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Sartre in Dialogue with Husserl and Beauvoir

The Evolution of Existential Freedom

—SHANNON M. MUSSETT

In his essay, "Beyond the Cogito: The Question of the Continuity of Sartre's Thought," Thomas W. Busch opens by noting the following admission by Sartre: "When pressed to identify an overriding philosophical unity of his corpus, he claims that it is freedom."[262] Busch agrees that Sartre maintains the centrality of freedom throughout his work, but adds that "Sartre radically changed his mind about several important philosophical issues which affect the understanding of freedom itself."[263] Still, in his own writings on the matter, Busch emphasizes that Sartre upholds a devotion to the idea of freedom at the core of his philosophical oeuvre. Despite the (sometimes radical) modifications that Sartre made on the notion of freedom, he consistently requires that the existent be free on some basic ontological level.

Given the length and success of their philosophical careers, it is no surprise that both Sartre's and Beauvoir's conceptions of freedom evolved and deepened over time. In Sartre's case, many read his later works as a rejection of the naïve ontology of his earlier writings, particularly, of *Being and Nothingness*. Busch himself admits that the tension in Sartrean ontology is pushed to the point of breaking altogether when comparing the early and later Sartre. In his article, "Simone de Beauvoir on Achieving Subjectivity," Busch concludes that Sartre's later shift towards *praxis* in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* "put enormous (I would say fatal) strain upon the ontological categories of *Being and Nothingness*" insofar as subjectivity conceived as *praxis* "has serious repercussions on the ontological claim of incommensurability between body as subject and body as object."[264] He moves on to conclude that Sartre's reorientation toward concrete subjectivity in the *Critique* and *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*,[265] brings him closer to Beauvoir's own philosophical position in works such as *The Second Sex* and *The Mandarins*. While I wholeheartedly agree that the adoption of the more nuanced formulation of situated freedom in both thinkers is closer to lived experience, this essay highlights the notion of radical freedom, in its multiple configurations, particularly in the philosophy of Sartre. To accomplish this task, I begin with the connection between Husserlian phenomenology and Sartre in order to illustrate the emergence of freedom in Sartre's philosophy out of Husserl's intentionality of consciousness. Following this, I show how Beauvoir's philosophy communicates with Sartre on this idea of freedom. Beauvoir scholars have always been more attuned to a continuity, rather than a disjunction, in Beauvoir's works, and I believe that such a continuity is evident in Sartre's philosophy as well. With the help of Busch's writings, I show how freedom—whether conceived as non-positional self-awareness, the nihilating action of being-for-self, or the ambiguous action of disclosing being—remains central to the existentialist project of authenticity and liberation.

Part One: Husserl, Sartre, and Freedom

Busch consistently argues throughout his corpus that the intentionality of consciousness (along with the Cartesian *cogito* and radical doubt) form the key elements of Sartre's own burgeoning philosophy of consciousness and freedom. Throughout Busch's early essays, this connection is central as, for example, when he writes: "I believe that a strong case can be made that Sartre's philosophy is, in its essential thrust, the most faithful to Husserl's program of those thinkers influenced by Husserl."[266] Husserl's phenomenological reduction, in which the actual existence of phenomena are bracketed through the *epoché*, is meant finally to overcome the Kantian dualism between phenomena and noumena.[267] Husserl's reduction opens up the possibility of things to be given to a consciousness that, by its very nature, intends them: "this is not to say that the things once more exist in themselves and 'send their representatives into consciousness.' This sort of thing cannot occur to us within the sphere of phenomenological reduction. Instead, the things are and are given in appearance and in virtue of the appearance itself."[268] We must no longer concern ourselves with the existence of things apart from their appearances, instead, we must bracket their existence—be they objects in the world, the ego, or other people.[269]

Husserl's answer to the problems surrounding objectivism and positivism focuses on consciousness in the act of constituting its world. What comes under investigation is the very meeting of consciousness intending its object in experience. In order to concern

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himself with the "pure Ego" or "reduced" consciousness, Husserl first employs a bracketing off of things as they exist in themselves. Rather than closing us off from the truth, the *epoché* therefore "does not leave us confronting nothing. On the contrary we gain possession of something by it; and what we . . . acquire by it is my pure living . . . the universe of 'phenomena' in the . . . phenomenological sense."[270] Husserl's method allows us to describe experience without proving the world's existence. No longer weighed down by an unthinkable, yet necessary shadow realm of the Kantian *noumenal*, Husserl is able to philosophize human experience as it is lived. Freed from the presuppositions of an individual Ego with a specific personality or an object existing independently of consciousness, Husserl discovers universal concepts in appearances that will serve as the building blocks of a new scientific method.[271]

In Sartre's study of Husserlian phenomenology, he is taken by the notion of the intentionality inherent in cognition's meeting with the world. This activity, the *intentionality of consciousness*, sparks the young Sartre's own adoption of the new existential philosophy. For Husserl, the intentionality of consciousness is such that "cognitive mental processes (and this belongs to their essence) have an *intentio*, they refer to something, they are related in this or that way to an object. This activity of relating itself to an object belongs to them even if the object itself does not."[272] In other words, what is emblematic of cognition is that it *relates* to an object in the world regardless of whether or not that object exists (making that object's existence inconsequential to phenomenological study). But this intentional character of consciousness still aims at a world and this world still appears to it—i.e., is given to it in appearance. Defining consciousness in this way opens up a whole new horizon of investigation of appearances, or phenomena, of every kind. This is part of what was so appealing to Sartre in his study of Husserl, *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Guided by Husserl, Sartre's project begins with intentionality and moves to purify the reflective act of consciousness in order to break from the natural attitude (our naïve and uncritical immersion in the world). As Busch explains, "Purifying reflection in the early Sartre was his version of the phenomenological reduction whereby consciousness could extricate itself from submersion in a world of supposedly pregiven meaning and value and grasp itself as the constitutive origin of its world."[273]

Yet, Sartre quickly breaks with Husserl when the question of the freedom of the existent comes to the foreground of the discussion. As Busch explains, "*The Transcendence of the Ego* also marks, after his initial enthusiasm, Sartre's first criticism of Husserl, for he now accuses Husserl of betraying phenomenology's fecund view of consciousness by failing to subject the ego to phenomenological reduction."[274] In particular, Sartre calls into question the substantiality of the transcendental ego revealed by Husserl's reduction. For his part, Husserl asserts that, "through the *epoché* I have penetrated into the sphere of being which is prior in principle to everything which conceivably has being for me . . . I, the ego performing the *epoché*, am the only thing that is absolutely indubitable."[275] In fact, the most significant insight of all of phenomenology is the "discovery" of the transcendental ego. [276] This indubitable entity, containing and capable of multitudes, turns out to be deeply problematic for Sartre. As he opens his analysis in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, he writes, "we should like to show here that the ego is neither formally nor materially *in* consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*. It is a being of the world, like the ego of another."[277] Husserl's ego, it turns out, is simply too *substantial* for Sartre—the activity of intentionality is subordinated to the substantiality of the transcendental ego. But Sartre asserts that freedom—what makes us human—must necessarily be an *activity* rather than a content in or a quality of an ego.

Returning to Husserl so as to grasp Sartre's critique, we find Husserl claiming that the ego splits into a natural ego and a phenomenological ego such that the former is naïvely interested in the world and the latter is a disinterested observer.[278] Thus the ego can be both interested in the natural, naïve world as well as a disinterested and unbiased phenomenological observer. Sartre argues against Husserl that the transcendental ego although "disinterested" and "unprejudiced," is a kind of thing intending, rather than the activity of intention itself. For Sartre, the consciousness that does what the transcendental ego does for Husserl, is no kind of thing, but is instead *nothing at all*. According to Sartre, the persistent ego that stands behind Husserl's formulation of consciousness is unnecessary and in fact, contrary to the essence of Husserl's project. In truth, as Busch aptly notes, "the *ego* is seen to arise only with reflection and is not identified as an immanent structure of transcendental consciousness, but as a transcendent object. Husserl is accused of not extending his phenomenological reduction far enough, of himself being a victim of the natural attitude, confusing a product of consciousness with consciousness itself."[279]

Despite his criticisms of the solidity of the transcendental ego, Sartre finds a philosophical gold mine in Husserl's intentionality of consciousness. According to Sartre, "it is certain that phenomenology does not need to appeal to any such unifying and individualizing *I*. Indeed, consciousness is defined by intentionality" as Husserl defines it.[280] Because consciousness always intends an object—consciousness is always consciousness *of* something—Sartre will have a great deal of difficulty accepting this first order consciousness (or the naïve ego) as being anything more than a spontaneous act of constitution and therefore in itself, nothing at all. The first order of consciousness, because it is always that which spontaneously constitutes its world, can never itself be objectified and thematized. This first order of consciousness (what Sartre defines as a non-thetic awareness of self) is defined as nothingness, which is, for Sartre, human freedom.[281]

Using the intentionality of consciousness, Sartre brings to light the difference between the ego as the solidified, unified, and

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concrete object of thought and the non-thetic consciousness which spontaneously reflects on this ego. The two will never meet and are as different from each other as being and nothingness. The first order of consciousness, which is the spontaneous impulse that thinks this ego, is "quite simply an empty concept which is destined to remain empty" and "in a sense, it is a *nothing*."[282] As Sartre further develops in *Being and Nothingness*, because consciousness is always consciousness of something, it can never be a thing but only the negating action by which Being comes to be revealed.[283]

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre struggles both with and against the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger in trying to give voice to how we can philosophize experience. Busch captures it succinctly: "It became apparent in *Being and Nothingness*, that Husserl was relied upon to defend the autonomy of consciousness and Heidegger to defend the implantation of consciousness in the world."[284] In this work, Sartre undertakes the phenomenological task of exploring the relationship of human being (or human consciousness) and the world in experience passed on from Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. Using the terms, "being-in-itself" (*l'être -en-soi*) and "being-for-itself" (*l'être-pour-soi*) to describe the plenum of the world over against the negativity that is introduced by human freedom, Sartre builds a dichotomy between human subjectivity and the rest of the world. He describes being-for-itself as "a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being is essentially a certain way of *not being* a being which it posits simultaneously as other than itself."[285] Being-for-itself is opposed to being-in-itself which, as Busch explains, is "a mode of objectified being whose sense is constituted in contrast with the temporal self-surpassing of the for-itself. The in-itself is not a particular object, but the modality of object-being."[286] In Sartrean terms, the for-itself is not a being but a nothingness. As nothingness, the for-itself is that which negates the given conditions and relates itself to the in-itself. The in-itself is the opaque given or that which "can encompass no negation. It is full positivity."[287] Put simply, being-for-itself is transcendent human freedom—the ability to negatively rupture the solidity of the given—whereas being-in-itself is the brute existence of the world and the things which reside in it—be they objects, other people, or even our own static egos.

Human being is freedom, but this essence is also nothingness or the negating of the world. This world is pure being and because the existent can "stand back" from it, put distance between itself and the given through thinking and acting, the existent is in its essence, nothingness. Continuing the insights from *The Transcendence of the Ego*, we see that freedom is not a concrete "thing" or something that one *has*; it is an active movement of negativity, or the introduction of nothingness into the world. Sartre is therefore able to conclude that "as soon as one attributes to consciousness this negative power with respect to the world and itself, as soon as the nihilation forms an integral part of the *positing* of an end, we must recognize that the indispensable and fundamental constitution of all action is the freedom of the acting being."[288] This understanding of freedom as a negating activity of rupturing the given clearly builds from his early understanding of Husserl's intentionality of consciousness.

Busch elaborates at great length the change undergone by Sartre as he moves away from the early Husserlian understanding of the intentionality of consciousness and the tacit freedom that underlies all actions. As Busch notes, the reliance on the Cartesian-inspired dualism between being-for-self and being-in-itself results in an unbridgeable ontological gap between freedom and the world. It is only in his later treatments of Genet and Marxism, where Sartre realizes that the situation is far more entangled than the notion of a free nothingness rupturing the given can possibly account for. In this light, he comes much closer to the insights of Beauvoir's own analyses of freedom in situation.

Part Two: Beauvoir in Communication with Sartre

Busch is certainly correct that the early Sartre backs himself into a corner; while attempting to rescue consciousness from *determinism*, he ends up asserting that the for-itself is wholly *unconditioned*. This gives consciousness really only two choices: the acceptance of radical freedom in authenticity, or a life of bad faith. It might be tempting to think that Sartre's later focus on the study of childhood and the material conditions of the situation are a rejection of the notion of freedom born in his earlier works. But I think this is a misguided interpretation. Because of Busch's teaching and writings, I have always been profoundly affected by the strain of radical freedom that runs through both Sartre and Beauvoir's works. I have previously studied how Beauvoir's understanding of freedom emerges directly as an adoption of and a challenge to Hegelian freedom understood as negativity.[289] In that earlier paper, I argue that there are both productive forms of freedom (expressed by Beauvoir as revolt and creativity) and more or less impotent forms (expressed as complaint and resignation). I maintain that no matter how much material and cultural situations can work to oppress existents, ontological freedom remains, even if only implicitly, ever ready to be made explicit through action. Furthermore, with certain changes to circumstances, this freedom can erupt into acts of revolution and creativity on the individual and cultural level. This insight is what guides Beauvoir's study into the situation and emancipation of woman in *The Second Sex*, for example. According to Beauvoir, even the act of resigning to the most degraded situations (which is the most impotent expression of ontological freedom)—such as women living under the constraints of extreme mystification, Jews struggling for survival in concentration camps, or Algerians suffering in torture chambers—implicit freedom persists and calls for liberation. This is what both gives hope to revolutionary and emancipatory efforts, as well as what frightens oppressors. In sum, "taking into account the excesses

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of oppression, Beauvoir forces us to admit that even in resignation there is still freedom. Freedom, in other words, can never be destroyed in human beings, even if it is completely ineffectual in its diffusion."[290] She shares this dedication to the centrality of freedom with Sartre.[291] Thus one can say that freedom forms a continuous thread throughout both thinkers' works as they develop, metamorphose, and evolve.

Busch is not the only commentator who notes Sartre's allegiance to freedom throughout his writings. Beauvoir maintains the centrality of freedom in Sartre's work as well. In her autobiography, *After the War: Force of Circumstance Vol. 1,* she writes that despite their evolving appreciation of Communism, Sartre never wholeheartedly adopted Marxism. Beauvoir explains that Sartre's fierce individualism allowed him to take what he needed from Marxism, without causing him to abandon the heart of his existentialist project. She explains that Sartre,

> [B]elieved in the phenomenological intuition which affords objects immediately "in flesh and blood." Although he adhered to the idea of *praxis*, he had not given up his old, persisting project of writing an *ethics*. He still aspired to *being*; to live morally was, according to him, to attain an absolutely meaningful mode of existence. He did not wish to abandon—and indeed, never has abandoned—the concepts of negativity, of interiority, of existence and of freedom elaborated in *Being and Nothingness*. In opposition to the brand of Marxism professed by the Communist Party, he was determined to preserve man's human dimension.[292]

As Beauvoir here makes clear, when Sartre's philosophy came into contact with Marxism and Communism, he shifted his focus to *praxis*, *without ever abandoning his concern for freedom, ethics, meaning, and the thickness of lived experience*. Sartre's early affirmation of the lack of deep identity that results from the *néant* in being-for-itself later changes to an idea of "achieved subjectivity" and the construction of "character" from social conditioning. Yet, as both Sartre and Beauvoir elucidate, there is much to be said about preserving the freedom at the heart of transcendence for the purposes of liberating ourselves and others from alienation, social destination, and oppression. As Beauvoir shows in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex* (as does Sartre in his later works), freedom and autonomous choice are deeply complicated when studying existents who have been raised and conditioned in circumstances that enforce a kind of identity that is neither chosen nor fully present to self. If we were to express this in Husserlian terms, the idea of fully extricating the ego from the natural attitude is a herculean feat in light of the material conditions that seek to limit, curtail, and extinguish this move.

As explored in detail above, Sartre's initial revelation about human freedom is deeply immersed in Husserlian phenomenology. Beauvoirian freedom emerges from a similar orientation but is, I find, much more deeply connected to the Hegelian dialectic than any other phenomenologist. Freedom as negativity forms the cornerstone of Hegelian consciousness and is one that Beauvoir adopts in her earliest formulations of freedom in all of its engagements and prohibitions. As Hegelian negativity is a *process* rather than a *thing*, Beauvoir finds common ground as early as *Pyrrhus and Cineas* (1944) where she writes, "I am not first a thing, but a spontaneity that desires, that loves, that wants, that acts" and consequently, "what is mine is therefore first what I do."[293] In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, she writes succinctly that "man is originally a negativity."[294] Yet, the focus on freedom as action brings her into confrontation with the limitations on the effectual expression of freedom sooner than Sartre.

As Busch notes, the early Sartre maintains a tension between "immersion in the world and a purifying distance from the world."[295] Or, put differently, there is a tension between the nihilating activity and the pure being that is negated by it. This kind of tension appears in Beauvoir's *Ethics* as a tension between the desire to *be* and the desire to *disclose being*. There she argues that the authentic attitude is not one wherein we choose the side of authentic subjectivity over against the objective world, but rather one where the failure to unify being-in-itself and being-for-itself (to use Sartrean language) is *assumed*: "to attain his truth, man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being but, on the contrary, accept the task of realizing it. He rejoins himself only to the extent that he agrees to remain at a distance from himself."[296] Thus, to be free is to reside in the ambiguous movement between being (essence, identity, engulfment in the being of the world) and the disclosure of being (distance, negation, freedom from engulfment in the world). Although she does not use the language of "purification" to describe this, she does note the ethical dimensions of disclosure. However, there is no absolute breaking from this ambiguous movement for Beauvoir. Negation, nihilation, freedom—all of these moves remain profoundly entangled in the world that involves these actions.

Based on Beauvoir's review of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Sonia Kruks argues that Beauvoir "implies that there are degrees, or gradations, of freedom—and that social situations modify freedom itself and not merely its facticity or exteriority."[297] This idea—that ontological freedom is paramount, but that it must be understood along a kind of continuum between immanence and transcendence—is at the heart of Beauvoir's philosophy almost from the beginning. Beauvoir is aware that:

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[A]lthough everyone is ontologically free, not everyone shares the same concrete *possibilities* for expressing this freedom. Some individuals may be in a favorable situation conducive to the expression of their freedom, and others may simply suffer a loss of their transcendence so much so that it takes on the appearance of immanence, i.e., the appearance of givenness. Therefore, one's situation can in some cases serve not merely as a limitation to be surmounted in an upsurge of freedom, but as an intractable and oftentimes unknown constraint on action.[298]

Pyrrhus and Cineas, her earliest philosophical essay, notes that possibilities can vary between people depending upon their circumstances, but she has not yet become fully cognizant of the extent that the situation can be a barrier to freedom's expression. Very soon thereafter, however, this realization becomes a kind of underlying narrative to the ethical analysis she offers in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Here, we find that one can be condemned to a kind of immanence wherein one merely lives without the possibility to project meaning into an open future. This is what Beauvoir calls the situation of oppression.[299] As Busch notes, race and gender are not aspects of one's concrete situation that are taken seriously by Sartre until his later work. Beauvoir, however, takes up these intersections of human existence very seriously in the *Ethics*. Like Sartre, there is a great deal of bad faith evident in human choice in the attitude of seriousness. Serious people flee from the vertiginous sense of freedom as nothingness and turn toward an identification with their egos, much like Sartre describes in *The Transcendence of the Ego*. Nodding to Sartre, Beauvoir explains that "*Being and Nothingness* is in large part a description of the serious man and his universe. The serious man gets rid of his freedom by claiming to subordinate it to values which would be unconditioned."[300] And although Beauvoir agrees that the attitude of seriousness is by far the most prevalent inauthentic attitude that human beings adopt, it is not fair to place individuals along the diametrically opposed poles of bad faith or inauthenticity as we find in Sartre's early existentialism. As she observes, of all the disingenuous attitudes detailed in the *Ethics*, the reason that seriousness "is the most widespread [is] because every man was first a child."[301] Simply put, because almost every person grows up in a world of pregiven, absolute, and unquestioned values, we have a strong inclination to cling to that world into adulthood. What took Sartre the intensive study of Genet to fully understand, Beauvoir is attuned to even before writing *The Second Sex*. And yet, it is fair to say that the ontological freedom of negativity, negation, and nihilation shared by both thinkers at the beginning of their careers, undergo similar transformations as their meditations on history, power, and the material conditions which effect freedom deepen. To illustrate these transformations, I now turn briefly to key examples in both thinkers.

Busch zeroes in on the profound difference between Sartre's treatment of the young bride terrified at her vertiginous freedom in *The Transcendence of the Ego* and the oppressed Dop shampoo worker from *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* whose life is totally dominated by the material conditions in which she lives. This transition illustrates Sartre's intensifying awareness of the forces that shape freedom. The former, on her bourgeois perch, has the time and ability to contemplate the radical freedom to solicit passersby as a prostitute and the consequent anxiety that pervades her when she realizes there is nothing to stop her from doing what her ego identity cannot abide. She has the leisure and material wherewithal to enact a kind of simple phenomenological reduction whereby the act of the constituting the ego appears as categorically different than the ego constituted. This awareness of her freedom fills her with terror. As Busch summarizes, "She was shocked out of this 'natural attitude' regarding herself with the apprehension that consciousness as spontaneous freedom creates and sustains the 'ego'" rather than the ego supporting her acts and decisions.[302] But certainly, not all existents have the luxury of being able to affect this "shock" to the natural attitude and to study the ensuing vertigo when all that is left is the monstrous activity of consciousness.

When we place the young bride beside the example from Sartre's *Critique*, we are confronted by the stark realities of class and material deprivation. The woman who works in a factory under brutal physical pressures for a pittance does not have the same luxury of "standing back" and enacting a Husserlian *epoché*. Rather, she lives in an oppressed totality wherein choice (even the choice about the object of fantasy) is wholly external, residing in the *practico-inert*. "The existentialist position that one 'makes oneself' must be reunderstood," writes Busch, such that we now understand that "the existent makes itself but within a given encompassing situation which defines the existent."[303] Even and despite the fact that the possible is defined in terms of a situation that marks out a field (some fields opening possibilities while others foreclose them), Busch acknowledges that throughout his analysis of situations of extreme oppression, "Sartre continues to maintain that the human existent is a projection toward ends, toward possibility."[304] Despite the fact that the woman in the Dop shampoo factory exists as a "transcendence transcended," such that her choices are so limited as to necessitate that we understand her situation as one of oppression, she still remains free to choose within those confines—she is, in other words, never wholly determined. Despite the misery of the manipulated conditions in which she lives, she can choose or not choose to have an abortion, for example, even though this notion of choice challenges the radical freedom lauded by the early Sartre. But as with Beauvoir, choice requires freedom, even if freedom is dramatically constrained from expressing itself in positive, affirmative, or creative acts.

In order to help us come to terms with the seemingly bizarre understanding of choice that Sartre maintains even in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (after all, what kind of choice are we talking about when an oppressed working class woman must "choose"

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whether or not to have an abortion) Busch asks that we understand Sartre's use of freedom not *literally*, as total independence from the conditions of one's circumstances, but *hyperbolically*. The latter idea allows us to see that no matter how brutally restrictive our conditions are they do not fully determine our actions. As Busch explains, "one must understand the hyperbolic use of 'total independence' to describe the relation of free subjectivity to social structures. The expression is meant to convey that 'no factual state can determine consciousness." In other words, no matter what one's situation, there are always options."[305] In short, Sartre, much like Beauvoir, maintains that freedom is at the heart of the existent, but is acutely aware of how this freedom can be degraded and manipulated by upbringing, language, class, race, and the general circumstances of one's situation into a frighteningly limited field of possibilities.[306] This is why Busch asks that we think of the development of Sartrean freedom in terms of a "spiral," insofar as it evolves over time to move from the more abstract sense of ontological freedom to the more concrete sense, one that requires that the realities of the situation be taken into account in the *expression* or enactment of that freedom.[307] This spiraling development allows Sartre to take seriously the forces of concrete alienation in living, laboring, and choosing one's profession, as well as the effects of one's upbringing in the projection of future possibilities.

As soon as she turned her full attention to ethics, Beauvoir became acutely aware of how these kinds of forces shape situations in ways that make it very difficult (if not *almost* impossible) for freedom to be realized in action. Not only is Beauvoir sensitive to the effects of the childhood on one's situation, she is also mindful of the fact that not everyone can be held accountable for ontological freedom once adulthood is reached:

> Certain adults can live in the universe of the serious in all honesty, for example, those who are denied all instruments of escape, those who are enslaved or who are mystified. The less economic and social circumstances allow an individual to act upon the world, the more this world appears to him as given. This is the case of women who inherit a long tradition of submission and of those who are called 'the humble.'[308]

As is clear, Beauvoir thinks it is possible for certain adults, *in all honesty*, to live in the infantile world of the serious person. Such people are "mystified" into being unaware of their ontological freedom through the concrete barriers of the infantile world constructed around and through them: "having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads. Like the child, they can exercise their freedom, but only within the universe which has been set up before them, without them."[309] Examples of such people are American slaves and women in many civilizations. Of course, this insight forms the foundation of her world-changing work *The Second Sex*, where she explores all of the ways that woman is made, not born. Beauvoir finds that for woman, ontological freedom is cast into a world that, much like the world of the child, is not a world where she recognizes herself. Rather,

> [S]he discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness. Woman's drama lies in this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as essential, and the demands of a situation that constitutes her as inessential.[310]

Just as Busch highlights Sartre's realization concerning the Dop shampoo factory worker, whose life is dominated by a situation of doomed immanence (of transcendence transcended), Beauvoir notes that this reality is the reality of most women in western civilization.

And yet, for both Beauvoir (as with Sartre above) even in oppressive circumstances, one is never totally denied the possibility of freedom. I call this "the paradox of immanent freedom" insofar as one is free, but only in the abstract sense (similar to what Busch calls the ontological sense of freedom in the early Sartre). For Beauvoir, this manifests in the empty expenditures of freedom in complaint (which changes nothing) or resignation (where one's freedom merely dissipates but does not get eradicated).[311] But even in empty expenditures, positive liberation is always possible for Beauvoir, just as it is for Sartre. What is more, if one is in a situation where one has greater possibilities and a more open futural horizon for action, then the onus is *to help others do the same*. The two expressions of "transcendent" freedom, revolt and creation, are what the "authentic" person engages in, both for themselves and for those who do not have similar material possibilities for concrete action. Thus Beauvoir focuses on how we live within an ambiguous situation where we both form and are formed by circumstances. From this position, at the crossroads of determination and freedom, we can distance ourselves from circumstances through revolt (particularly against oppressive structures) and actively change them through creation. This possibility of revolt against oppression is key to the ethical call to help others who are in situations of oppression. But such a call is only meaningful if one believes that ontological freedom, even if only in its implicit or trapped form, underlies all revolutionary movements.

As the work of Thomas Busch helps us to see, the evolution of Sartrean freedom can be viewed through the bookends of

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Husserlian phenomenology and Beauvoirian existentialism. The intentionality of consciousness revealed to Sartre the existence of a kind of radical freedom that cannot be captured by the reflective actions of the transcendental Ego. This non-positional awareness of self became the radical nothingness capable of rupturing Being in the act of nihilating the given. The ability to stand back from the world in order to thematize it, question it, and shape it, undergoes profound transformations as Sartre's thought evolves. As he becomes more aware of the effects of language, class, childhood, and material circumstances, he backs off from his earlier belief in the radical split between human freedom and the world. Rather than being-for-itself standing on the one side and everything else standing squarely on the other, he becomes sensitive to the deep entanglements in which embodied subjects find themselves. These entanglements are clear to Beauvoir almost from the beginning of her works on ethics and cultural criticism. As such, Sartre's later works bring him into a closer connection to Beauvoir's philosophy of ambiguity. But to claim that Sartre or Beauvoir ever jettisoned their commitments to freedom would be clearly wrongheaded. Their own philosophical and political orientations prevent them from going in the direction of post-modern tendencies to see the subject as simply produced by the situation. Rather, maintaining the deep conviction that all of us, so long as we live and strive, are ontologically free on some level, allows existentialism to remain one of the most powerful philosophies of liberation and transformation in the western tradition.

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262. In Busch, "Beyond the Cogito," 189. This admission comes from the script of *Sartre By Himself* (28).

263. Busch, ibid.

264. Busch, "Achieving Subjectivity," 182.

265. Busch sometimes includes *The Words* in this category as well (see Busch, "Beyond the Cogito," 195).

266. Busch, "Phenomenology as Humanism," 128.

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267. In a move away from Kantian dualism, Husserl emphasizes that "*I must exclude all that is transcendentally posited*" because, as Kant has shown us, that which transcends human cognition is veiled in illusion and what Husserl seeks is "*clarity*" (*Idea of Phenomenology*, 4). As Busch notes, *Ideas* was the most influential Husserlian text on Sartre's philosophical development (*Power of Consciousness*, 4).

268. Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, 10.

269. Ibid. 34.

270. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 20–21.

271. As is well known, this method had profound influence on his student, Martin Heidegger, whose impact on French Existentialism is enormously important but which lies beyond the scope of this paper. Heidegger's early phenomenology in *Being and Time* is a radical break from the Husserlian purified consciousness intending and constituting its world. This method of studying *Da-sein* (or human being) in its everydayness reveals that "the '*substance*' of human being is not the spirit as the synthesis of body and soul, but *existence*" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 110). The emphasis on the lived experience of human being in its everyday life can be seen in Beauvoir's own emphasis on the philosophical importance of *la réalité humaine* in *The Second Sex*.

272. Husserl, *Idea of Phenomenology*, 43.

273. Busch, "Beyond the Cogito," 201.

274. Busch, *Power of Consciousness*, 5.

275. Husserl, *Crisis*, 78.

276. Husserl notes that this ego, purified of its concreteness through the act of bracketing, "*has an enormous inborn a priori*" and all of phenomenology "is revelation of this inborn *a priori* in its infinite multiplicity of facets" (Husserl, *Introduction*, 25).

277. Sartre, *Transcendence*, 31.

278. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, 35.

279. Busch, "Senses of Alienation," 151.

280. Sartre, *Transcendence*, 38.

281. In order to show how the first order of consciousness is absolute spontaneity, Sartre maintains a Husserlian split where there are two different orders of consciousness—the one non-thetic or non-positional and the other thetic or positional. In philosophizing, we have a tendency to conflate the former with the latter. Take for example, Sartre's famous example of the streetcar in *Transcendence*. When I am running after a streetcar, there is no substantial *I*, no ego per se. There is only "consciousness *of the streetcar-having-to-be-overtaken*, etc., and non-positional consciousness of consciousness. In fact, I am then plunged into the world of objects . . . but *me*, I have disappeared; I have annihilated myself" (*Transcendence,* 49). Accordingly, non-positional self-awareness (which exists at both the pre-reflective level of consciousness intending objects and the reflective level of consciousness intending itself) is a consciousness which can never be thematized or concretized. This example is clear because it is easy for us to see the difference between being caught up in the moment and consciously reflecting on our actions. But regardless on what level consciousness engages its world, non-positional awareness of self (or freedom) underlies all activity and can never be made explicit to any order of consciousness.

282. Sartre, *Transcendence*, 89, 93.

283. This is largely the theme of the subchapter, "The Origin of Nothingness" in the first chapter of Part One, *The Origin of Negation* in *Being and Nothingness*.

284. "Beyond the Cogito," 193.

285. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 174.

286. Busch, *Power of Consciousness*, 24.

287. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, *lxvi.*

288. Ibid. 436.

289. Mussett, "Expressions of Negativity."

290. Ibid. 10.

291. Unlike, for example, Camus and Merleau-Ponty who largely eschew the emphasis on radical freedom.

292. Beauvoir, *After the War*, 7.

293. Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cineas*, 93.

294. Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 118.

295. Busch, "Beyond the Cogito," 193.

296. Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 13.

297. Kruks, "Teaching Sartre," 84.

298. Mussett, "Expressions of Negativity," 6.

299. Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 81.

300. Ibid. 46.

301. Ibid.

302. Busch, "Phenomenological Reduction," 56.

303. Busch, "Beyond the Cogito," 198.

304. Ibid. 199.

305. Busch, "Sartre's Hyperbolic Ontology," 199; quotation is from Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 435–436.

306. It would actually be helpful to expand on Busch's own treatment of childhood and class in Sartre's formation of the subject, by looking at issues of colonialism and race as we find in Sartre's Preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. There he does not affirm absolute freedom but writes, "I do not say that it is impossible to change a man into an animal: I simply say that you won't get there without weakening him considerably" (Sartre, "Preface," 15).

307. Busch, "Sartre's Hyperbolic Ontology," 200.

308. Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 47–48.

309. Ibid. 37.

310. Beauvoir, *Second Sex*, 17.

311. Mussett, "Expressions of Negativity," 8.

8

"Bad Faith" in *Being and Nothingness*

Unambiguously Epistemological as well as Ontological

—RONALD E. SANTONI

In a recent article entitled "The Misplaced Chapter on Bad Faith, or Reading *Being and Nothingness* in Reverse,"[312] Matthew Eshleman—in my judgment one of the most astute and promising of the rising and challenging Sartre scholars—says repeatedly that the "primary function" of Sartre's probing analysis of "bad faith" in his *Being and Nothingness* (1943) chapter entitled "Bad Faith" is not to analyze bad faith but to discover what peculiarity of human reality allows the possibility of bad faith to take place. For Eshleman, reading *Being and Nothingness* in reverse makes this regressive conclusion a conclusive one. And in both this article and his rejoinder[313] to my critique[314] of it, he contends that this reversive reading also makes clear a shortcoming in my scholarship (which he has studied assiduously and even labels "Herculean") to recognize sufficiently the social aspects of bad faith. Moreover he contends strongly that bad faith is "essentially" and "ineluctably" (I take this to mean "necessarily") an "intersubjective social phenomenon."[315]

In my aforementioned reply to him, I have already taken issue with Eshleman's critique, so I shall not repeat it here. Instead, my primary intent here will be to give a concise reformulation of the key aspects of Sartre's concept and analysis of "bad faith," and show the critical importance of the epistemological form of it, too often ignored by many of Sartre's commentators and readers. In my judgment—and this will not likely surprise those who are familiar with my work on Sartre—the phenomenon of "bad faith" pervades Sartre's thoughts, concerns, socio-political positions, psychoanalysis, and—dare I say it—ethics, from the beginning to the end of his philosophical/literary oeuvre. Please note, however, that I am not contending that bad faith is the most fundamental concept in Sartre's ontology or philosophy: freedom[316]—specially freedom as human reality—or perhaps even contingency—may justifiably make a stronger claim to that. Rather, I am trying again to emphasize bad faith's multidimensionality in Sartre's thought. And, by so doing, I shall at least be suggesting how bad faith often serves as a kind of criterion by which Sartre evaluates not only the actions and views of others but also our individual and collective praxes, mindsets, movements, and socio-political positions, for example.

Over fifty years after the publication of *Being and Nothingness*, I need not offer another highly detailed analysis of either the puzzle that leads Sartre to offer a meticulous analysis of bad faith or Sartre's analysis of the mechanisms of bad faith. I, for one, have already attempted this in earlier works.[317] Yet I must provide at least a summary of the most salient points in that analysis.

Early in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre, employing Nietzsche's precise characterization of it, allows that bad faith is "a lie to oneself."[318] However, insisting against Freud, that consciousness is translucent, he struggles to understand how bad faith can be possible, for unlike the "strict lie" or "falsehood," the translucent bad faith consciousness cannot have the ontological duality between the "deceiver" and the "deceived," between "myself and myself before the Other."[319] If bad faith is lying to oneself, if the one who lies and the one to whom the lie is told are one and the same, and if all consciousness is conscious of itself, how can I lie to myself, or, in other words, how can I conceal the truth from myself? The psychoanalytic notion of "a lie without a liar" violates the psychic unity and translucency of consciousness.[320]

Perplexed by this puzzle but persuaded by what he regards as clear evidence of people living in bad faith (he offers a number of controversial examples), he attempts a conceptual and epistemological solution (note!) to this epistemological paradox. But this must not ignore the ontological questions that may be at the core of the puzzle. Sartre's analysis of bad faith is preceded by his recognition that the human being is not only the one by whom concrete negations (*négatités* such as absences or lacks) come into the world, but also the one who can adopt "negative attitudes with respect to [oneself]" (*des attitudes négatives vis-à-vis de soi*).[321] So, initially, it is in order to illustrate this self-differentiating possibility of self-negation that Sartre chooses to examine bad faith as "one determined attitude . . . essential [note!] to human reality" that "direct[s] its negation" towards itself.[322] And, of course, unambiguous evidence of Sartre's ontological concern with bad faith lies in his related question, "What must be the being of a man if he is to be capable of bad faith?"[323] This question is, without doubt, the basis for Eshleman's more recent, and, I've contended,