

A Recovery of Innocence: The Dynamics of Sartrean Radical Conversion

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I

Sartre failed to publish a finished ethical treatise during his lifetime,¹ in spite of the fact that he filled hundreds of manuscript pages in at least two attempts at a projected Morale.² This failure on his part to produce a systematic moral theory has occasioned a great deal of confusion as regards the structure and even the possibility of a Sartrean ethic. The prevailing sentiment is that the ontology of Being and Nothingness effectively precludes the possibility of a consistent ethic.

This rejection of the possibility of a Sartrean ethic, I would suggest, is unwarranted from both a textual and a philosophical perspective. To be sure, Sartre never did publish a treatise devoted exclusively to ethics; nevertheless, it can hardly be denied that the overall tenor of his work is moralistic--and, according to some commentators, even puritanical.³ In addition to this general moralistic attitude, the Sartrean corpus lends itself to the enterprise of discovering just what the parameters of Sartre's ethic would have been had he in fact completed one. Sartre's oeuvres are full of references, explicit or otherwise, to the foundation and structure of such an ethic, ready-to-hand for anyone with the patience (or freedom from bias) to search them out. At least three commentators have done so, in fact, each producing lucid and consistent accounts of a Sartrean ethic.⁴

The primary reason for the ubiquitous but mistaken opinion that a Sartrean ethic is impossible lies, I suspect, in a misreading of Being and Nothingness. All too often, commentators have taken passages in that treatise which are phenomenological analyses of bad faith to be representations of necessary human relations. An inevitability is read into such demoralizing descriptions as Sartre's infamous characterization of love as sado-masochism,⁵ and it is assumed that it and other equally dreary portrayals of intersubjectivity in Being and Nothingness as necessary entailments. Such, however, is not the case. Sartre makes it clear in Being and Nothingness⁶ that his analysis of human rela-

tions is to be interpreted as a description of bad faith (which I shall discuss more fully later), of the nonmoral act, and not as a final statement about an irremediable human nature or condition.' Read in this light, Being and Nothingness not only does not preclude the possibility of a Sartrean ethic, it actually points in its direction. All the elements of an ethical theory are contained in germinal form within it, and when they are considered in conjunction with both Sartre's other writings and the secondary literature which concerns itself with an existentialist ethic, they provide us with a fairly cohesive picture of what the moral life is for Sartre.

The ethical theory which reveals itself from Sartre's and his associates' writings rests upon the possibility of what is called the "radical conversion," a readjustment of the individual's fundamental project so intensive that it changes her entire way of being-in-the-world. Behaviour which is chronologically prior to this conversion is, at best, pre-ethical; behaviour after the conversion, assuming that the conversion is continually and freely reaffirmed by the individual, is ethical.

Fundamental as the radical conversion is for the possibility of a Sartrean ethic, it is not the primal requirement. The conversion itself is dependent upon a condition which is both logically and chronologically prior to it, namely the achievement within the subject of what Sartre calls "pure reflection." As such, pure reflection is the necessary condition for the possibility of a Sartrean ethic. The progression is not an inevitable one, in the sense that anyone who acquires pure reflection will automatically undergo a conversion, nor even that anyone who undergoes the conversion will sustain it in her future actions. There are no guarantees in a Sartrean ethic. But there is a logical necessity to the progression, in that no one can enter into the realm of the ethical without the conversion, which in turn is not itself reached save through pure reflection.

In the discussion that follows, my purpose is to schematize the "stages on life's way" through which the individual for-itself travels in its journey to pure reflection and possible conversion. These stages, in logical order, may be represented as "immediacy," "impure reflection," and "pure reflection." As will be seen, the achievement of pure reflection can to a certain extent be viewed as a "recovery of innocence" inasmuch as it places the for-itself in a mode of consciousness remarkably similar to original pre-reflective immediacy. Or, even better, we might characterize the dynamics of radical conversion as a process of Aufhebung, in which prior stages are surpassed only to be incorporated into the terminus point.

To be sure, Sartre himself never explicitly schematized the dialectic at work in the individual for-itself's achievement of pure reflection and conversion. Furthermore, none of the secondary literature (to my knowledge) undertakes an analysis of the actual dynamics of the radical conversion, except insofar as to compare pre-conversion reflection with post-conversion reflection. I freely admit, therefore, that most of my paradigm is based upon extrapolation from and extension of Sartre's writings. I trust, however, that my developmental schematization of Sartre's sometimes elusive references to pure reflection, far from taking unwarranted liberties with his text, will serve to clarify both the major project of Being and Nothingness--namely, the description of pre-conversion behaviour--and the nature of a Sartrean ethic.

II

Immediacy

Immediacy, or "unreflective consciousness,"⁸ is both logically and chronologically the original consciousness of the for-itself. It represents an antepredicative stage of innocence, as it were, the spontaneous flow of consciousness as freedom which is sullied by neitherthetic awareness of self nor by the realization of its historicity--a knowledge which, as we shall see, is eventually translated into "psychic," objectified terms by impure reflection. One could almost describe immediacy as an animal-like lived intuition, were it not for the fact that human immediacy is at least tacitly aware of its origin, a relation not at all certain in animal consciousness. Sartre stresses that even immediate consciousness is nonthetically aware of itself as source,⁹ that there is a pre-reflective cogito implied in every act of immediate consciousness, and that this tacit awareness is so ubiquitous that it is affirmed by the subject, without her even being aware of the act, in her very speech patterns.¹⁰ This nonpositional awareness of self must not be confused with an explicit knowledge, however; at the level of immediacy, consciousness is free of the presence-to-self which reflection brings. It is a natural (nonreflective) flow of freedom, with neither motivation nor goal.

Immediacy, of course, is not simply the original (in the chronological sense) state of a consciousness experiencing its being-in-the-world. Although the original innocence of immediacy is impossible to sustain (at least in normal humans), immediate moments of consciousness are part and parcel of our entire careers as sentient beings. Whenever one loses oneself in the moment of aesthetic or religious contemplation, whenever one luxurates in the sheer pleasure of the

moment, with no thought whatsoever of temporality, or even when one engages in rather mechanical tasks which freeze consciousness for the duration of their performance, immediacy reappears. Immediacy as pure experience is lived, is "existed," as often or as seldom as we reflective beings lose our presence-to-self.

Impure Reflection

The sudden eruption of immediacy into reflection is, Sartre tells us, a "mystification".¹¹ We can say what happens after the transition is made, and we can even give a general account of the motivation that triggers the transition. But it is difficult to fully explain how it is that the motivation arises in the first place. What can be said about the process, however, is that the for-itself, by virtue of its constant contact with objects-in-the-world, cannot sustain the original attitude of immediacy indefinitely. Sooner or later, the for-itself will be seized with the insight that there is a difference between it and the other. At that point, consciousness will become aware of itself being aware (i.e., will be aware of itself distinguishing between itself and the other), and this perception will thrust it abruptly into the realm of the reflective.

Regardless of its first cause, however, the reflectivity that initially arises from this upsurge of self-consciousness is usually of the impure variety. It may not be a logical necessity that impure reflection follows immediacy, but from an experiential point of view such a sequence seems more likely than one of pure reflection arising from immediacy. As Sartre says, "Is it possible to pass from immediate consciousness to pure reflection? I know nothing about it. Perhaps one can achieve it after the exercise of pure reflection, but I could not say a priori that a being living on the level of pure immediacy is capable of pure reflection. What is most frequently encountered is, I believe, people who pass calmly from the immediate to impure reflection."¹²

What, then, is this impure reflection? Sartre tells us it is the "reflective consciousness of man-in-the-world in his daily experience."¹³ It is a lived, embodied reflectivity, similar in this respect to immediacy, an introspection which penetrates only to a minimal and quite superficial level of consciousness. There is no explicit process of intellectual auscultation with impure reflection; it is "too busy" simply existing-in-the-world to undertake a profound analysis of its structure. As a consequence, it bases its actions upon a fundamental project whose authenticity it complacently assumes, without virtue of prior examination. Sartre has an explanation for the shallowness of impure reflection's self-penetration, however; he in-

sists that impure reflection refuses to sincerely examine its fundamental project because in so doing it would be forced to face up to the fact that the mode of existence called for by the project is a self-deception. This fundamental project is, as we shall see, essentially self-contradictory, and as a result the pursuit of it propels impure reflection into a series of self-defeating secondary projects. In a word, the fundamental project of impure reflection is the attempt to deny and flee from the very freedom which defines the for-itself.

This flight from freedom, and the complementary quest for being which characterizes impure reflection, arises from the ruins of pre-reflective immediacy. As the for-itself continues in its presence to being, Sartre tells us, it eventually begins to lose itself in its historicity. It cannot grasp itself as a substance in the flow of the fleeting, escaping present, and so it must increasingly look for itself in both its concrete past and its projected future. But this "ekstatic" assumption of self, far from providing consciousness with a satisfactorily solid self-image, only serves to alienate it further. It sees itself as separate from itself, "dispersed" out there in the world of the in-itself. Instead of recognizing this lack of self-coincidence as an essential representation of what it is, the for-itself views it as a remediable shortcoming. It fails to recognize the inevitability of its failures to coincide because it fails (or refuses) to see the nonbeing which it is.¹⁴

At this level, the for-itself has hypostasized itself as an in-itself which is outside of itself. It has discovered itself only to lose itself in the external, out there "next" to the in-itself. Its next step will be to recover itself for itself by interiorizing that objective selfness which it has found projected into the world. The for-itself will attempt to posit itself as a substantial entity by making of itself an object-to-self. And precisely this endeavor is the schism of reflection. As such, "reflection remains for the for-itself . . . an attempt to recover being. By reflecting, the for-itself, which has lost itself outside itself, attempts to put itself inside its own being."¹⁵

This objectification and interiorization of the for-itself's temporal ekstases into a substantial "self" is what Sartre calls the "psyche."¹⁶ The psyche, as the concretization of the for-itself's temporal modes of existence, represents the "objectification of the for-itself."¹⁷ The individual for-itself, as subject, is seen as an opaque cache of motives, passions and impulses, which "move" the subject in the same way that the wind moves a leaf. The for-itself assumes the character of a thing amidst the world of things. At the same time, however, the for-itself retains its in-

teriority and its flow; it is consciousness of itself as a thing, and hence is capable of enjoying its supposed thinghood. In short, the for-itself, in interiorizing its temporal ekstases as object, seeks to unify within itself being-in-itself and being-for-itself: "to be itself as an object-in-itself--that is what the being-of-reflection has to be."¹⁸ This effort to be what is an obvious contradiction in terms is what Sartre calls impure reflection's fundamental project: the desire to be god, i.e., the desire to simultaneously be both pure substance and pure act, to be the source of one's own being.¹⁹ It is the attempt on the part of the for-itself to escape the nothingness which essentially defines it, and to found itself within the opacity of being. As such, the god-project is the effort to deny freedom, to freeze transcendence into a solidified, finite length of temporality. "The goal in short is to overtake that being which flees itself, itself while being what it is in the mode of not-being, which escapes between its own fingers; the goal is to make of it a given, a given which finally is what it is."²⁰ To repeat, impure reflection, along with its correlate the god-project, is an "abortive effort on the part of the for-itself to be another while remaining itself."²¹

The consequence of the god-project's quest for being and denial of freedom are far reaching. Being-for-itself not only sees itself as a kind of malleable thing which is constituted by the objects and events it encounters in the world,²² but also assumes that normative values are likewise "things," immutable and inflexible entities that exist "out there" somewhere. In short, the for-itself's obvious valuation of the god-project broadens itself into a valuation of being-in-general. The for-itself projects the existence of concretized values because it values concretizations of itself. This fundamental attitude is, of course, the well known "spirit of seriousness," or bad faith, which Sartre and de Beauvoir make so much of,²³ and which Being and Nothingness is essentially an analysis of. It is a denial of the ontological structure of the for-itself.

As such, this project towards self-coincidence is doomed to failure on two separate but related counts: first, because the structure of the god-project requires that the sought after self-coincidence be at the same time a presence to itself--an obvious absurdity--and, secondly, because the very nature of being-for-itself, i.e., as that being whose being is to not-be, immediately precludes any self-coincidence. The for-itself as a flow of freedom is radically different from being-in-itself, and their ontological relationship can never be other than one of strict separation.²⁴ The very attempt to be other than what it is points in itself to the true nature of the for-itself, since this

project involves "a nihilation of the for-itself, a nihilation which does not come to it from without but which it has to be."²⁵ In other words, it is only because the for-itself is non-coincidental, i.e., is freedom, that it can indulge in its impossible pursuit of being.

It can easily be imagined that the degree of ultimate fulfillment as an existence based upon impure reflection's god-project is minimal. To pose as a supreme goal an ideal which is not only intrinsically self-contradictory, but also destructive of the very nature of what it is to be a human, can only result in an ever-increasing build-up of frustration and alienation from both self and others. The god-project's self-defeating goal poisons human actions and renders them ultimately sterile. Personal fulfillment is thwarted and attempts at interpersonality mutate into sado-masochism. As Francis Jeanson says, "insofar as man continues to imagine that his mission, however conceived, is inscribed in things, all human activities are equivalent and all are doomed to fail."²⁶ It is precisely this inevitable futility of the god-project that Sartre has in mind in Being and Nothingness when he calls man a "useless passion"²⁷ and contends that "it amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations."²⁸ Reflection is in bad faith and forever futile when, rather than accepting its lack of concrete grounding, "it constitutes itself as the revelation of the object which I make-to-be-me."²⁹ And such is exactly impure reflection's project.

Pure Reflection

We have seen how the for-itself, torn out of its immediacy by its confrontation with its own historicity, attempts to recover its being by making itself an object through the mediation of impure reflection. We have also seen that this attempt to be an interiorization of being-in-itself and being-for-itself rebounds back upon the subject, serving no other purpose than to reveal what the for-itself is--namely, that being which is and must be noncoincidental. The question before us now is this: how can the for-itself reveal to itself its inevitable failure to found itself? How is it, in other words, that the for-itself is able to make the transition from impure to pure reflection?

Sartre is not entirely comfortable when he discusses reflection's "moment of truth": it would seem that the appearance of pure reflection, like that of impure reflection, is something of a "mystification." We do know, however, that the transition from impure to pure reflection must be a deliberate self-purification on reflection's part. Reflection itself must somehow be the source of its salvation; it must be constitutive of

its own metamorphosis, not inhabited and cleansed by an external agent. This internal upsurge of reflection folding back against itself Sartre calls a "katharsis": "Pure reflection can be attained only as the result of a modification which it effects on itself and which is in the form of a katharsis."¹⁰

Unfortunately, Sartre tells us absolutely nothing else about the katharsis, this mysterious internal and self-imposed cleansing from whence impure reflection magically re-emerges purified. Luckily, however, the secondary literature supplements Sartre's rather gratuitous statement about reflection's self-purification, enabling us to ascertain that this kathartic process which impure reflection imposes upon itself is nothing else than the for-itself's performance of a phenomenological reduction upon consciousness.¹¹

Recall that reflection first reveals itself as the for-itself's attempt to recover itself in the midst-of-the-world. In its campaign to posit itself as an interiorized unity of being-for-itself and being-in-itself, consciousness ignores the fundamental facts of its nonbeing and intentionality, and instead projects itself as a semi-opaque and impressionable being which is molded by the for-itself's being-in-the-world. Furthermore, this attitude, which is characteristic of impure reflection, examines itself on only a superficial level. It never attempts to evaluate itself apart from its existential modes of self-comprehension--which are precisely the products of its behaviour-in-the-world. It merely "exists" its being. As a result of impure reflection's superficiality, consciousness never recognises that the fundamental project which it has adopted--i.e., the god-project--is incapable of realization. It fails to know itself as the lack of being which it is and must be.

The futility and simple wrong-headedness of impure reflection can be clearly realized by the for-itself if it ever "brackets" consciousness-in-the-world and examines, in and of itself, the transcendental nature of consciousness. To perform a reduction upon consciousness is to see it stripped of the assumed motives, impulses, structures and other psychic trappings of thinghood which consciousness-in-the-world has imposed upon it. As Francis Jeanson remarks in Sartre and the Problem of Morality, "to understand any psychic phenomenon--assuming man faces the world--requires that one raise himself from his situation of man-in-the-world to the origins in consciousness of man in the world, and their relation, that is, to a consciousness that is transcendental and constitutive. We get at this consciousness by means of the 'phenomenological reduction'.¹²

The phenomenological reduction of consciousness, which would appear to be the goal of existential psychoanalysis,¹³ is a laborious and intensely in-

rospective separation of consciousness from its objective situation. It is, in a very literal sense of the word, a "retreat," in which reflection undertakes the task of disassociating the essential from the nonessential in its search for self. In cutting itself off from the world by means of the reduction so that it reveals its essential structure to itself, consciousness arrives at a realization of itself as the being whose being is in question. It recognizes that it is not constituted by but rather is constitutive of objects-in-the-world, that it is not a quasi-object composed of psychic qualities, and that it is condemned to inevitably transcend every attempt at self-coincidence immediately upon its assumption of the effort. In a word, consciousness discovers itself as the radical and uncompromised freedom which it is. Its freedom is revealed to it unadorned by involvement in the world, and as such appears as the pure nothingness which consciousness is, the perpetual overflow of the for-itself. To quote Jeanson again, "the freedom arrived at is . . . the essence of freedom: it is pure, transcendental consciousness inasmuch as it defines itself as freedom."⁴

Pure reflection, in illuminating the structure of consciousness by means of the phenomenological reduction, reveals to itself the futility of the god-project and the values to which its pursuit gives rise. The clear and distinct realization of itself as freedom, as that being which is-not, once and for all dissolves the self-deception involved in the quest for being. To seek to be what one is not and never can be is not only to give rise to fundamental and grave conflicts in one's existence pattern; it is also an extremely pig-headed attitude. As de Beauvoir succinctly tells us, "in the face of an obstacle which it is impossible to overcome, stubbornness is stupid. If I persist in beating my head against a stone wall, my freedom exhausts itself in this useless gesture without succeeding in giving itself a content."⁵

Pure reflection, then, assures the for-itself that it is fundamentally and inescapably free, and that the effort to deny this freedom by means of a frantic pursuit of being will never be rewarded with success. It forces the for-itself to face the fact that it is a transcendental flow, incapable of paying ultimate ontological allegiance to either concrete objects or objectified values. It demonstrates with absolute clarity the futility--indeed, as de Beauvoir says, the stupidity--of continued subservience to the god-project, and in so doing purifies reflection of its "existed" assumptions about itself. But this moment of lucidity which the phenomenological reduction brings to reflection is not and cannot be the leap into the ethical realm. It immediately precedes the subject's assumption of the ethical, but is not in itself representa-

tive of that qualitative move. The katharsis brought about by the reduction is not, in short, conversion. It merely disabuses consciousness of its psychic content, scrubbing the old bottle, as it were, so that the new wine may be poured in.

Conversion and the Recovery of Innocence

It might seem an obvious conclusion that the phenomenological reduction and ethical conversion are one and the same phenomenon. Such appears to be de Beauvoir's opinion; she at least draws a strong analogy between the two: "existential conversion should . . . be compared to Husserlian reduction: let man put his will to be "in parentheses" and he will thereby be brought to the consciousness of his true condition."³⁶ Francis Jeanson seems to agree with her: ". . . at the level of pure reflection . . . one has stopped trying to give himself motives, drives, supports, or justifications. Instead, all needs and exigencies are referred back to the choice of oneself that constitutes one's fundamental project"³⁷--that is, all values are chosen in light of the for-itself's realization of itself as radical freedom. And Thomas Anderson's excellent The Foundation and Structure of Sartrean Ethics likewise makes no distinction between conversion and pure reflection.³⁸ While Sartre, cryptic as usual when it comes to his ethic, has not explicitly agreed with this particular interpretation, neither has he explicitly repudiated it.

I would suggest, however, that the for-itself's performance of a phenomenological reduction upon itself, and the occurrence of the ethical conversion, are two distinct (albeit related) steps towards the moral life. The conversion is an outgrowth of, a "part of" pure reflection, but the two are not identical. I would further contend that, while the conversion is dependent upon pure reflection as a necessary condition for its appearance, the existence of pure reflection by no means entails the emergence of the conversion. Thus, not only are conversion and the kathartic reduction not identical, they are not even inseparable.

It must be kept in mind that the for-itself's phenomenological reduction of consciousness is a value-free operation. It is basically a neutral act on reflection's part, with no other purpose than to distinguish between the essential and the nonessential in the structure of transcendental consciousness. Its only task--and its only goal--is to examine consciousness in itself, and then in turn to examine the consciousness by which consciousness is examined. In doing so, the reduction aims to reveal the nature of what truly is as regards the for-itself; it does not aim to predicate value judgments concerning the content that it uncovers.

Translated into specific terms, then, the only results of the for-itself's phenomenological reduction upon itself are (1) the revelation that the for-itself is essentially that being whose being is in question--i.e., whose being is freedom; (2) as a result the in-itself has no hold on the for-itself. Consciousness is not constituted by objects, but is rather itself constitutive of them. The case is likewise with values; there is no necessity binding the for-itself to its valuation of being save its own free choice. It does not receive the notion of value from external ideals; it creates those ideals for itself. (3) Consequently, the attempt to deny the non-being which the for-itself must be--i.e., to blindly pursue the god-project--is, in de Beauvoir's terms, "stupid."

Notice that the results of the reduction are entirely neutral in tone. They convey information only, not value judgments. The most partisan thing the reduction does is to point out the foolhardiness of pursuing an impossible quest--foolhardy from an intellectual or logical, and not a moral point of view. The pursuit of the god-project, the reduction discloses, is foolish in the same way that an obsessive effort to square a circle is foolish.

In short, the phenomenological reduction, by illuminating the essential structure of the for-itself, reveals the futility of the god-project. It does not, however, represent the abandonment of the project. That act of the will, clearly not a part of the dispassionately neutral reduction's mandate, just as clearly belongs to the domain of the radical conversion.

The conversion, it seems to me, can only be understood as a direct volitional act of the for-itself arising from reflection upon the reduction's revelation of the for-itself's true nature. The volitional act consists of the for-itself's explicit acceptance of the responsibility which its constitutive nature entails--i.e., the affirmation that in a world devoid of intrinsic values it (the for-itself) is bound by no normative constraints other than those which it freely chooses--and the concomitant acknowledgment that freedom, inasmuch as it represents the condition for the possibility of valuation in general (i.e., choice) is itself the ultimate foundation of values. As such, conversion is a radical abandonment of the self-defeating and interpersonal-alienating god-project. It is an assumption of the ethical in that it places full responsibility upon the individual for-itself, a responsibility which is precisely freedom's correlate. The radical nonbeing of the for-itself, its incapacity to achieve self-coincidence--in short, its freedom--is now affirmed rather than fled from. The for-itself freely accepts its intentional, constitutive nature, freely acknowledges that it, as sole author of its acts and values, bears sole responsibility for them. As Sartre

tells us, the ethical man "carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being. We are taking the word 'responsibility' in the usual sense as 'consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or object'. In this sense the responsibility of the for-itself is overwhelming since he is the one by whom it happens that there is a world."³³ This explicit acceptance of its non-being does not mean that the for-itself suppresses its desire to be god; that hunger is a result of its ontological structure. It does mean, however, that the for-itself is no longer a slave to that desire, that its fundamental project is no longer the god-project, but is instead freedom itself.³⁴

The ethical conversion, then, is a volitional commitment on the part of the individual for-itself that replaces god-desire as fundamental project with freedom as fundamental project. It is not identical to the phenomenological reduction, but does rely upon it as a necessary condition for its appearance.

A further indication that the reduction and the radical conversion are not identical is that the two do not have to appear together. There seems to be nothing in pure reflection that necessitates the upsurge of the conversion. It is at least imaginable that the for-itself could react in a number of non-conversion ways to the revelation of self which the reduction supplies. The for-itself could conceivably flee with the utmost alacrity from the picture of freedom which the reduction has provided, embracing more violently than ever the god-project which it so "foolishly" left for a short time. Or, again, it is conceivable that the for-itself, faced with the realization that its fond hopes in regards to the god-project are illusions, might enclose itself within an impenetrable shell of cynicism or even nihilism. In short, there is no necessary connection between reduction and conversion. The former merely illuminates and the latter results only from a deliberately volitional acceptance of the implications of the freedom thus illuminated. In short, kathartic reduction can lead the for-itself to an awareness of its freedom, but it can't make it convert.

As a final word on the nonidentity of the kathartic reduction and the radical conversion, I would point to a highly suggestive paragraph towards the end of Sartre's essay "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self." Although, as indicated earlier, Sartre has never addressed himself specifically to the issue at hand, his remarks in this essay concerning the moral realm seem to indicate that he is aware of the volitional basis of an existentialist ethic--a basis which, I have argued, cannot arise from the ethically neutral reduction. In the passage in question, Sartre says that we "place ourselves . . . on the level of moral-

ity . . . starting from the moment when we reject being, since being has rejected us, the moment when we no longer want values, in the sense in which want is taken as a simple coincidence with self."⁴¹ Note that he uses verbs such as 'reject' and 'want' which clearly indicate volition. The level of morality is attained not when the for-itself passively becomes aware of the futility of the god-project, but rather when it deliberately "rejects being"; the conversion is enacted not when the for-itself realises that basing its existence on the value of being is foolish, but when it actively rejects that value, when it ceases to "want" it. And, indeed, the act of choice called for by radical conversion would seem to be consistent with the voluntaristic nature of existentialist ethics in general."⁴²

There remains one final aspect of the dynamics of Sartrean conversion to examine, and that is the for-itself's "recovery of innocence" which I alluded to earlier in this discussion. I maintain that the for-itself's attainment of the ethical conversion represents a fundamental change in project and behaviour in which freedom (to extend the "conversion" metaphor) washes away the for-itself's "sinful" obsession with the god-project. This notion of the for-itself's return to an original innocence after conversion highlights the "worldly temptation" of being which overtakes the for-itself in the course of its development.

As usual, Sartre does not explicitly discuss this recovery of innocence, but he does refer to it in a passage that at first glance seems to be a typically Sartrean barbarism. He says: ". . . reflection can be either pure or impure. Pure reflection, the simple presence of the reflective for-itself to the for-itself reflected on, is at once the original form of reflection and its ideal form; it is that on whose foundation impure reflection appears, it is that which is never first given [but] which must be won by a sort of katharsis"⁴³

This is indeed a paradoxical statement. In one and the same sentence, Sartre tells us that pure reflection is both the original and the terminal ("ideal") form of reflection, and that it is both given (as the foundation upon which impure reflection appears) and yet not given, but rather won ("by a sort of katharsis")! What are we to make of this rather bizzare locution?

The paradoxes contained within this quotation seem to resolve themselves if we interpret them as being expressive of the for-itself's recovery of innocence. The dynamics of this recovery might be described as follows. The for-itself's attitude, it will be remembered, was immediacy, a direct and spontaneously lived relationship with the world. To be sure, immediate consciousness is nonreflective (although it is nontheoretically aware of the cogito), but it is consequently also unsullied by the psychic cirrosis which it ac-

quires as the result of impure reflection's being-in-the-world. It is a simple flow of intentionality, unmediated by conceptual assumptions about the value of non-value of being, and as such is not bound to a fundamental desire to be god. Its being-in-the-world, while not a deliberate (i.e., reflective) effort to exist as a freedom, is nevertheless a natural flow of freedom. It represents an "existed" celebration of the freedom which the for-itself is, unhampered in its flow because, unlike reflection, it has not tried to objectify itself.

Immediacy, then, is really the original form of pure reflection's post-conversion attitude, the ideal terminus of a Sartrean ethic. It is, in a natural, naive, unreflective--"innocent"--way, that which the ethical for-itself must continually and reflectively strive to be--namely, a flow of freedom, unswayed by ulterior motives, simply "existed" for its own sake. This pure reflection is both the "original" and the "ideal" form of reflection.

We also saw that immediacy, this pure flow of freedom on the for-itself's part, is unable to sustain itself in the midst of the world, that its confrontation with being throws it into the realm of impure reflection and the god-project. In impure reflection the for-itself's actions are no longer unmediated; they no longer represent the flow of freedom for the sake of itself. Quite the contrary. The for-itself now seeks to deny that very freedom which it previously celebrated by encapsulating itself and its values within the domain of the in-itself. Its naive, natural fidelity to what it is has given way to a sophisticated distortion, and the results, as we saw, are destructive to the development of both the individual for-itself and interpersonal relations. It is only through an intense effort at self-illumination (the phenomenological reduction) and an act of volition which "wins" for the subject its freedom from the psychic structure, that pure reflection is recovered. This pure reflection is both given and not given. It appears as the natural attitude of the for-itself, is subsequently blemished by the for-itself's reflective attempts at self-coincidence, and, if it is to be recovered, must finally be won by a deliberately volitional act.

The ethical conversion's abandonment of the god-project and affirmation of freedom as primary value, then, represents a return of sorts to the original, pre-reflective celebration of freedom which was characteristic of original immediacy. It is in this sense that we may call it a recovery of innocence. It is not, however, a literal return to original immediacy on the for-itself's part; normal consciousness cannot sustain itself in a state of immediacy except in the elusive present. Rather, the untrammelled flow of freedom which immediacy naturally was is qualitatively

re-affirmed on a reflective basis by pure reflection. The fundamental project which immediacy nonreflectively sprang from--i.e., the estimation of freedom as the logical source of all values--is deliberately chosen in the conversion. The flow of freedom is no longer naive; it is informed by both an awareness of the futility of the god-project and a simultaneous longing for it, and as such must constantly be on guard against succumbing to it. The pure reflection of conversion, in its return to a kind of immediacy, is thus an incorporation and a surpassing of both original immediacy and impure reflection. It is an innocence, if you will, tempered by a knowledge of the possibility of guilt.⁴⁴

III

In the course of this discussion, I have been concerned to schematize the necessary conditions for the possibility of a Sartrean ethic. That schematization, to recapitulate, is as follows: the dynamics of radical conversion involves a process of the coming-to-be of self-realization on the part of being-for-itself, a discovery of self which is initiated when the original freedom of immediacy is shattered by the for-itself's lived dispersion in the world. In its attempt to recover itself, the for-itself enters into a mode of reflection which becomes habitual and which can eventually grow to be insurmountable. That mode is, of course, impure reflection, which has as its raison d'être the quest for being, the desire to be god. Impure reflection will continue to shape the individual for-itself's existence until the for-itself enters into intensive self-examination and performs what is in effect a phenomenological reduction upon itself. The reduction, which clearly reveals the transcendental structure of consciousness to the for-itself, will effectively dissolve the hopeful illusions which the for-itself entertains in regards to the god-project. The for-itself must then "choose," in a deliberate, volitional act, whether it will freely accept the nature revealed by the reduction, or whether it will flee from it in panic. If the former alternative is affirmed, the for-itself is propelled (or, better, propels itself) into the ethical. In choosing to reject the god-project, and to exist as a deliberate flow of freedom, the for-itself recovers the innocence which it enjoyed in its original state of immediacy--an innocence all the more meaningful, perhaps, for its having been won rather than simply given. Insofar as the dynamics of Sartrean conversion is concerned, my beginning, to paraphrase T. S. Eliot, is indeed my end, and my end my beginning.⁴⁵

NOTES

¹It is highly probable, however, that surviving fragments of the ethical manuscripts will be published posthumously. In 1973 Michel Contat was named executor and overseer of the posthumous publication of all of Sartre's unfinished texts. These include the ethical treatise L'Homme, two chapters of the second volume of the Critique, and the beginning of the last volume of L'Idiot de la famille. See Axel Madsen's Hearts and Minds: The Common Journey of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre (New York: Morrow Quelle, Publishers, 1977), p. 287.

²As Sartre says in Sartre par lui-même (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1977) (not to be confused with the book by the same title written by Francis Jeanson and included in Gallimard's "Par lui-même" series); Sartre by Himself, A Film, translated by Richard Seaver (New York: Urizen Books, 1978), p. 81: "I have, when you think about it, written two 'Ethics': the first between 1945-46, completely mystified--the 'Ethics' I thought I could write after I had finished Being and Nothingness. The notes I had on that first version I've relegated to the bottom drawer. And then notes that date from 1965 or thereabouts, on another 'Ethics,' which related to the problem of realism as well as that of morality. I could have written a book using those notes as a basis, but I just haven't done it as yet."

³See, for instance, Maurice Cranston's The Quintessence of Sartreism (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), p. 3: "Sartre can be fairly called a puritan, because of [his] austerity and high moral seriousness; and also because his work has always been informed by a profound distaste for the visible world of corruption and folly." Or Francis Jeanson's Le Problème moral et la pensée de Sartre (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965); Sartre and The Problem of Morality, translated by Robert V. Stone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 265: "I maintained eighteen years ago, and I continue to maintain today, that Sartre's philosophy is a moral philosophy and all its virtue for us issues from this." And finally Simone de Beauvoir's Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1946); The Ethics of Ambiguity, translated by Bernard Frechtman (Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1975), p. 34: Sartrean "existentialism alone gives--like religions--a real role to evil, and it is this, perhaps, which makes its judgments so gloomy."

⁴Namely, Simone de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity and Pyrhus et Cinéas (Paris: Librairie

Gallimard, 1944); Andre Gorz, Fondements pour une morale (Paris: Galilee, 1977); and Francis Jeanson, Sartre and the Problem of Morality.

⁵Jean-Paul Sartre, L'Être et le néant (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1943, pp. 431-483. Hereafter referred to as EN; Being and Nothingness, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1975), pp. 474-533. Hereafter referred to as BN.

⁶EN, pp. 484, 670, 722; BN, pp. 534, 742, 798.

⁷Simone de Beauvoir (Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 11) echoes the notion that BN is by and large a study of bad faith: ". . . in Being and Nothingness Sartre has insisted above all on the abortive aspect of the human adventure. It is only in the last pages that he opens up a perspective for an ethics."

⁸What I call 'immediacy' in this paper Sartre usually refers to as 'unreflective consciousness' or 'nonreflection'. I use 'immediacy' here because (1) it seems to me to better capture Sartre's meaning in the context of the present discussion than does his term; and (2) it is less awkward from a stylistic point of view.

⁹EN, pp. 16-22; BN, pp. 9-16.

¹⁰I am referring, of course, to Sartre's well known example of counting cigarettes (EN, p. 19; BN, p. 13). In summary, he tells us that an individual can be engaged in so mindless a task as counting one's cigarettes and still be (nonthetically) aware of the cogito. This awareness is demonstrated by the counter's immediate, nonpremediated response "I am counting cigarettes" when asked by a second party to give an account of her present act. The pre-reflective knowledge of the cogito thus reveals itself in our ordinary speech patterns.

¹¹Jean-Paul Sartre, "Conscience de soi et connaissance de soi," Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie 42 (1948), pp. 49-91; "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self," translated by Mary Ellen and N. Lawrence in Readings in Existential Phenomenology, edited by N. Lawrence and D. O'Connor (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 142.

¹²Sartre, "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self," p. 142.

¹³EN, p. 205; BN, p. 222.

¹⁴EN, p. 199; BN, p. 215.

¹⁶EN, p. 200; BN, p. 216.

¹⁶EN, pp. 206 ff.; BN, pp. 221 ff.

¹⁷EN, p. 215; BN, p. 234.

¹⁸EN, p. 200; BN, p. 216.

¹⁹See, for instance, EN, p. 708; BN, p. 784, where Sartre, in speaking of the for-itself's attempt to be a synthesis of being-in-and-for-itself, says "every human reality [in this mode] is a passion in that it projects losing itself so as to found being and by the same stroke to constitute the in-itself which escapes contingency by being its own foundation, the Ens causa sui, which religions call God." See also EN, p. 718; BN, p. 792.

²⁰EN, p. 200; BN, p. 216.

²¹EN, p. 208; BN, p. 226.

²²Sartre's notion that impure reflection sees consciousness as a plastic tabula rasa constituted by the objects in the world which it encounters can be traced in his writings at least as far back as Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions (Paris: Hermann, 1939); The Emotions: Outline of a Theory, translated by Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948). In speaking of emotions, for instance, he tells us that impure reflection sees the emotion it experiences as somehow imposed upon it: "Ordinarily, we direct upon the emotive consciousness an accessory reflection which certainly perceives consciousness as consciousness, but insofar as it is motivated by the project: 'I am angry because it is hateful'. It is on the basis of this reflection that the passion will constitute itself." Even in this early work, however, Sartre sees that there is an alternative to impure (or "accessory") reflection, for he goes on to say that "the purifying reflection of the phenomenological reduction can perceive the emotion insofar as it constitutes the world in a magical form. 'I find it hateful because I am angry.'" (Esquisse, p. 49; Emotions, p. 91)

²³See EN, pp. 85-114; BN, pp. 86-118; and de Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity, pp. 36-73.

²⁴Until, of course, the death of the individual for-itself. But even then the relationship is really one between two differentiations of being-in-itself, rather than between being-in-itself and being-for-itself.

²⁵EN, p. 199; BN, p. 215.

²⁶Jeanson, Sartre and the Problem of Morality, p. 207.

²⁷EN, p. 708; BN, p. 784.

²⁸EN, pp. 721-722; BN, p. 797.

²⁹EN, p. 208; BN, p. 226.

³⁰EN, p. 206; BN, p. 224.

³¹See de Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 14; Jeanson's Sartre and the Problem of Morality, pp. 34, 72, 83-89, 183; and an excellent short article by Thomas Busch, "Sartre: The Phenomenological Reduction and Human Relations," Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology 6, (January 1975).

³²Jeanson, Sartre and the Problem of Morality, p. 34.

³³See, for instance, EN, pp. 720-721; EN, p. 796: "existential psychoanalysis is moral description, for it releases to us the ethical meaning of various human projects . . . the principle result of existential psychoanalysis must be to make us repudiate the spirit of seriousness."

³⁴Jeanson, Sartre and the Problem of Morality, p. 72.

³⁵de Beauvoir, Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 28.

³⁶de Beauvoir, Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 14.

³⁷Jeanson, Sartre and the Problem of Morality, p. 28.

³⁸Thomas C. Anderson, The Foundation and Structure of a Sartrean Ethics (Lawrence, Kansas: The Regents Press of Kansas, 1979). Anderson says, for instance (p. 41): "Morality ideally is a reflective study of values operating with full awareness that man is their source (this full awareness Sartre calls purifying reflection)."

³⁹EN, p. 638; BN, p. 707.

⁴⁰See, for instance, de Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity, p. 14: "existentialist conversion does not suppress my instincts, desires, plans, and passions. It merely prevents any possibility of failure by refusing to set up as absolutes the ends toward which my transcendence thrusts itself, and by considering them

in their connection with the freedom which projects them."

¹Sartre, "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self," p. 134. Emphasis mine.

²For an excellent discussion of the voluntaristic nature of existential ethics, see the first four chapters of Frederick Olafson's Principles and Persons (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1970).

³EN, p. 201; BN, 218.

⁴Although it is beyond the scope of this particular discussion to go into the matter in detail, I can't resist the temptation of suggesting that the radical conversion's pure flow of freedom is an excellent candidate for Sartre's spirit of "play." The tantalising reference to play at the end of Being and Nothingness (EN, pp. 669-670; BN, pp. 741-742) has been all but ignored by most commentators, but its claim that play "releases subjectivity," and is the avenue through which man "escapes his natural nature [impure reflection] so that he apprehends himself as free and wishes to use his freedom," is remarkably similar to my description of the effect of the radical conversion. It's certain that more work needs to be done on the nature of Sartrean play, and I hope to contribute to that enterprise in the future. At the present time, to the best of my knowledge, there are only two articles that explicitly concern themselves with the topic: Thomas Busch's "Sartre: The Phenomenological Reduction and Human Relationships," and Ralph Netzky's "Playful Freedom: Sartre's Ontology Re-appraised," Philosophy Today 18 (Summer 1974). Both studies are, unfortunately, limited. Busch fails to make the important distinction between the reduction and the conversion (which I have discussed in this paper), and Netzky misses the point of the reduction altogether.

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