartre, Sartre by Himself, tr. R. Seaver (New York: Urizen Books, 1978), p. 16.

² Ibid., pp. 16-7.

Anguish, despair, forlornness and bad faith are concepts which describe man's reaction to being isolated in the universe. Furthermore, the basic presuppositions of B.N. depend upon the fact that there are not more fundamental realities than for-itself and in-itself. Admittedly, God's departure from the human condition is not a central focus of Sartre's philosophy, however the accuracy of Sartrean thought is contingent upon this radical absence of God.

An examination of Sartre's writings reveals that he has a limited concept of faith. Faith is defined in terms of the structure presented in the introductory parts of B.N. For example: "To believe is to know that one believes, and to know that one believes is no longer to believe."¹ This passage implicitly equates belief as being a form of in-itself. Therefore, to be aware that one believes is to recognize that belief can be subject to questioning. Belief is limited to the realm of non-thetic consciousness, which if it is reflected upon, is no longer belief. To know that one believes and still adhere to that belief is a form of in-itself-for-itself.

Furthermore, Sartre affirms that belief is a form of confidence in something that does not have empirical substantiation. "But if I know that I believe, the belief appears to me as pure subjective determination without external

¹ B.N., 69.

correlative."¹ This corresponds to D.G. where Goetz comes to the conclusion that there is no God. This conclusion is based upon the lack of experiential evidence. That is, Goetz's words "I demanded a sign" indicate that faith is just a matter of receiving confirmation. Although Sartre does give some indication that faith is a form of trust, that trust is based upon something which lacks sufficient evidence to support that trust.

Certainly Sartre did not conceive faith in terms of having a perspective or orientation in life. The tone of D.G. suggests that God is a type of scientific hypothesis which needs to be proven. This contravenes religious faith because faith is not solely based upon this concept as it involves commitment and complete trust. It is not founded upon empirical evidence or "signs." This is one of the basic tenets of religious faith. Sartre in this regard seems to be suggesting a positivistic position.

This lack of conceptual development of faith is reflected in D.G. It is reflected through the flat characterization of Goetz. It is quite clear that Goetz, although wanting to be an instrument of God, is acting alone. That is, it is Goetz who decides to do good, suffers, and gives away his lands. The faithful Goetz is still the solitary Goetz. For instance, when he

¹ B.N., 69.

refers to Catherine, a person whom he used for his own ends and now upon her deathbed is seeing demoniac visions, Goetz states "It was through my sin that this woman was damned, and it is through me that she shall be saved."¹ Surely belief in God demands the recognition that man is only a medium of divine providence. The theme of divine providence plays an insignificant role in Goetz's conversion and development of his faith. Therefore, due to Sartre's biographical background and lack of conceptual insight into faith, his writings portray man as being an isolated creature who must assume the awesome responsibility of this fact.

It was mentioned that at the end of H.E. Sartre remarked that even if God did exist, God would have little effect upon the human condition. Surely this statement cannot be at face value in light of the rest of Sartre's writings. That is, if God did exist then there would be no need for man's dramatic reaction to isolation. And there would be metaphysical implications for the structure of Sartre's phenomenological ontology. It is beyond the scope of this work to explore those implications. However, it is quite clear that God has no place in either Sartre's phenomenological or existential thought.

¹ D.G., 101.

The question which needs to be asked is What is the status of God? If he does not exist, then does that mean that He is a form of nothingness? If man expects a God in the same way a person expects Pierre to be in the café at a particular time, then can "God" be used to refer to an actual manifestation of nothingness? If so, the relationship between God and the Sartrean conception of nothingness needs to be explored. It was noted at the end of Chapter One that Sartre's lack of established method in elucidating the interplay between for-itself and in-itself, and the ontological nature of nothingness are two problems that needed further exploration. The final chapter will attempt to come to some conclusion regarding these two problems and how this conclusion affects the status of Sartrean atheism.

CHAPTER THREE: GOD AND NOTHINGNESS

Even though Sartre might think that he has resolved the problem of God's existence, his solution is not entirely satisfactory. In order to understand why this solution is not satisfactory, it is necessary to briefly review the line of argument in Chapter One and Chapter Two of this work. In Chapter One we discussed the basic relationship between for-itself and in-itself and discovered that awareness is not completely synonymous with existence. In Chapter Two we noted that Sartre's ontology was so limited that metaphysical concepts, such as God, were classified as nonsensical and irrelevant. It was also noted throughout these two chapters that the notion of nothingness is significant for understanding the interplay between for-itself and in-itself, and for understanding man's freedom in general. I will, in this chapter, attempt to determine the relationship between Sartre's conception of God and nothingness, and to show, despite Sartre's determination to declare God dead, that the question of God's existence is still not settled.

In Chapter One, a close exploration was made of the Introductory Part of B.N., entitled "The Pursuit of Being," in order to understand Sartre's conceptual development of for-itself

and in-itself. It was seen that Sartre based his epistemology on existence rather than awareness. Furthermore, Sartre's employment of transphenomenality radically separates consciousness from objects. That is, objects are distinct entities in-themselves apart from what consciousness may or may not perceive. However, since Sartre insisted upon the primordially of existence over awareness, I suggested that he did not follow the phenomenological method because he went beyond the point of describing appearances.

Chapter One also explored the chapter entitled "The Origin of Negation" in the first part of B.N. Sartre held that nothingness was neither solely a subjective phenomenon nor solely an objective phenomenon. It is a combination of both. The example of Pierre in the café illustrated this fact. For-itself is depicted as a lack. In short, for-itself is a type of non-being, which in turn is the source of man's freedom. Nothingness provides the basis for man's freedom. This gives rise to man's sense of forlornness, anguish, despair and bad faith.

In Section One of Chapter Two, we saw that Sartre's ontological structure could not cope with the idea of God. Although Sartre tentatively accepts traditional views of God as a starting hypothesis, he rejects the notion that a deity exists. He denies God could exist because a God would have the qualities of being an Absolute Observer of mankind, Self-Caused or omniscient, as these qualities would infringe upon man's freedom.

Man's freedom and the relationship of for-itself and in-itself are both antithetical to the existence of a divine being.

In the second section of Chapter Two, the existential consequences were examined. Again it was noted that God's absence from the human condition gave rise to man experiencing despair and abandonment. Since man is fundamentally a being without an essence, he must assume responsibility for creating his essence. With the death of God there is a death of a priori values. Man is condemned to continuously realize values without the assistance of God or pre-experiential notions. Man is alone in the universe to determine his humanity.

Throughout these two chapters I suggested that Sartre has problems in establishing the ontological foundations of his philosophy. For instance, since Sartre has not attempted to elucidate his method, the very concept of a "phenomenological ontology" is left in some doubt. Ontology is usually a study of the conceptual analysis of reality, whereas phenomenology is primarily a descriptive analysis of reality. That is, ontology tries to explain reality in terms of ideas. Sartre uses the terms for-itself and in-itself, which are essentially concepts, to explain the world. Man does not perceive for-itself qua for-itself or in-itself qua in-itself. Instead, he perceives other men and objects, such as chairs and tables, and he interprets them to be manifestations of certain concepts. However, phenomenology attempts to describe objects in terms of how they appear to consciousness without the assistance of a conceptual

schema. Sartre has failed to recognize this distinction when he proposes the independent standing of for-itself and in-itself respectively. It is also evident, when one examines the ontology of nothingness, that a problem surfaces when saying that nothingness has an ontological nature. It was also noted that since God is a metaphysical concept, he has no position within the framework of for-itself and in-itself. Moreover, it was pointed out that even though Sartre states that man is the focal point for existential thought, God's absence is a major factor in man's state of affairs.

Having reviewed some of the more important points of the discussion so far, I want now to argue that God and nothingness, in Sartre's philosophy, both have mutual characteristics which point toward the conclusion that God and nothingness are equated. These mutual characteristics, which will be expounded upon shortly, can be identified in two areas: first, between for-itself and in-itself, where for-itself--a form of nothingness--is the basis for man's freedom or self-determination; and second, where for-itself posits the non-being of something. It should be borne in mind that in actuality these two areas do tend to overlap and therefore this distinction is somewhat artificial, useful mainly in drawing parallels between Sartre's notion of nothingness and his atheistic strain of thought. I believe that, by examining common elements of Sartre's notions of God and nothingness in these two above stated areas, I can demonstrate the equation of God and nothingness.

One of these common elements is that both nothingness and God play a vital role in man's quest to be an authentic being. In a theistic system, God would be the source for man's values and meaning. However, since Sartre's restrictive system cannot accommodate any notions about the divine, nothingness becomes the source for man's authenticity. That is, both freedom and nothingness provide the grounds for the Sartrean man to be a creative being. So much so, that man's freedom remains unquestioned because man is directly aware that there is no internal foundation to build his essence. In other words, nothingness provides the "springboard" for man to be what he desires. Authenticity means that man is conscious of this fact, and that he takes appropriate action in this regard. Inauthenticity or bad faith describes man attempting to escape his freedom by allowing himself to be determined by a false foundation. It is false because once man is aware of an object, he is aware that he is not that object. "The For-itself by its self-negation becomes the affirmation of the In-itself . . . there can be affirmation only by a being which is its own nothingness and of a being which is not the affirming being."¹

It is further evident that this description closely parallels Sartre's "nihilism." That is, he advocates that man should reject any established codes of values. Sartre nihilates

¹ B.N., 217.

a priori values that would infringe upon man's freedom. In a sense, Sartre substitutes nothingness for these a priori values and for the concept of a human nature. Man has no essence except for the fact that he is free. He is free because there is "no-thing" which would transgress that freedom. Kuhn succinctly writes: "The 'abyss' of freedom is identical with the abyss of Nothingness."¹ There are no pre-experiential values because within the ontological framework of B.N., for-itself can only be aware of what is immediately present to consciousness.

Freedom and nihilation are dialectically related. Man is free to nihilate everything and because everything is nihilated, it is possible for man to be absolutely free. Sartre writes: ". . . human reality is its own nothingness. For the for-itself, to be is to nihilate the in-itself which it is. Under these conditions freedom can be nothing other than this nihilation."² Nothingness makes it possible for man to be free, while it is freedom that makes it possible for man to nihilate. It is not a coincidence that Sartre, in B.N., when considering how it is possible for human reality to bring nothingness into the world, refers to freedom; and when he writes about freedom in Part Four it is no coincidence that he refers to the point that there is

¹ H. Kuhn, Encounter with Nothingness, for. by M. Jarett-Kerr (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1951), p. 6.

² B.N., 439.

nothing which determines consciousness.¹ "Freedom is precisely the nothingness which is made-to-be at the heart of man and which forces human-reality to make itself instead of to be."² It is on the ground of nothingness that man is able to be free. And freedom is a manifestation of man's ability to nihilate values.

Essentially, Sartre formulated a philosophical system without God. Sartre states in Situations that, like theism, atheism is an a priori choice about something which lies beyond the reach of experience.³ It was stated in the previous chapter that Sartre evidently made this choice early in his life, and that he built a system to accommodate that choice. This decision was further philosophically substantiated by exploring the human condition. And the conclusion is summed up in Goetz's lines: "If God exists, man is nothing; if man exists . . ." ⁴ The rest of the quotation is certainly obvious. Furthermore, Sartre stated in an interview that he emphasizes man. "There is no difference between the Devil and the Lord--personally, I choose man."⁵ Sartre makes

¹ B.N., 23-5, 439-41.

² B.N., 440.

³ J.P. Sartre, Situations III, 139, quoted in R. Jolivet, Sartre: The Theology of the Absurd, tr. by W. Piersol (Toronto: Newman Press, 1967), p. 34.

⁴ D.G., 141.

⁵ J.P. Sartre, Sartre on Theatre, tr. by F. Jellinek (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), p. 226.

it explicit that existential ethics begin when it is acknowledged that there is no transcendent source for human values. By stressing the need to study man and by setting up the ontological framework of for-itself and in-itself, Sartre has replaced with nothingness any metaphysical notions, including God. Cochrane when discussing Heidegger's and Sartre's thought writes: "The nothing in the thought of Heidegger and Sartre is, in fact, a substitute for God."¹ Instead of God being the source of man's authenticity and creativity, nothingness becomes the source. God, the giver of meaning and values, is replaced by nothingness. Man is confronted by this nothingness and then must decide for himself what values and meaning to choose. In other words, existence is explained and determined by nothingness. Kuhn writes "Existentialism is subjectivism in its nihilism."² In actual fact, given the structure of his ontology, Sartre has no other choice but to make this implicit equation between nothingness and God. The validity of Sartre's system, since it is so restrictive, depends upon its being able to categorize that which cannot be "slotted" within the framework. Sartre does this through his use of nothingness.

In replacing the secure system of theism, Sartre formulated a system where man is basically insecure. In fact,

¹ A.C. Cochrane, The Existentialists and God (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), p. 70.

² Kuhn, op. cit., p. 8.

Sartrean existentialism and ontology is founded upon the principle that man cannot depend upon anything or anybody except that which is given in terms of immediate choice. In short, man cannot rely upon his past, environment, society, ethical systems, or the established church. Man is condemned to make choices, and furthermore, he solely and completely is responsible for the consequences of those choices. The result is since man has no foundation on which to base his decisions, he constantly tries to formulate a foundation. In short, as pointed out in the discussion, man wants to be an in-itself-for-itself or God. "It is as the nihilation of the in-itself and a perpetual evasion of contingency and of facticity that it wishes to be its own foundation."¹ Man pays a high price for taking over the role of creator. That is, since man is the sole author of his individual authenticity, he must forever assume that role over and over again. There is no escape from this perpetual activity. Man cannot not exercise his freedom when he chooses to or when it is convenient. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that Sartre is concerned about truth and not convenience or security, and rightly so, thus it is incidental to Sartre that man must forego the "security blanket" of traditional values in order for him to attain the fulfillment of philosophical integrity and truth. And

¹ B.N., 566.

to attain this truth, man has to pay the price of assuming responsibility for being the sole creator of his humanity.

Since this is the case, man is never complete. The goal of unification of for-itself with in-itself is the direct result of saying that nothingness is the basis on which man seeks to define himself. Thus, to escape the awesome implications of nothingness, the goal of man is, paradoxically, that of becoming an immanent God. "But the being toward which human reality surpasses itself is not a transcendent God; it is at the heart of human reality; it is only human reality itself as totality."¹ But for reasons previously mentioned, for-itself will never achieve this totality. Sartre ends B.N. by saying that for-itself's attempt to secure this foundation ends in failure. This is because there is no God (i.e., the knowledge of God's will) upon which man can base his being. In a word, Sartre writes "Man is a useless passion."²

The consequence of Sartre replacing God with nothingness qua the foundation of man's creativity leads man to despair and alienation. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind, that within the scope of Sartre's philosophy, he has given valid reasons why God cannot be the source of man's authenticity. In fact, Sartre affirms that if man subscribes to a theistic source of values,

¹ Ibid., p. 89.

² Ibid., p. 615.

then he would be committing an act of inauthenticity or bad faith. Moreover, the boundaries of Sartre's ontology do not allow man to succeed in being his own foundation qua totality. Sontag describes man's lack of nature as being a painful realization for man:

It is "painful" because the human self, not having God's infinite power, grasps for necessity and certainty and finds, to its dismay, that negativity and nothingness are neither merely accidental nor temporary phenomena but instead are permanent features of the structure of Being itself.¹

In other words, when Sartre does away with God, man has to assume the task of creating values.

A second, similar characteristic that nothingness has in common with God is that they are both bases for explaining existence. That is, in a theistic philosophical system, God is used to explain the meaning of existence. In Sartre's system, nothingness is the basis for such explanation. For-itself interprets existence by giving meaning to it. The nothingness of consciousness formulates relationships between itself and objects. For instance, the statement "the chair is not a table" is an example of an external negation. External negation is an

¹ F. Sontag, The Existentialist Prolegomena (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1969), p. 70.

external bond between two things by for-itself.¹ It was also seen in the Introductory Sections of B.N. that the phenomenon of being is the meaning of the being of phenomenon.² Furthermore, Sartre states that knowledge is a type of relationship between for-itself and in-itself.³ Without nothingness within for-itself, there would only be existence qua intself. Sartre states that existence without awareness is an artificial abstraction. Since existence is the basis of awareness, Sartre affirms that awareness is that which is not and existence is that which is. Therefore, nothingness provides the means for explaining human reality. This is further evident when one examines Sartre's existentialism whereby man is the "corner stone" of meaning. In short, nothingness is the key to understanding the Sartrean concept of existence.

Depending upon whether one is operating in a theistic or atheistic system, these first two similarities of God and nothingness--both being the foundation of man's authenticity and both providing the means for interpreting human reality--are structural similarities. That is, both are used as underlying references in explaining the human condition. The third similarity deals with an actual manifestation of God or nothingness.

¹ B.N., 631.

² Ibid., p. lxxv.

³ Ibid., p. 172.

In this way, this similarity will illustrate the nature of both within the Sartrean framework. In one sense, both do not exist. For instance, the nature of nothingness is not to be. According to Sartre, the nature of God is to be in-itself-for-itself, an ontological impossibility. (This was explained in Chapter Two).

However, while they may be alike in this wide sense, there is a very important distinction between God and nothingness. That is, roughly speaking, they do not exist in the same manner. In referring to nothingness, Sartre writes "If we can speak of it, it is only because it possesses an appearance of being, a borrowed being, as we have noted above. Nothingness is not, Nothingness 'is made-to-be'."¹ In speaking about existentialism, Kuhn writes: "This philosophy grants to Nothingness a quasi-substantial reality."² Loosely speaking, nothingness, for Sartre, has a definite ontological nature. Furthermore, it was noted that, due to Sartre's revised concept of intentionality, consciousness always posits something which has an ontological basis. The positing of non-being is no exception. Even though God does not have an ontological status, God's absence still plays an important role in the affairs of man. "Whatever may be the myths and rites of the religion considered, God is first 'sensible to the heart' of man as the one who

¹ Ibid., p. 22.

² Kuhn, op. cit., p. xv.

identifies and defines him in his ultimate and fundamental project."¹ And therefore since God does not exist he is limited to the conceptual realm.

And yet God is not a concept in the same manner that Wellington is a concept. It was stated in Chapter One that Sartre makes the distinction between Pierre and Wellington not being in the café. Wellington's absence could not be experienced by the expectant because Wellington does not really exist. If God were a concept in the same way as Wellington, then man could not experience God's absence. This distinction between Wellington and God will be further explored later in this chapter. In the meantime, it is essential to bear in mind that while both nothingness and God do not exist, they do not exist in different ways.

Having made this distinction, I would suggest that given Sartre's framework both nothingness and God are projections of human reality. It was stated in Chapter One, that negations arrive in the world through the interrogative mode of experience. Sartre believes that nothingness only occurs when man expects, desires, or perceives. It is nevertheless the objective phenomenon which reveals non-being. The essential feature of non-being was quoted in Chapter One in the lines "The world does

¹ B.N., 566.

not disclose its non-beings to one who has not posited them as possibilities."¹ The experience of Pierre's absence from the café would not have occurred if there were not someone who had posited Pierre in the first place. Therefore, man must first project the presence of someone or something before he is able to experience the absence of that someone or something.

It is the hypothesis of God being equivalent to nothingness is correct, then Sartre's example of Pierre not being in the café can be analogously applied to God not being in the Sartrean world. Nothingness is always nothingness of something. There is no such thing as pure nothingness qua empty void because nothingness is projected on the ground of being. For example, Pierre is absent from the café. The café defines the experience of Pierre's absence. The experience of nothingness is an intentional one. Just as the experience of Pierre's absence can be felt by the expectant, man may experience God's absence, if he seeks God but cannot find him. Sartre's structure can only permit God to be empirically verified. However, this contravenes the whole notion of religious faith, which states that empirical verification will never confirm the presence of God. So God is essentially absent from the Sartrean view of the human condition.

God's absence can be experienced by man realizing that there are no a priori values and thus he is left to realize his

¹ Ibid., p. 7.

humanity. This has been expounded in connection with Sartre's views about existentialism. God's absence can only be experienced by those who realize that theistic a priori are false. For instance, a person may be brought up to believe in Christianity and that a Christian ethic is the proper one to adhere to. After getting away from the Church, that person may have doubts and come to the realization that there is no God after all. In this example, the person experiences a form of nothingness because he expects God to be in the world qua a sign and instead finds nothingness. That is, man becomes conscious of the fact that God is absent.

Sartre's play entitled D.G. is an example where someone, Goetz, seeks God but cannot find him. It was stated in Chapter Two that Goetz turns from being evil to being good, back to being evil again. During the time that Goetz tries to be good, he searches for some confirmation that he is following God's will. Instead of receiving a sign, he receives silence.

Each minute I wondered what I could BE in the eyes of God. Now I know the answer: nothing. God does not see me, God does not hear me, God does not know me. You see this emptiness over our heads? That is God. You see this gap in the door? It is God. You see that hole in the ground? That is God again . . . Absence is God.¹

¹ D.G., 141.

One wonders which is more true regarding Goetz's lines--that God does not see, hear or know man, or man cannot see, hear God. In either case, man takes God to be absent from the human condition.

In defence of Sartre, one may point out that, if God never existed in the first place, how could He be absent? It was suggested that God and nothingness have different characters in the manner of their non-existence. Nevertheless, man does have an image or a conception of God. In this respect the "pseudo-presence" of God has the same effect as a real person would have in being absent from a café. Man prays, worships, and dedicates his life to the glorification of God. In this way man affirms the pseudo-presence of God. It is a false presence because God does not exist in the Sartrean framework. Nevertheless man's actions do affirm the conceptual possibility of God in a way different from affirming the conceptual possibility of Wellington. Man does not worship and pray to the idea of Wellington. The notion of God is embedded within the fabric of society and man's psyche. While both Wellington and God are both abstractions, Wellington does not affect man in the same way that God does.

However, it should be pointed out that God can become an abstraction in the same sense as Wellington, if man moves away from affirming the pseudo-presence of God. That is, once the Sartrean man gets over the initial shock that he is alone, and acts accordingly, then God becomes solely an abstraction. In this sense, God ceases to be an experience of absence and thus is

no longer considered by man to be a non-being. In this sense, the truly atheistic man believes that God is only a conceptual possibility like any other. That is not the case with the example of the believer turned atheist, and with Goetz in D.G. Both affirmed the pseudo-presence of God by their actions and both were disappointed when they sought verification of that pseudo-presence.

It is evident then that this third similarity between God and nothingness is the result of human expectation. To be more specific and perhaps more technical, God's absence, like Pierre's absence, is only possible on the ground of nothingness. Like Pierre, God is absent from the background of being: the world. In this sense, God is not really the same as nothingness but rather is a form of non-being. It was noted in Chapter One "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."¹ In this respect, it is the result of an attitude towards the world and the ground of nothingness that non-being is possible. Furthermore, the source of nothingness and of God's non-presence is for-itself. In short, it is man who determines the absence of God in the same way that he determines the absence of Pierre. It is man who creates the false presence of God and it is man who discovers the absence of God. In this way, man

¹ B.N., 11.

experiences abandonment and despair.

It was said at the outset of this chapter that nothingness is equated with God. However, this equation is not completely correct because it was shown that nothingness is the ground on which God's absence takes place. Since God can be an individual who does not exist, he is one among many things which do not exist. Loosely speaking, God belongs to the class of things which do not exist, but this does not mean that they are totally equated with nothingness. While God belongs to the class of objects which do not exist, God is a unique object that sets Him apart from those objects. For example, unicorns do not explain how man may gain authenticity. Furthermore, man does not create a pseudo-presence of unicorns in the same manner that he does with God. The concept of God is a unique one. Therefore, to be completely correct, the equation of nothingness and God needs qualification.

In Sartrean ontological terms, God is both a non-being and nothingness. God is a non-being when man explicitly searches for the manifestation of his presence. But God's absence qua nothingness is also a principle for explaining existence and the manner in which man gains his authenticity. Individual occurrences of God's absence are related to nothingness in the same manner as non-being is related to nothingness. Therefore, it is clear that the hypothetical equation is indeed true in some respects. Although Sartre does not explicitly state this fact, it would not be exceeding the bounds of Sartrean ontology to make

this conclusion for him. He does this by saying that nothingness is the source of man's freedom and authenticity; that nothingness, via for-itself's image of the other, explains or gives meaning to existence; and finally, that the experience of man coming to grips with the falsity of God's presence is similar to confronting non-being in general. In short, Sartre has reduced God to nothingness.

Given the link between God and nothingness, any discussion of nothingness will have repercussions for the status of God in Sartre's ontological framework. It was noted briefly that the concept of nothingness is fundamentally a paradox. It is a paradox because, on the one hand, Sartre states that nihilation is intentional and that nothingness has a quasi-ontological nature. This is so because nothingness occurs against the backdrop of existence as in the incident of the café. Furthermore, if there were no awareness, then there would be no experience as absence or non-being. If no one expected Pierre at a certain time, then Pierre's absence would not be felt. However, on the other hand, Sartre states that non-being has an objective nature apart from what consciousness may be aware of. "There is a transphenomenality of non-being as of being."¹ Sartre is saying that, while awareness brings about the experience of nothingness, nothingness has a nature apart from what consciousness is conscious of. His aim is to ensure that nihilation is not conceived in terms of a purely subjective phenomenon.

¹ Ibid., p. 9.

This paradox is similar to the problem of the transphenomenal nature of for-itself and in-itself. It was mentioned that Sartre believes that awareness is a thing-in-itself and existence is a thing-in-itself. Sartre, in saying this, has no other choice but to say that non-existence is also a thing-in-itself. When Sartre does this, just as in the case of the move from awareness of existence to existence qua series of appearances, he is exceeding the bounds of phenomenological description. Sartre is saying that just as man does not experience the totality of existence, man does not experience the totality of nothingness. Man may experience discrete appearances of non-being, but he can never comprehend the totality of nothingness qua series of appearances of non-disclosures.

Sartre's dualism of awareness/ existence is clearly established in B.N. The impossibility of in-itself-for-itself gives further cause to say that Sartre's dualism is unbridgeable. I have already noted that within a purely phenomenological framework there would be no problem arising from the unification of existence with awareness. Nevertheless, when one deals with Sartre's ontology, there seem to be two questions which are raised in connection with this dualism and the transphenomenal nature of this dualism. First, what does it mean to say that nothingness has a nature apart from what consciousness is aware of? While it is one thing for Sartre to say that nothingness is a paradox, it is quite another to give nothingness an objective status. Without the expectant, nothingness is an incomprehensible void. This

conclusion Sartre tries to avoid. Again, Sartre is operating at two levels--the phenomenological and the metaphysical. In short, the only way that Sartre can affirm the transphenomenal nature of nothingness is on the grounds of metaphysical speculation.

The second, and perhaps more crucial question is this--given Sartre's belief that consciousness cannot comprehend the totality either of existence or of non-existence, how does man know that the totality does not have a different character than its individual appearances? In other words, how does man know that the nature of the parts is the same as the nature of the totality? A quick answer to this question is that man does not know unless he moves to the metaphysical level. While Sartre does move to the metaphysical realm in setting up the objectivity of awareness and existence respectively, he does not explore the relationship between individual appearances and the series of appearances as a whole. He does say that transphenomenality of being is the basis for the revelation of individual appearances. In spite of this, he also states that consciousness has a nature apart from appearing. Thus there is a distinct possibility (and only a possibility) that the objective nature of existence and non-existence may be quite different from what man is immediately aware of.

Sartre places man in a terrifying position because man can only know what is immediately apparent to him. According to Sartre, he never sees the condition for revelation of appearances. Essentially, man cannot know the general character of existence

or of nothingness. Since man can only perceive one appearance at a time, he cannot know for certain if that one appearance represents the general character of the series of appearances. In short, man does not know anything about the transphenomenal nature of existence. Without metaphysical assurance man is unable to know for certain what existence is. It should be pointed out that when referring to the series of appearances as a whole, I am not referring to a more fundamental reality than phenomena. On the contrary, Sartre has made it quite clear that there is no such thing as an underlying structure of reality.

Perhaps an analogy will help illustrate the problem of for-itself being unable to realize the objective nature of existence and non-existence. Sometimes popular publications have a jigsaw puzzle over a picture that needs to be identified. That is, the entire picture is covered up except for a missing piece. It is on that basis that one is supposed to judge what the contents of the picture are. This analogy fits because, like a person who is only able to see the missing jigsaw piece, for-itself is only able to see one appearance at a time. For-itself must put together all the different appearances in order to try to understand the objectivity of existence. However, this is impossible. Like the person who is unable to comprehend the full picture underneath the jigsaw cover, for-itself will never grasp the totality of nature. Certainly, a complete understanding of the objective nature of existence and non-existence will enable man to better understand the individual. In short, man will

never know for certain if the nature of the parts are indicative of the nature of the whole, unless he gets an understanding of the whole. This is ruled out by the Sartrean system's inability to accept metaphysical speculation.

One should keep in mind that this difference, between parts and totality, is one of types. That is, this difference of types deals with the relationship between the general character of individual appearances and the character of the series of appearances. This relationship must be seen in terms of the parts having the same characteristics as the totality does. For example, man qua individual is considered to be different from other animals by being rational. That is, man qua individual belongs to the class of animals which are rational, e.g., man in general. The reason why man qua individual belongs to the class of men in general is because man has the same nature as the members in the class of men. The relationship between them is one of types.

In the same way, my present concern about the relationship of individual appearances having the same nature as the series of appearances qua series of appearances is also one of types. In the analogy of the jigsaw puzzle, a person may recognize that an area is a person's nose, another is a part of a person's cheek bone, another is an eyelid and so forth. However, if he is unable to see the different pieces all at once but has to remember each picture in order to put it together in his mind, then there is a certain amount of guess-work involved.

Furthermore, if there were no clues given to what kind of object it was underneath the jigsaw puzzle, then more guess-work would be needed in order to decide what the contents of the picture are. The point of this analogy is to show that the less man knows about the character of the whole--whether it be a puzzle or the series of appearances--the more difficult it is to ascertain knowledge about the whole through individual appearances. Likewise, the less man knows about what lies beyond consciousness, the more man cannot know about the objective nature of awareness and existence by way of what is immediately apparent to man.

If this analysis is correct, then since man can only perceive one appearance at a time, man cannot know for certain that the nature of the parts is the same as the nature of the totality. Sartre has implicitly made a distinction between parts and totality when he uses the term transphenomenality. Sartre may not accept the view that the character of the parts is radically different from that of the totality. However, since he fails to establish a solid relationship between individual appearances and the series of appearances as a whole, then he has no way to support his view except through metaphysical speculation. This Sartre tries to avoid. Sartre cannot have it both ways: that is, on the one hand, he cannot make the break between awareness and existence, and say that the basis of existence lies beyond awareness, and on the other hand, assume that what man is aware of, is the same as the objective

foundations of reality. Either there is nothing beyond awareness, or there is something beyond awareness, in which case a relationship needs to be drawn between awareness and existence. This way man may be confident that what he perceives is indeed an accurate indication of what reality is in general.

ver, given Sartre's conceptual framework there is no method determining this relationship./

If this analysis is correct, then it has consequences for forming the nature of God and nothingness. That is, the scope of for-itself is so narrow that it may encounter a manifestation of God's existence without knowing it. For-itself maintain that certain appearances point toward the conclusion that God does not exist, but in actual fact, since for-itself's scope is so limited, for-itself may be mistaken.

In this instance, it appears that man is free: "As such I am necessarily a consciousness [of] freedom since nothing exists in consciousness except as the non-thetic consciousness of existing."¹ While man's freedom may lead to the conclusion that there cannot be a God, in actual fact, taking into consideration the whole picture qua objective nature of existence, this conclusion of God being absent may be an actual manifestation of an elaborate plan of the Divine. If this is the case, then Sartre's atheistic conclusions are left in some doubt.

¹ Ibid., p. 439.

Perhaps another analogy will help to illustrate the points. The analogy of a radio and television was employed in the previous chapter to illustrate that different philosophical systems reach different conclusions. However in this analogy there is a television, a tape recorder, and a video recorder. The television is set up in a room where both the tape recorder and video machine are directly connected to the set. The video machine can record both audio and visual signals. The operator of the machines is only able to see and hear the television signals through the tape recorder and video recorder. That is, he cannot see or hear the television set directly. If the operator only plays back the tape recorder and does not know he can play back the video recorder, he may come to the conclusion that visual signals do not exist. However, if he discovers the video machine, then he will realize that there are indeed visual signals, and what he mistook for nothingness is really a form of existence. In the same way, the radio represents how for-itself is able to understand audio signals, but cannot register visual signals (i.e., the objective nature of existence), and thus bases its conclusion solely on what it is aware of.

The upshot of this chapter is more fully to illustrate how the concept of God is much too complex to be dealt with in the way Sartre deals with it. Sartre has no choice but to make an implicit equation to the effect that God has characteristics similar to those of other non-beings. This is because man can perpetually affirm the pseudo-presence of God--unlike other

conceptual possibilities--by his actions and by his reactions, to realizing that God's presence is a false one. But since nothingness, like existence, has an independent nature apart from awareness, for-itself can never know for certain that this "independent nature" has the same character as that which is revealed to consciousness. This further illustrates that not only is Sartre's dualism too restrictive, but Sartre implicitly affirms that it is too restrictive by his insistence upon using "transphenomenality." Therefore, Sartre's atheistic strain of thought cannot be founded within his phenomenology, and thus there is no way that the question of God's existence can be adequately dealt with given Sartre's thought.

In conclusion, it is hoped that this discussion has shown that Sartre has still not resolved the question of God's existence. Perhaps Sartre himself best described the ambivalences in his own philosophy when he wrote:

The problem of God is a human problem which concerns the rapport between men. It is a total problem to which each man brings a solution by his entire life, and the solution which one brings to it reflects the attitude one has chosen in regard to other men and to oneself.¹

¹ J.P. Sartre, "The Living Side," in Situations, tr. by B. Eisler (New York: Brazillien, 1965), p. 52.

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