

## The Paradoxical Implications of the (εποχή) Phenomenological Reduction in Sartre's Psychoanalysis

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An examination of Sartre's notion of consciousness reveals a paradoxical relation between the nature of consciousness and its application to his theory of existential psychoanalysis. The difficulty emerges as a consequence of the radicalization of the phenomenological reduction wherein consciousness appears as non-egological, and exemplifies Sartre's notion of bad faith. If one attempts to be consistent in applying the Sartrian notion of consciousness to psychoanalysis an impasse between analyst and patient is created. This paper discusses this impasse and makes suggestions for alternate solutions.

*The Transcendence of the Ego* (1957) develops a radical position in regard to the nature of consciousness. In the opening of the text Sartre asserts his intention to prove that "the ego is neither formally nor materially in consciousness: it is outside in the world" (Sartre, 1957, p. 31). This quotation implies that the εποχή rests upon consciousness, and not upon the ego, as in Husserl, or upon the cogito, as in Descartes. Therefore, the construction of the ego is a project for consciousness like any other project. There is nothing intrinsically inhibiting the ego, neither an id, nor an essence of any sort. In this respect, Sartre is taking a radical departure from the traditional phenomenological position, including the position established by Husserl. One can equate Sartre's departure to Brentano's refusal to reduce consciousness to the unconscious on the grounds that such reduction would lead to an infinite regress of consciousness (Mohanty, 1972, p. 57).

Accordingly, the radicalization of the εποχή creates a two-fold effect. The ego is brought into the open where it is located outside consciousness, while at

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the same time, consciousness appears to be the irreducible entity standing behind the ego. Thus, the constitution of the ego is structured out of the unity of conscious states, states that are accessible and intentionally subject to reflective consciousness; consciousness as thus defined is consciousness of something. Once the *εποχή* has demonstrated that consciousness is irreducible, then any presupposition (epistemological, ontological, or psychological) which seems to be inserted behind consciousness would have no value as a proof for its existentiality.

Hence, Sartre rejects any division, or duality, on the level of conscious experience, because such a division will inevitably create two different psychological units out of consciousness, whereas in actuality there is only one experience. As Sartre states

By the distinction between the Id and the ego Freud has cut the psychic whole into two. I am the ego but I am not the Id. I hold no privileged position in relation to my unconscious psychic. I am my own psychic phenomena insofar as I establish them in their conscious reality. For example, I am the impulse to steal this or that book from this bookstall. I am an integral part of the impulse; I bring it to light and I determine myself hand-in-hand with it to commit the theft. (1956, pp. 50-51)

According to Freud, if I contemplate stealing, this contemplation is motivated, if not determined, by my id or the unconscious. According to Sartre, it is I who initiate the act of contemplation which results in the act of theft, a totally conscious act promoted, and exclusively actualized, by me. But when I realize that I am a thief, and that I am recognized as such by the other, I try to negate the choice which I have already made, by escaping into the unconscious. Accordingly, the unconscious is invented by a conscious act. It is a means of denying one's own conscious states—a mode of bad faith.

Undoubtedly, the notion of bad faith in Sartre occupies a central point in his theory of existential psychoanalysis. Without bad faith there would be no self-deception, no illusions about one's self or the other, and no self-objectification. Without bad faith there would be no refusal of one's freedom, and without bad faith there would be no means to deny one's transcendence (meaning that one would consider one's self seriously as a being who is not what one is, and is what one is not). In short, most neuroses, if not all, can be traced to bad faith.

At this point it should be emphasized that Sartre did not, as might have been expected, attempt to construct the notion of good faith. Construction of the notion of good faith would have been a mastery of evil genius in bad faith, and knowing the impossibility of such a task, he briefly points out that good faith is "self-recovery, which we shall call authenticity" (Sartre, 1956, p. 79).

However, if one reflects upon the characteristics this authenticity or self-recovery might have, surely one will discount the possibility of equating it with formulations like self-sufficiency, fullness of being, or self-perfection. Any of

these, or any other static description, will be contrary to the dialectical openness which Sartre attributes to a being who is not what he or she is, and is what he or she is not.

Authenticity, therefore, is better related to the spontaneity of consciousness before it emerges in reflection and becomes conscious of itself as I; unreflective consciousness remains open to what is not, and does not become exhausted by that of which it is conscious. On the reflective level, consciousness becomes consumed in its own domain, and as such, it will be reduced to what is. From this account, one can conclude that spontaneity, innocence, and authenticity are the necessary conditions for good faith. In contrast, reflection, the emergence of the I, and decision-making are the inevitable directions toward bad faith. Consequently, in order to avoid falling into bad faith, consciousness has to remain a movement, not a structure; and it has to be in a constant state of upsurge, not a yielding to self-identity. In short, consciousness has to remain non-egological, rather than inhibited with an ego.

The paradox which seems entrenched in Sartre's phenomenological ontology, and which in effect schematically directs his psychoanalysis, is related both to his radical notion of bad faith, and to his notion of consciousness. It is absolutely imperative that to avoid falling into bad faith the for-itself (consciousness) not be allowed embodiment or structure in relation to itself as an identity; for if this structure or embodiment of the for-itself were to occur, it would negate its transcendence (Sartre, 1956, p. 66). In Sartre's terms, the for-itself would be equal to self-objectification of one's being. Moreover, in his analysis of consciousness, Sartre made a clear distinction between unreflective and reflective consciousness. "The *εποχή* has proved, that there is no I on the unreflective level. When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in contemplating a portrait, there is no I" (Sartre, 1957, p. 49). Hence, the I emerges on the reflective level only. What Sartre is attempting to accomplish at this point is to refute Husserl's distinction between the empirical and the transcendental ego. Assuming that the I can only exist on the reflective level, the solution seems to lie in breaking down consciousness in terms of the reflective and unreflective.

If one examines the characteristic of bad faith, and the nature of consciousness, it appears that reflective consciousness is always bound to fall into bad faith. Conversely, examining Sartre's characterization of good faith as self-recovery associated with authenticity and innocence, these characteristics seem to be associated with unreflective consciousness.

At one point Sartre insinuated that "reflection poisons desire" (Sartre, 1957, p. 59). If this is true, then it is safe to conclude that reflection disrupts spontaneity. Hence, if on the level of spontaneity, consciousness releases itself as a stream without any arbitrary bracketing, openness will qualify consciousness, or the for-itself, thus following Sartre's definition of a being as one who is not

what he or she is, and is what he or she is not. But when consciousness becomes reflective, and breaks away from spontaneity, it constructs its intentional experience as an I. With the emergence of the I, one can no longer escape simple definition in terms of what one is.

Phenomenologically, it is impossible for consciousness to be able to direct its intentionality by grasping its negation and affirmation at the same time. At a given instant in time, consciousness is either present toward itself as an I, or it is absent toward itself as a non-I, but is not both present and absent.

In order to make this point clear, let us assume that a sequence of time is broken down into a succession of instantaneous moments. At any given instant of the sequence, consciousness is attentively involved in time. The *εποχή* reveals that at every given instant, consciousness is either reflective or unreflective—consciousness is either emerging in reflection as an I, or remaining spontaneous and totally positional as a non-I. It should be clear that consciousness can not be on both sides of the razor at the same instant. It is either on the reflective side, or on the unreflective side. The crucial point here is that when consciousness becomes reflective it can no longer be simply positional, because at the point of its emergence as an I, it discloses to itself the characteristic of its own being.

When the I emerges out of reflective consciousness, it can no longer be identified in terms of what the I is not, for being may not be identified with non-being. Thus, on the level of reflection, consciousness becomes irreversible in conceiving the states of its own being as an I, and not otherwise. However, due to Sartre's intransigence with respect to consciousness, this outcome does not prevent bad faith.

Since it has been demonstrated phenomenologically that consciousness cannot possibly exercise its own intentionality and yet remain suspended between what is not and what is, then the *εποχή* should not be materialized if consciousness is to remain spontaneous and in good faith, for any such attempt would equal self-objectification. It is evident that the radicalization of *εποχή* creates a serious problem for the discipline of psychoanalysis, paralyzing therapeutic assistance or other processes of self-integration.

Traditional psychoanalysis is primed to aid the individual by unifying his or her personality by creating a synthesis of the id and the superego, the ego emerging as a result of this synthesis. For Sartre, however, such an approach is unacceptable because it is based upon a false presupposition. If the id is rooted in the unconscious, and the unconscious is not accessible to consciousness, it is not real and cannot be subject to analysis or bring unity to the ego. The psychoanalytic methodology is actually another type of bad faith. "Psychoanalysis has not gained anything for us, since in order to overcome bad faith, it has established between the unconscious and consciousness an autonomous consciousness in bad faith" (Sartre, 1956, p. 53). What actually is involved here

is not the kind of bad faith which Sartre speaks of in relation to self-deception, or self-negation, but rather, the kind of bad faith which is performed in falsifying the truth. If the id is not accessible to conscious investigation, then it should be considered only a hypothetical entity, hardly a sound foundation for the system.

The investigation now leads us to a serious question, namely, would it be justified for the analyst to lead, accept, or encourage any type of defense mechanism which might not be true? In traditional psychoanalysis the individual subject is given a chance to reinforce those defenses which seem to be positive and constructive, and to eliminate those which are negative or self-destructive. If the analyst applies Sartre's method consistently, the individual remains defenseless, for any artificial, or even genuine construction of one's being will arrest the stream of spontaneity and thus constitute an act of bad faith. In Sartre's phenomenological approach there seems to be no adequate recognition of either the volitional element in directing intentional consciousness or the eidetic construction of the lived world. The former enables a subject to construct the state of his or her being, that is, one's being in the world, and thus mediates one's existential reality without bad faith. The latter makes possible the construction of experience according to one's assessment of the conditions.

This latter alternative, however, is also rejected, because after the radicalization of the *επινοή* any attempt to construct the eidetic will be doomed to fail. Without freezing intentionality into a static construction, the intention is to keep consciousness open and thus retain a totality, not a collection of intellectual abstractions, and it is as a totality that one is to be comprehended by the analyst (Sartre, 1956, p. 568). The analyst, therefore, must not stop at the ego, but rather unveil the ego to consciousness so that the subject can become conscious of his or her self (Sartre, 1956, p. 574). Since every choice is a conscious choice the subject should become aware of his or her choices. This is precisely the task of the analyst (Sartre, 1956, p. 574) and ultimately, Sartre hopes that the subject will become objective about the self. Subjective objectivity will then operate from the analyst towards the subject, and from the subject towards the self (Sartre, 1956, p. 574). For the analyst this is possible, according to Sartre, through the "intuition accompanied by evidence" (Sartre, 1956, p. 574) which enables the analyst to formulate a totalized image of the subject. Moreover, this approach leads to the possibility of "transcending transcendence," in which case the analyst and the subject will overcome the dilemma of subject-object relationship, and the two will be unified under one given state of consciousness, captured by the awakening of consciousness to its choices.

This would be possible if consciousness is totally translucent, as Sartre believes it to be. However, consciousness possesses the volition to disclose itself

within its own opacity, and if this occurs, any assessment of the other, as another consciousness, will cease to be more than interpretation. Crossing the boundary between interpretation and knowledge risks solipsism—and so, in his analysis of the idealist and the realist positions, Sartre observes

Formerly I believed that I could escape solipsism by refuting Husserl's concept of the existence of the Transcendental "Ego." At that time I thought that since I had emptied my consciousness of its subject, nothing remained there which was privileged as compared to the Other. But acutally although I am still persuaded that the hypothesis of a transcendental subject is useless and disastrous, abandoning it does not help one bit to solve the question of the existence of Others. Even if outside the empirical Ego there is nothing other than the consciousness of the Ego—that is, a transcendental field without a subject—the fact remains that my affirmation of the Other demands and requires the existence beyond the world of a similar transcendental field. Consequently the only way to escape solipsism would be here again to prove that my transcendental consciousness is in its very being, affected by the extra-mundane existence of other consciousness of the same type. Because Husserl has reduced being to a series of meanings, the only connection which he has been able to establish between my being and that of the Other is a connection of knowledge. Therefore Husserl can not escape solipsism any more than Kant could. (Sartre, 1956, p. 235)

Undoubtedly, Sartre's attempt to solve the problem of solipsism is genuine, especially when it concerns the delicate and sensitive problems of psychoanalysis. Ultimately, Sartre wants to save the subject from becoming objectified in any form. He thinks that by transforming the discourse from knowing qua knowing to the being of the other as a transcendental consciousness, he can overcome all intellectual abstraction and objectification. The application of the *εποχή* has shown this to be possible, but application of the *εποχή* does not show that the other, as another consciousness, is the one which possesses the will to make consciousness translucent, open, and accessible; or opaque and closed in itself. In this case the dilemma is not solved and the ambiguity remains.

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