

Sartre on Self-Awareness

**Pre-Reflective and Reflective
Self-Consciousness
in the early works of Jean-Paul Sartre**

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Abstract

This thesis investigates Sartre's theories concerning the nature and extent of one's awareness of one's own consciousnesses, as those theories are expounded in Sartre's philosophical publications of the 1930s and 1940s. Exegetically, the thesis aims to clarify those theories and to expose Sartre's reasons for holding them. Philosophically, the thesis aims to assess those theories against the backdrop of the philosophical debate over self-awareness and to discover whether Sartre has a distinctive and valuable contribution to make to that debate.

The thesis is divided into three parts. The Introduction is primarily exegetical, clarifying the terminology Sartre employs in the theories under discussion. Chapter 1 is concerned with the awareness Sartre claims we have of our current consciousnesses. Chapter 2 is concerned with the awareness Sartre claims we can have of previous consciousnesses. In each chapter, the view under consideration, and Sartre's reasons for holding it, are exposed and assessed in the light of empirical examples, theoretical considerations, and the main rival theories.

Sartre's views are discussed in with reference to such influences on his thought as Descartes, Freud, Husserl, and Heidegger, and such contemporary thinkers as Armstrong, the Churchlands, Dennett, and Searle. Exegetical controversies are discussed with reference to much secondary literature concerned with Sartre's philosophy.

Overall, it is found that Sartre offers a distinctive and coherent account of self-awareness. In chapter 1, it is found that although Sartre has shown that we are (to some degree) aware of much of our current mental lives, he has not shown that we are aware of the whole of our mental lives. In chapter 2, it is found that Sartre's theory that reflection is sometimes reliable cannot be verified or falsified, but that despite this it is no worse off than other theories of the reliability of reflection.

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Overview of the texts

The present work takes Sartre's philosophical publications of the 1930s and 1940s as the canon of 'the early Sartre'. The restriction of the present thesis to Sartre's early work is not to be taken to indicate that I agree with, for example, Warnock (1958, xviii) that there is a radical discontinuity between Sartre's early and later, more Marxist, work rather than with, for example, Danto (1991, 134) who considers Sartre's life's work to be a progression (cf. Sartre 1981, 11-2). This thesis is restricted to Sartre's early work for the simple reason that it is in that work that Sartre is concerned with the issues under discussion in this thesis.

The primary texts used in this thesis are listed below, along with the abbreviations used to refer to them. Because I consider it appropriate to view these works as a development rather than as a corpus, they are listed in order of original (French) publication. The dates in brackets refer to the dates of the English editions used, to which all page references refer. Full details of these texts, along with those of every work referred to in the text, are listed in the bibliography in order of name and date of edition referred to.

- TE *The Transcendence of the Ego* 1936-7 (1957)
- I Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea in Husserl's Phenomenology 1939 (1970)
- STE *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* 1939 (1962)
- PI *The Psychology of Imagination* 1940 (1972)
- B&N *Being and Nothingness* 1943 (1958)
- CSKS Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self 1948 (1967)

Of these texts, I take *Being and Nothingness* as the principal work, since it is there that the theories of the preceding works are integrated and expanded to form a theory of self-awareness (as part of a more comprehensive philosophy) that is more detailed than that of the preceding works.

Reference is made to comments on self-awareness from each of the listed works preceding *Being and Nothingness*, primarily to the lengthy discussion of that topic in *The Transcendence of the Ego*, where these comments serve to clarify the point at issue. (In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre affirms the majority of the theses of the preceding works (B&N: 60, 61, 102, 258, 295, 392, 445, 575, 600), disavowing only the refutation of solipsism offered in *The Transcendence of the Ego* (B&N: 235), which refutation is not relevant to this thesis.)

‘Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self’ is the transcript of a lecture, given by Sartre to the Société française de philosophie, and his replies to interlocutors’ questions, and is concerned chiefly with the theory of self-awareness presented in *Being and Nothingness*. It is thereby drawn upon primarily for clarification of the claims made in *Being and Nothingness*.

In addition to these texts, occasional reference is made to an interview conducted with Sartre in 1975 (published in 1981), but only when the passage cited is explicitly concerned with clarifying relevant themes of the texts listed above.

Introduction

Consciousness

This thesis is concerned with Sartre's theories of the nature and extent of one's awareness of one's own consciousnesses. According to Sartre, there are two varieties of such awareness: pre-reflective awareness and reflection. Chapter 1 is concerned with the former, chapter 2 with the latter.

The purpose of this introduction is to clarify the key terms in Sartre's discussion of self-awareness, and hence to provide provisional definitions of the two concepts under discussion in the rest of the thesis, in order to preclude certain possible misunderstandings of my discussion of Sartre's theories. Inevitably, this exposition involves justification of my exegesis against competing readings of Sartre's work.

The Meanings of 'Consciousness'

In the passages with which this thesis is concerned, Sartre's key term is 'consciousness'. He uses this term in three distinct senses: in the narrowest sense, a consciousness is simply an awareness of a particular object - for example, I am now conscious of a table, and conscious of a lamp, etc. (e.g., B&N: xxviii); in a broader sense, a consciousness is a synthesis of all my current consciousnesses in the narrow sense - in this sense, my current consciousness is of a lamp and a table (e.g., B&N: 317); in the broadest sense, a consciousness is an enduring 'mind' - in this sense, we can talk of my consciousness and your consciousness (e.g., B&N: 253). The third sense is not used in any of the areas of Sartre's thought with which this thesis is concerned, and hence the term 'consciousness' is not used in that sense here. The term will mainly be used in the second sense (which will sometimes be referred to as 'consciousness in the broad sense'); the first sense will generally be denoted by the term 'awareness', although sometimes 'structure of consciousness' or 'consciousness

in the narrow sense' will be used for the sake of clarity. Bearing this distinction in mind, the sense of the term as I use it should be clear from the context.

It is important to realise that, for Sartre, a 'consciousness' just is an intentional mental relation to an object (or simultaneous group of such relations): Sartre's use of the term is not equivalent to Freud's, who reserves it for mental items or processes of which the subject is aware as they occur (Freud 1964, 70). Although, as we shall see, Sartre believes that a subject is always aware of his or her consciousnesses as they occur, he regards this as a substantive claim and not merely an analytic consequence of the term 'consciousness' (hence his arguments for that claim, which I assess in Chapter 1).

Sartre's use of the term 'consciousness' constantly emphasises his understanding of the intentionality of mental life: for Sartre, intentionality is directedness towards an object, rather than the 'aboutness' favoured by many contemporary Anglo-American philosophers of mind (cf. B&N: xxvii). The latter reading of 'intentionality' is bound up with the language of representations: it seems that representations alone can be said to be 'about' things. Sartre is emphatic in his denial that there is, strictly speaking, any *thing* (even a representation) *in* consciousness (see I: passim). He refers to representations as "idols invented by the psychologists" (B&N: 125) and sensations as "a daydream of the psychologist" (B&N: 315; cf. PI: 139). An assessment of Sartre's rejection of mental images understood as subjective objects of awareness is outside the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, since this rejection is fundamental to Sartre's understanding of the mind, I shall retain Sartre's term 'consciousness' rather than replace it with such terms as 'mental event' or 'mental state' (the latter of which Sartre anyway rejects as being too passive: TE: 109; PI: vii) which do not imply Sartre's rejection of any conception of the mind as "a place peopled with small likenesses" (PI: 2).

Moreover, 'mental state' and 'mental event' usually refer to the whole state or event that Sartre would refer to as 'consciousness of an object' - i.e., a 'content' and the awareness of that content - whereas Sartre's term 'consciousness' refers just to the awareness and not to the object of that awareness. That is, if I desire a glass of water, the mental state/event is one of 'desiring a glass of water', whereas for Sartre the object is water (or a glass thereof) and the consciousness (in the narrow sense) is the desiring.

The Synthetic Unity of Consciousness

Sartre believes in the unity of consciousness both in the sense that one's simultaneous awarenesses are unified into a single consciousness in the broad sense, and in the sense that one's consciousnesses in this broad sense are organised and presented as a unity across time.

However, it is mistaken to talk of "Sartre's single-minded Cartesian insistence on an essentially indivisible mind" (Neu 1988, 87). Sartre's unity of consciousness is not equivalent to Descartes's indivisibility of the mental: as we have seen, Sartre is particularly opposed to any understanding of consciousness, or the mind, as a unified container of images, thoughts, etc.; furthermore, Sartre argues strongly against the notion that there is a Cartesian, Kantian, or Husserlian transcendental ego 'behind' consciousness and responsible for unifying experience (TE: 32-60; cf. I: 5).

The unity in question is, for Sartre, synthetic: consciousness itself synthesises its diverse parts (awarenesses) into a single unified consciousness (TE: 38; PI: 5), and synthesises this consciousness in the broad sense with its immediate predecessor (TE: 39; PI: 14). Since, for Sartre, the unity of consciousness is the result of a synthesis of parts, there is no reason to equate this unity with Cartesian indivisibility since there is no reason to suppose that the parts cannot be disconnected from one another, the synthesis dismantled. One popular argument against Cartesian indivisibility of the mental concerns so-called 'split-brain' cases: the severing of the corpus callosum which connects the two hemispheres of the brain results, under certain carefully constructed experimental conditions, in the prevention of communication between the two hemispheres and the concomitant phenomenon of a 'split-mind' - what seems, on behavioural evidence, to be two independent centres of consciousness within a single human being (Nagel 1971, 392-402). Sartre's notion of the *synthetic* unity of consciousness, however, seems positively supported by the split-brain experiments: under certain conditions, the two hemispheres of the brain cannot communicate and so the diverse psychic elements (or consciousnesses in the narrow sense) cannot be synthesised into a single experience. That is, the difference between the split brain patient under experimental conditions and a normal individual is that the latter, but not the former, can and does synthesise distinct but simultaneous awarenesses into one single consciousness (as Nagel (1971, 409-11) suggests). The split brain patient under experimental conditions, it seems, synthesises her awarenesses into two distinct consciousnesses.

Positional and Nonpositional Awarenesses

For Sartre, awarenesses (consciousnesses in the narrow sense) can be divided between 'positional' and 'nonpositional' awarenesses. This distinction is closely linked to Sartre's use of the figure / ground distinction of Gestalt psychology. Sartre writes:

“we must observe that in perception there is always the construction of a figure on a ground. No one object, no group of objects is especially designed to be organized as specifically either ground or figure; all depends on the direction of my attention ... the ground is that which is seen only in addition, that which is the object of a purely marginal attention.” (B&N: 9-10).

Thus, for Sartre, the distinction between figure and ground is dependent upon my attention: that to which I pay attention is the figure, all else that I perceive but to which I do not pay attention constitutes the ground (B&N: 332). It is important to realise that, where Gestalt theory typically restricts the figure / ground distinction to within each sensory modality (see Katz 1951, 31), Sartre generalises it across the whole conscious range: all sensory modalities, imagination, mathematical thought, etc. That is, where Searle (1992) distinguishes the 'figure-ground distinction' (132-3) from the 'centre-periphery distinction' (137-9), Sartre conflates the two: the 'figure' is that which is at the 'centre' of consciousness, the ground is all that I am only peripherally aware of. For example, if I am sitting on a chair looking at a table, the table is the 'figure', and the 'ground' is constituted by whatever else I can see 'out of the corner of my eye', all that I can hear, smell, etc., along with proprioceptive and tactile awarenesses.

Sartre makes it clear that we do not have detailed awareness of the objects that form the ground of awareness; the ground is an “evanescence”, “an undifferentiated totality”, and “the background” (B&N: 10); I have to direct my attention on each individual person in the café in order to determine whether any of those people is my friend Pierre, whose face is well known to me (ibid.). Sartre's term for this directing of attention, which gives detailed awareness of its object, is *positing*: positional awareness, then, is a directing or focusing of attention on a particular object; non-positional awareness is the awareness I have of things other than the object upon which I am focusing attention, and hence does not deliver objects in full detail. Sartre also uses the terms 'thetic awareness' and 'non-thetic awareness' of positional and nonpositional awareness respectively. The distinction between 'thetic' and 'non-thetic' seems to be akin to the distinction in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy of mind between 'conceptual content' and 'nonconceptual content': positional awareness

presents its object *as* something, even if only as a ‘this’ (B&N: 182-3, 316-7), whereas nonpositional awareness does not have this character since nonpositional awareness does not fully differentiate its objects from one another or deliver them in detail. As such, nonpositional awareness of an object cannot involve *judgement* of that object as good, bad, fearful, etc. (B&N: xxix).

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (usually) marks the distinction between positional (thetic) and nonpositional (non-thetic) awareness by italicising ‘of’ in the phrase ‘consciousness *of* ...’ to mark *positional* consciousness and hence the ‘of’ of intentionality (directedness)¹, and bracketing the ‘of’ in the phrase ‘consciousness (of) ...’ to mark *nonpositional* consciousness, and hence the fact that, in this case, “the ‘of’ ... merely satisfies a grammatical requirement” (B&N: xxx; cf. CSKS: 133). Sartre also marks this distinction by talking of positional, focused, awareness as “knowledge” (*connaissance*)² and nonpositional, undetailed, awareness as simply “consciousness” (*conscience*).

For Sartre, then, every consciousness in the broad sense consists of one and only one positional awareness and a number of nonpositional awarenesses, just as every experience contains one and only one figure on a ground. When Sartre claims that “there is no consciousness which is not a *positing* of a transcendent object” (B&N: xxviii), he is claiming that there is no consciousness in the broad sense which is not a focusing of attention, which is not directed on a particular object: there is never a ground without a figure. Sartre does not argue for this claim, and seems to have formed it by merging views taken over from Husserl (see B&N: xxvii) with the claims of Gestalt psychology (see B&N: 9-10, 182). It might be argued that there is a familiar phenomenon of just ‘staring into space’, which phenomenon provides an adequate counterexample to the claim that there can be no consciousness without a centre of attention. On the other hand, it might be argued that further analysis of ‘staring into space’ may show that the starrer *does* think about something in particular whilst staring, or perhaps fixes attention on some distant point. Whatever the truth about this, nothing in this thesis hinges on whether or not we allow Sartre this claim.

The further claim that there is only one figure, one positional awareness, in each consciousness, is illustrated by Sartre with the following example:

“The attentive pupil who wishes to *be* attentive, his eyes riveted on the teacher, his ears open wide, so exhausts himself in playing the attentive role that he ends up by no longer hearing anything.” (B&N: 60).

The pupil is aware of the sounds emanating from the teacher, and is in that sense hearing them, but since he is concentrating on his posture and not on those sounds, he is not *listening*: his awareness of the teacher's words does not *posit* its object and hence does not provide detailed knowledge of that object. Indeed, it does seem that I cannot focus attention on more than one object at a time, that even in cases of so-called 'split attention' the centre of consciousness is constantly shifted between two objects. As Sartre puts it, "[t]he "this" dissolve[s] again into this undifferentiated totality [i.e., the ground] when another "this" arises ... the "this" is revealed as "this" by "a withdrawal into the ground of the world" on the part of all the other "thises"" (B&N: 182-3).

Therefore, a consciousness in the broad sense is, for Sartre, a synthesised structure comprising a positional awareness of an object upon which attention is directed, and various nonpositional awarenesses which can properly be called awarenesses despite the fact that they do not involve the focusing of attention.³

Unreflective and Reflective Consciousnesses

Consciousnesses in the broad sense, for Sartre, can also be divided into two types. The basic form of consciousness is of the variety that Sartre terms '*irréfléchi*', variously translated as 'unreflective', 'unreflecting', and 'non-reflective', the former of which I shall use throughout the thesis. A consciousness of this type "is directed towards objects different in kind from consciousness" (PI: 10), objects such as streetcars and clocks (TE: 49) and mathematical propositions (TE: 38).

The other type of consciousness is a 'reflection' (*réflexion*), which "is a consciousness *directed upon a consciousness*, a consciousness which takes consciousness as an object" (TE: 44). The consciousness reflected on is delivered in reflection directly, "in the perspective of naive realism" (B&N: 151). Since the consciousness reflected upon (i.e., the object of the reflection) retains its own intentional character, reflection is a consciousness of a consciousness-of-object. That is, in reflection:

"there is an unreflected act of reflection ... which is directed on a reflected consciousness. The latter becomes the object of the reflecting consciousness without ceasing to affirm its own object (a chair, a mathematical truth, etc.)." (TE: 53).

Reflective consciousness, then, still posits and grasps an object, but the object is itself a consciousness in the broad sense which (like all consciousnesses) is directed towards an object.⁴

Sartre is adamant that the object of a reflective consciousness is necessarily other than the consciousness positing it: “reflection or positional consciousness of consciousness ... [is] a complete consciousness directed towards *something which is not it*; that is, toward consciousness as object of reflection.” (B&N: xxviii; my emphasis). In short, it is misleading to talk of Sartre’s ‘reflection’ as “a turning of consciousness on itself” (Catalano 1974, 32)⁵: according to Sartre, reflective consciousness is not reflexive (TE: 44).⁶ Sartre is right to reject the possibility of reflexive consciousness: if every consciousness posits an intentional object, then a consciousness positing itself is positing a consciousness positing itself, which requires the possibility of an instantaneous episode of ‘consciousness of consciousness of consciousness of ...’ ad infinitum. This would not be an infinite regress as such (since no new items are introduced: it is the same ‘consciousness’ each time), but as an infinite iteration it is equally vicious.

If the intentional object of a reflective consciousness must be a consciousness other than the reflective consciousness, it seems that the object must be a *previous* consciousness.⁷ Although Sartre at one point claimed that “in certain cases a consciousness may appear immediately as reflected” (TE: 57), it seems that he soon changed his mind:

“fear does not begin as consciousness *of* being afraid, any more than the perception of this book is consciousness *of* perceiving it. The emotional consciousness is at first non-reflective” (STE: 56).

It seems that Sartre is right to deny that reflection can be simultaneous with the consciousness reflected upon: since both the reflecting consciousness and the consciousness reflected posit objects, to reflect upon a current consciousness would require the possibility of focusing attention on two distinct objects at once. One cannot look in two directions at the same time (see 10-11 above); “[t]o attempt to perform the double act is instead to oscillate between the two” (Honderich 1988, 84; cf. Ryle 1949, 164-5). Behaviour called ‘self-conscious’ in everyday English, such as feeling ashamed as one tells lies, does not require a reflection (in Sartre’s sense) simultaneous with the consciousness reflected on: such phenomena can be characterised as positional awareness of the lies as lies, an ashamed positing of the words being spoken.

Reflection, then, is a form of ‘self-awareness’ in the sense that in reflection one is positionally aware of one’s own previous consciousnesses. Despite Sartre’s definitions of reflection quoted above, Hammond, Howarth, and Keat claim that “reflective consciousness ‘posits’ a self as object ... [and] interprets this ‘me’ as having a certain sort of character or ‘structure’.” (1991, 107). The ‘self’ they evidently have in mind is not a transcendental ego (since they acknowledge Sartre’s rejection of that notion: *ibid.*, 100-4), but the transcendent ego (also called ‘*le Moi*’) that Sartre claims “appears only to reflection” (TE: 83). However, this ego is not *posited* by reflection:

“The ego never appears, in fact, except when one is not looking at it ... [it is] never seen except “out of the corner of the eye” ... in trying to apprehend the ego for itself and as a direct object of consciousness, I fall back onto the unreflected level, and the ego disappears along with the reflective act.” (TE: 88-9).

This ego, for Sartre, is constituted by a particular type of reflection which interprets the consciousness posited (reflected on) as a manifestation or expression of a particular ‘state’ (for example, reflecting on my anger at Peter as a manifestation of my hatred of Peter; cf. TE: 64), and thereby constitutes the ego as the totality of such states (TE: 74-6). This ‘ego’ is just one’s image of oneself, not a subject of consciousness: the ego’s “*esse reduces to percipi*” (CSKS: 114). Sartre’s theories concerning the ego are not directly a concern of this thesis, but (as we shall see in Chapter 2) are relevant to Sartre’s theory concerning the reliability of reflection, which theory is directly a concern of this thesis.

Reflection, then, is ‘self-consciousness’ in the sense that it is a consciousness of one of one’s own previous consciousnesses and in the sense that one’s ‘character’ or ‘personality’ (*le Moi*) is constituted through it. The posited intentional object of a reflective consciousness is, for Sartre, another (previous) consciousness.

Pre-Reflective Awareness

Sartre’s use of the term ‘pre-reflective’ echoes Freud’s term ‘preconscious’. For Freud, mental items and processes are ‘preconscious’ if the subject has no awareness of them as they occur but can easily become conscious of them (Freud 1957, 173; 1964, 71). For Sartre, on the other hand, we always have some awareness of our current awarenesses - of our desirings, believings, etc. - and can easily become

reflectively aware of them. Hence Sartre's referring to this awareness we always have of our current consciousness as 'pre-reflective awareness'.

That is, for Sartre "every ... consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself" (B&N: xxix). Whereas in reflection one consciousness posits another (previous) consciousness, pre-reflective "consciousness of consciousness is not positional ... because it is one with the consciousness of which it is consciousness. At one stroke it determines itself as consciousness of perception [for example] and as perception." (B&N: xxx).

Pre-reflective awareness, then, is not a particular type or special kind of consciousness in the broad sense (unlike unreflective or reflective consciousness), but is a structure of consciousness, an awareness that forms part of every consciousness: "consciousness is purely and simply consciousness of being conscious of that object. This is the law of its existence." (TE: 40). Thus, according to Sartre, there is always awareness of one's current consciousness.

"to be and to be aware of itself are one and the same thing for consciousness." (TE: 83).

A full elucidation and assessment of Sartre's theory of pre-reflective awareness and of his arguments for his position is the subject of chapter 1. For the rest of this section, I wish to clarify the notion of 'pre-reflective awareness' in opposition to two common misreadings of it.

The first misreading of 'pre-reflective awareness' is as a form of 'self-awareness' in the sense of "consciousness of the self" (Catalano 1974, 32)^{8,9}. Such a reading is in contradiction with Sartre's explicit claim that:

"there is no *I* on the unreflected level. When I run after a streetcar ... [t]here is consciousness of the *streetcar-having-to-be-overtaken*, etc., and nonpositional consciousness of consciousness ... but *me*, I have disappeared. There is no place for *me* on this level. And this is not a matter of chance, due to a momentary lapse of attention, but happens because of the very structure of consciousness." (TE: 48-9).¹⁰

This problem arises, in my view, due to Sartre's use of the term '*conscience de soi*' and its subsequent translation as 'consciousness of self', or 'self-consciousness' (e.g., B&N: xxx), translating '*soi*' as 'self' rather than as 'itself'. Although this translation

preserves French idiom, it is a technically inaccurate presentation of Sartre's idea. By '*conscience de soi*', Sartre means 'consciousness of itself' as is evident from his use of the term interchangeably with 'consciousness of consciousness' ('*conscience de conscience*'); see, for example, B&N: xxviii-xxx). The misreading is compounded by the often quoted sentence from Sartre's explicit argument for pre-reflective awareness, usually translated as "there must be an immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself" (B&N: xxix). Translating '*soi*' as 'itself', and set in context, this statement becomes: "Consciousness of itself is not dual. If we wish to avoid an infinite regress, there must be an immediate, non-cognitive relation of itself to itself [*de soi à soi*]". Finally, this misreading is encouraged by Sartre's use of the phrase 'pre-reflective cogito' which implies that Sartre considers pre-reflective awareness to include awareness of an I who thinks. However, Sartre argues that the Cartesian and Husserlian cogito "affirms too much", that its "certain content is not "*I have consciousness of this chair*" but "*There is consciousness of this chair.*" (TE: 53-4). Moreover, for Sartre, the term 'I' that appears in any articulation of the pre-reflective cogito does not refer to a part of the consciousness of which there is pre-reflective awareness or to a part of the pre-reflective awareness of that consciousness: it is simply a word that indicates a public object (i.e., one's body), used when one reports one's current consciousness (see TE: 90).

Pre-reflective awareness is a self-awareness in the sense that it is each consciousness's awareness of itself. That is, pre-reflective awareness can legitimately be called a 'self-consciousness' only if the term 'self' is understood in that phrase to mean what it means in such phrases as 'self-refuting', 'self-verifying', etc.: pre-reflective self-awareness is not awareness of a self any more than a statement that is self-contradictory contradicts a self.

The second misreading concerns the relation of pre-reflective awareness to reflective consciousness. According to my interpretation, pre-reflective awareness is the awareness every consciousness has of itself, and reflective consciousness is the type of consciousness which posits another consciousness as its intentional object. Thus, both unreflective and reflective consciousnesses are accompanied by pre-reflective awareness of themselves (or rather, are pre-reflectively aware of themselves), but this pre-reflective awareness is not itself reflective as such. Spiegelberg, on the other hand, claims that:

"In pre-reflective consciousness our reflecting actually coincides with that upon which we reflect" (1982, 504; cf. also Bantel 1977, 90-3)

Sartre does refer to pre-reflective awareness as “a reflection, but *qua* reflection it is exactly the one reflecting” (B&N: 76), in his discussion of the game of referring back and forth (later referred to as ‘musical chairs’ (B&N: 142, 618)) that is the attempt to grasp pre-reflective awareness. The misreading arises, quite simply, from the fact that there are two French words, quite distinct in meaning, that are both translated as ‘reflection’ (as Barnes warns in a somewhat too late footnote at B&N: 151): ‘*réflexion*’ is ‘reflection’ in the sense of thinking about one’s own thought, and is the term Sartre uses in discussing reflective consciousness; ‘*reflet*’ is ‘reflection’ in the sense of Narcissus’s reflection, or the “shimmering play of light on silk” (Atkins et al, 1987, French-English, 596) and is the term Sartre uses when he discusses pre-reflective awareness as the “structure of the reflection-reflecting” (B&N: 76), like a strange kind of mirror that somehow reflects itself. Spiegelberg and Bantel seem to be confusing ‘*reflet*’ for ‘*réflexion*’. Glynn (1987, xiii) makes the same mistake in the opposite direction, referring to Barnes’s ‘game of mirrors’ illustration of pre-reflective awareness (B&N: 151) when discussing *réflexion*.

Chapter 1

Pre-Reflective Awareness

As we have seen, Sartre claims that every consciousness is pre-reflectively aware of itself. The purposes of this chapter are to assess this contention and to elucidate the nature and extent of this purported pre-reflective awareness. Since Sartre's term 'consciousness' is not equivalent to such terms as 'mental state', 'mental episode', or 'mental event' (see p. 7 above), the effect of 'externalism' on theories of self-awareness¹ is not a concern of this chapter (or, indeed, of this thesis): this chapter is not concerned with whether or to what extent I am aware that it is water and not twin-water that I currently desire, but with whether or to what extent I am aware that I am *desiring* rather than (for example) contemplating or hating that substance.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre offers an explicit argument for this contention that every consciousness (in the broad sense) is pre-reflectively self-aware, followed by a paragraph which contains a preliminary description of 'pre-reflective' awareness and (implicitly) further arguments for it. I will first assess Sartre's explicit and implicit arguments, before going on to discuss some possible counterexamples and objections to his contention and comparing Sartre's theory to its main traditional and contemporary rivals.

The Explicit Argument

Sartre's argument (B&N: xxviii-xxix) is the following modus ponens:

- (1) It is a necessary condition of consciousness that there is awareness of it;
- (2) If (1) is true, then the awareness of consciousness in question could not be part of a separate consciousness (i.e., a reflection);

∴ (3) It is a necessary condition of consciousness that it be aware of itself.

Concerning premise (1), Sartre writes:

“This is a necessary condition, for if my consciousness were not consciousness of being consciousness of the table, it would then be consciousness of that table without being consciousness of being so. In other words, it would be a consciousness ignorant of itself, an unconscious - which is absurd.” (B&N: xxviii).

If this is intended as an argument for (1), then it is a particularly bad one. The ‘if-then’ statement following the word ‘for’ is merely a tautology, and the substantial claim that a “consciousness ignorant of itself ... is absurd” (assuming ‘absurd’ here to mean ‘contradictory’ (cf. PI: 11)) is not an a priori truth:

“I might be conscious (say, of an apple) and unconscious (of being conscious of the apple) at the same time, and there is nothing absurd about this; it does not entail that *consciousness* itself is unconscious.” (Danto 1991, 46).

That is, from Sartre’s remarks, we “are not entitled to conclude ... that it [the consciousness of the table] could not be a consciousness which nevertheless successfully intended its object” (Rosenberg 1981, 258). The claim that “a consciousness ignorant of itself ... is absurd” would be true only if it is a necessary condition of a consciousness that there be consciousness of it, which is precisely the contention that this paragraph appears to be an argument for.

Many commentators suggest that support for Sartre’s understanding of consciousness as necessarily involving consciousness of it is given in Sartre’s discussion of negation as a part of consciousness, “although Sartre himself never directly connects the two” (Wider 1993, 242)². Wider reads Sartre’s claim that consciousness presents its object as other (B&N: 173) as implicitly claiming that “consciousness posits itself as *not being* its object” (Wider 1993, 243). However, for Sartre, “[t]he immediate consciousness I have of perceiving ... does not *know* my perception, does not *posit* it” (B&N: xxix; cf. TE: 45).³ Furthermore, negation cannot account for a consciousness’s awareness of itself as a specific type of consciousness, rather than simply as a ‘something other than the object’. Sartre writes:

“A perceptual consciousness appears to itself as being passive. An imaginative consciousness, on the contrary, presents itself to itself ... as

a spontaneity which produces and holds on to the object as an image.”
(PI: 14).

Finally, Sartre repudiates a reading such as Wider’s when he claims that “the consciousness of my reading is not able to pose as the consciousness of the book before me” (CSKS: 123). Given that Sartre does not connect negation with pre-reflective awareness, it seems that Sartre has not supported his claim that a consciousness necessarily involves awareness of it. In his favour, what he is presupposing here is intuitively plausible: it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which I have visual awareness of the table in front of me without being aware that I am *seeing* the table, or awareness of the aroma of garlic coming from the next room without awareness of *smelling* the garlic. However, the issue of whether awareness of consciousness is essential to consciousness divides contemporary theorists for both empirical and conceptual reasons, and hence cannot simply be presumed.⁴

Even if every consciousness is such that there is awareness of it, it does not follow immediately from this that there must be some *pre-reflective* awareness of consciousness, rather than just reflection on it. Locke, who believed that “man ... cannot think at any time waking or sleeping, without being sensible of it” (1975, 109), claimed that reflection was the only mode of awareness of awareness⁵ and, more recently, Honderich has defined a conscious event as “something of which there is a logical possibility of recall” (1988, 84). Against such a conception of consciousness (i.e., in favour of premise (2)), Sartre argues that it involves a regress: the reflection must itself be a consciousness, and so requires some consciousness of it; either a final term is allowed (which would have to be a consciousness of which there is no consciousness), or the regress is infinite. Thus, he argues, it cannot be the case that all consciousness of consciousness is reflective (B&N: xxviii; CSKS 114, 122).

McCulloch suggests that the regress involved may not be a vicious one, since it does not seem to require that every consciousness *is* reflected on, but only that every consciousness *can be* reflected on. “What is wrong with the thought that we have a capacity to reflect which, although limited in practice, is unbounded in principle?” (McCulloch 1994, 100).

However, such a reading overlooks Sartre’s claim that it is a necessary condition of a consciousness that there *is* consciousness of it (i.e., premise (1) of the argument under discussion). To claim that this consciousness of itself can be fulfilled by a psychologically possible (as with Locke), or a logically possible (as with Honderich), act of reflection, is to claim that all those consciousnesses that are never reflected on

lack a necessary condition of their being consciousnesses. That is, if reflection is to fulfil the role of the necessary condition of consciousness, it is not sufficient that the reflection be *possible* (in any sense): it must be *actual*. Furthermore, if that reflection is to be a consciousness, its necessary condition (a further reflection on it) must also be actual. Thus, the view that it is a necessary condition of a consciousness that a further consciousness is directed upon it does indeed require an infinite regress of consciousnesses. Sartre, then, has succeeded in showing (2), but without an argument for (1) is not entitled to draw his required conclusion (3).

Implicit Arguments

I intend here to reconstruct and to assess further arguments for Sartre's doctrine of pre-reflective awareness, based upon his comments about conscious activity and about our abilities to report and to reflect upon our consciousnesses. It seems that Sartre intends some of these comments to constitute additional support for his theory of pre-reflective awareness, but he does not explicitly formulate arguments. I will deal first, and at length, with the least well constructed but arguably most fruitful of these sets of comments, that concerning activity.

Activity. Sartre claims that his doctrine of pre-reflective awareness is supported by consideration of conscious activities such as counting:

“If I count the cigarettes which are in that case ... it is the ... consciousness of counting which is the very condition of my act of adding. If it were otherwise, how would the addition be the unifying theme of my consciousness? In order that this theme should preside over a whole series of syntheses of unifications and recognitions it must be present to itself ... as an operative intention Thus in order to count, it is necessary to be conscious of counting.” (B&N: xxix)⁶ .

Although often read just as an illustration of pre-reflective awareness (e.g., Spiegelberg 1982, 504), this passage can be read as a transcendental argument for pre-reflective awareness: there must be pre-reflective awareness of consciousness, since we can have the experience of counting, and pre-reflective awareness of consciousness is a necessary condition of such experience. It is just this last contention that concerns us here.

At first glance, Sartre's contention seems plainly false: can we not build a simple machine that counts cigarettes as they pass by its sensor, but which has no awareness of doing so? In order to appreciate fully Sartre's argument, and to understand why the simple counting machine is not an adequate counterexample to it, it is important first to break it down into two smaller claims: that counting cigarettes requires that the intention to count is a structure of the consciousness of the cigarettes (that "all there is of intention in my actual [*actuelle*: present, current] consciousness is directed toward the outside, toward the world" (B&N: xxix)); and that counting requires awareness of this 'operative intention'.

The first of these claims is supported by Sartre's later comments on the relation between intention and action (although he never explicitly connects these comments to the argument under discussion here). Sartre believes that a consciousness, like Parliament, cannot bind its successors: the gambler's recently formed intention never to gamble again is not sufficient to prevent him from returning to the table (B&N: 32-3). To borrow terminology from Searle (1983, 84), the holding of a "prior intention" is not a sufficient condition of the satisfaction of that intention, since the "intention in action" may yield an action not intended in the prior intention.⁷ That is, if at t_1 I form the intention to do ϕ at t_2 then it is still the case that at t_2 I may do ϕ but I may not; if the prior intention is 'never to gamble again', there may still be a later action with the intention in action of 'placing a bet'.

Furthermore, according to Sartre, the holding of a prior intention is not even a necessary condition of intentional action: if at t_1 I form the intention *not* to do ϕ at t_3 , and at t_2 I do not form a contrary or contradictory intention, then it is still the case that at t_3 I may do ϕ . As Sartre puts it, when standing at the edge of a cliff "*nothing* compels me to save my life, *nothing* prevents me from precipitating myself into the abyss" (B&N: 32); I may suddenly leap off the cliff without first forming the intention to do so. It seems that Sartre is right to deny that a prior intention is a necessary condition of action: "I don't in any sense have to have a plan to get up and pace about. Like many of the things one does, I just do these actions; I just act." (Searle 1983, 84). Moreover, forming a prior intention is itself an act which is intended: only in cases of illnesses such as kleptomania do we think of prior intentions to act as 'unintentional'. Thus, if all acts required prior intentions, it would be impossible to form such an intention without a prior intention to do so, and impossible to form *that* intention without a prior intention . . . ad infinitum. In short, if all intended acts required prior intentions, no such intentions would ever be formed, and so no acts ever performed.

Since it is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition of intentional action that the intention is formed prior to the action⁸, there must be an intention in action; “[i]n order for [my intention] to come to my aid once more, I must remake it” (B&N: 33). The first part of Sartre’s argument - that the operative intention must be a part of the consciousness of the cigarettes - seems to rest on this claim that a prior intention is not sufficient to yield an action: the operative intention must be *simultaneous* with the consciousness of the cigarettes if it is not to be *prior* to it. Although this alone is not sufficient to yield the claim that the intention is *part of* the consciousness of the cigarettes, Sartre argues further that “[i]f the intention is not a thing in consciousness, then the being of the intention can be only consciousness” (B&N: xxx). There is one strong consideration in favour of Sartre’s rejection of the possibility that the intention is “a thing in consciousness”, aside from Sartre’s own project of denying that consciousness, strictly speaking, has contents (see p. 7 above): the intention refers to the cigarettes (cf. B&N: xxix); intending-to-count-x is one way of being aware of x. Given that the intention is an awareness and simultaneous with the counting itself, and given the synthetic unity of consciousness (see p. 8 above), the synthetically united consciousness (the consciousness in the broad sense) must have as parts of its structure both the intention and the counting-consciousness.

Sartre’s second claim, that in order to count I must be aware of my intention to count, is not obviously true. Ryle (1949, 176-8) and Searle (1983, 92), for example, both explicitly deny it. However, if I am unaware of the intention, then as I pass the first cigarette out of the case and take the second what explains my considering it ‘the second one’ and continuing to count, rather than (say) putting it in my mouth and lighting it? To this question, it may be answered that there is, in counting, retention of the immediate past, of my having just passed ‘the first one’. Sartre concurs (TE: 39), but if what is retained is just the awareness of the previous cigarette, this does not explain my continuing to count, my ‘remaking’ the intention to count rather than making another intention: just because I am in some way aware that I have just taken one cigarette out of the case and am now confronted with another cigarette, it does not follow that I will count out this cigarette as ‘the second one’ rather than smoke it. What is required in addition to this retention is the awareness that ‘discovering how many cigarettes are in the case is the current project’, an awareness of the intention in action. That is, what must be retained is not just an awareness of the previous cigarette, and not just an awareness of having counted the previous cigarette, but an awareness that the aim was not just to count that one cigarette but to discover how many cigarettes there are (cf. B&N 100; Sartre 1981, 35) - an awareness of the operative intention of the previous consciousness.

However, it does not follow from this that the awareness of the previous operative intention is not reflective. Furthermore, Sartre's 'infinite regress' argument (see 19-20 above) cannot be used to repudiate the suggestion that it is reflective, since that argument rests on it being a necessary condition of *reflection* that there be awareness of it, which we have not yet shown. However, it does not phenomenologically seem to be the case that between counting the first cigarette and counting the second I turn my attention on the counting of the first cigarette, rather than keeping my attention focused on the cigarettes (cf. STE: 59). Thus, if I am aware of the operative intention of the previous consciousness without reflecting upon it, this awareness of the intention must have been retained along with the awareness of the cigarette. That is, I must have been aware of the intention as I counted the first cigarette. Furthermore, it follows from this that as I count the second cigarette I am aware of the operative intention of that consciousness as well as retaining awareness of the intention of the previous consciousness (which is the same intention: to count the cigarettes). This continuity accounts for the fact that the sequence of consciousnesses appears as a unity:

“It is due to [pre-reflective awareness] ... that ... consciousness is ... like a wave among waves. It feels itself to be a consciousness through and through and one with the other consciousnesses which have preceded it and with which it is synthetically united.” (PI: 14).

It is now clear what is wrong with the counter-example of the simple counting machine that is not aware of counting. To begin with, the machine, as it were, is 'acting' on the analogue of a 'prior intention', it 'acts' according to how it is set, whereas Sartre's argument concerns acting where a prior intention is insufficient for its own satisfaction. If the machine is made more complex, so that when confronted with an item it might count it but it might not, then either the machine would 'act' patternlessly (in which case it is not carrying out a project motivated by an overarching goal, such as discovering how many cigarettes there are), or the machine can carry out a project without a 'prior intention'. If the foregoing consideration of counting without a 'prior intention' is sound, then in order to have this latter ability, a machine would require awareness of its operative intention if it is to continue to carry out that intention.

Thus, the argument concerning counting shows that it is a necessary condition of (human) counting that the subject is pre-reflectively aware of counting whilst counting. Since it is based upon the fact that counting is a unified sequence of consciousnesses over time (i.e., a series whose members are united in a single project), parallel arguments could easily be constructed for all other such sequences, including reading, talking, and even thinking. Hence, for every sequence of consciousnesses unified into

a single project, it must be the case that each of its members is aware of itself. This is not equivalent to the claim that every consciousness is aware of itself, since not every consciousness is a member of a sequence aimed at achieving a particular end. However, the question may legitimately be asked: what is it about being a member of a unified sequence that renders a consciousness self-aware? That is, it seems that being a member of a sequence unified by a single overarching goal is a property extrinsic to the particular individual consciousness of the second cigarette, whereas that consciousness's awareness of itself seems to be an intrinsic property: unless we are to allow that intrinsic properties can be products of extrinsic properties, there seems no reason to restrict pre-reflective awareness to consciousnesses that are members of projects.

Thus, it seems that each member of the sequence would have been aware of itself even in isolation from the other members. This consideration allows us to alter the conclusion of the counting argument to: every consciousness which has *intention* as part of its structure is aware of itself. This is still not equivalent to Sartre's claim that all consciousnesses are aware of themselves since, despite the obvious pun on 'intentionality' (directedness) and 'intention', there seem to be paradigms of intentional (directed) consciousnesses that do not have an intention as part of their structure, such as believing, knowing, and desiring. Sartre wishes to attribute pre-reflective awareness to such consciousnesses, claiming, for example, that "knowing is consciousness of knowing" (B&N: 53). Although Sartre writes as though all positional, directed awareness is intended, as though the focusing of attention is always a deliberate act (e.g., B&N: 67-70), to simply claim that *all* believing and desiring are intentional (deliberate) is to beg the question against, for example, Freud's position: it is to state without argument that I could not unintentionally have certain beliefs or desires.

It might here be argued that Sartre's claim can be generalised from a claim concerning all consciousnesses that have intention as part of their structure to one concerning all consciousnesses if it can be shown that the intention itself is irrelevant to the self-awareness. For example, since the intention is a part of the structure of the counting consciousness, the counting consciousness is aware of (at least part of) its own structure. The question may then be asked why a counting (or other acting) consciousness is aware of its own structure where no other form of consciousness is. However, this consideration does not disallow the more restricted conclusion that there is something special about the operative intention of an action such that the acting consciousness alone is aware of itself. Another such consideration may be based on being confronted with a cigarette and *not* intending to count it: assuming I have no intentions towards that cigarette, an awareness of my lack of intentions must be

postulated to explain my lack of action (my not counting it, not smoking it, etc.). However, it does not seem that such a move could yield the requisite conclusion: it seems that the phenomenon of not counting the cigarette can be explained without an awareness of the absence of intention, since the absence of an awareness of intention is sufficient.

Thus, it seems that Sartre's counting argument cannot yield the conclusion that "every ... consciousness of an object is at the same time a ... consciousness of itself" (B&N: xxix), although it does yield the more restricted conclusion that every consciousness that has intention as a part of its structure is self-aware. In order to discover whether Sartre has any further support for his general claim, I will briefly turn to two other arguments for that claim that can be gleaned from his writings.

Reflection. Sartre also argues that there must be pre-reflective awareness of my current consciousness, since later reflection on that consciousness is possible and such pre-reflective awareness is a necessary condition of such reflection (B&N: 74; CSKS 133-4). He claims that it is the pre-reflective awareness of the current consciousness "which renders the reflection [upon that consciousness] possible" (B&N: xxix) in the sense that "non-reflective consciousness ... contain[s] in itself a sort of latent and non-positional [awareness] which reflection then [makes] explicit" (PI: 188).

This claim is problematic: it seems that there is no a priori reason to accept Sartre's claim that reflection makes explicit that of which the nonreflective consciousness was implicitly aware; whilst it is true that there is something (viz., the *consciousness of the object*) in the object of reflection that is not in the object of the initial unreflective consciousness (the consciousness reflected on), it does not follow from this that the original consciousness must have involved some kind of awareness of that structure. All that does follow is that there must have been that structure (where the reflection is reliable), not that there must have been awareness of it.

However, this argument may rest on Sartre's understanding of reflection as a shift of attention. He writes:

"Reflection is recognition [*reconnaissance*] rather than knowledge [*connaissance*]. It implies as the original motivation of the recovery a pre-reflective comprehension of what it wishes to recover" (B&N: 156).

Given this passage, it seems that Sartre's term 'pre-reflective' alludes not only to Freud's term 'preconscious' (see p. 13 above), but also to Heidegger's term 'pre-

ontological' (a term Sartre uses, in a different connection, in the paragraph following the passage quoted above). For Heidegger (1962, 32-3), we would neither be able nor be motivated to make ontological enquiry (defined as "that theoretical enquiry which is explicitly devoted to the meaning of entities") if we did not already have a 'pre-ontological' understanding, or comprehension, of Being. That is, the project of ontology presupposes a pre-theoretical awareness of the subject-matter of ontology. Similarly, it seems, for Sartre, reflection presupposes a pre-reflective awareness or understanding of the object of reflection (i.e., the consciousness reflected on). Since this pre-reflective comprehension is a necessary condition of reflection, to claim that it itself is a product of a reflection would be to enter an infinite regress. Therefore, the pre-reflective comprehension of the consciousness later reflected on must be a part of that consciousness.

Sartre's argument, therefore, appears to be the following:

- (1) It is always possible to shift attention from the object to my awareness of the object, that is, to reflect (PI: 5; CSKS: 136).
- (2) Such a shift of attention requires some kind of awareness of the thing toward which attention is to be shifted.
- ∴ (3) There must have been some awareness of the object to which attention was shifted before attention was shifted towards it.

The first premise of this argument seems fairly well accepted (see, for example, Searle 1992, 143), and it is certainly phenomenologically true that one can (at least sometimes) shift attention onto one's own previous mental states. However, I cannot see what would prove or disprove that this is *always* the case, that *any* consciousness can be reflected upon. Furthermore, (1) begs the question against, for example, Freud who claims that there are whole mental states that one cannot easily, or perhaps ever, direct attention on (Freud 1964, 71).

Moreover, premise (2) is not obviously true. Whilst it is true that I cannot deliberately turn my attention away from what I am writing and towards this table in front of me without an awareness that there is a table in front of me, and similarly that I cannot deliberately turn my attention away from the table and towards my consciousness of the table without some kind of awareness of my consciousness of the table, it does not follow from this that I am aware of the consciousness of the table as a consciousness of any particular type (an admiring consciousness, a dreaming consciousness, etc.). That is, just as I might turn around and be surprised by what I find behind me, so I may reflect and be surprised to find the way in which I was conscious of the table.

However, Sartre evades this objection with an observation concerning the phenomenology of reflection itself: “reflection ... is never surprised by itself; it does not *teach* us anything but only *posits*.” (B&N: 155). It seems that here Sartre is right. If I am counting cigarettes, and later reflect on that consciousness, the reflection does not (indeed, cannot) deliver a surprise (‘Oh! So I was *counting*!’); reflection “is more like turning *up* the lights than turning them *on*” (McCulloch 1994, 102).⁹

However, it remains that Sartre has here only shown that any consciousness on which I can reflect must have included a pre-reflective awareness of itself. He has not shown that *all* consciousnesses have this character, since he has not shown that all consciousnesses can be reflected upon.

Reporting. Finally, Sartre supports his notion of pre-reflective awareness with the observation that if, whilst he is counting cigarettes, “anyone should ask, “What are you doing there?” I should reply at once, “I am counting.”” (B&N: xxix; cf. TE: 89). Here his claim is that I can report my current counting-consciousness without the need to perform a new, reflective act of consciousness that is directed towards my previous consciousness and thence *discover* that I am counting. Sartre’s claim here can be supported by the following consideration: whilst I cannot truthfully think ‘I am thinking about London’, for the object of *that* thought is not London but a thought about London¹⁰, it is at least logically possible to truthfully *say* ‘I am thinking about London’, for this requires only a thought about London and an accompanying verbal report of the thought. This verbal report, however, requires that I am aware of my thought without reflecting upon it (for reflection leads me into thinking about thinking about London). Thus, if it is ever in fact possible to truthfully say ‘I am thinking about London’, then the subject must have awareness of her thought about London whilst thinking about London.

It seems phenomenologically true that I can truthfully report my current thought, since it seems that I am aware of, and can report, my counting the cigarettes without having to reflect and discover that what I was doing was *counting*, rather than (say) admiring. Furthermore, this ability to report my counting cannot be explained in terms of remembering an intention to count, or some other such act that does not require awareness of my current mental states, since remembering that I intended to count is not equivalent to being aware that I am currently counting, and since it does not seem phenomenologically that I perform any mental act of recollection whatever in immediately reporting my current mental state. This claim is further supported by Sartre’s phenomenological observation of reflection (see above): I do not need to reflect

in order to discover what I am doing, partly because I cannot *discover* what I am doing by reflecting. Reflection delivers only something of which I am already (in some sense) aware; since I am already aware of it, I can report it without reflecting upon it.

However, Sartre has shown here only that if a consciousness can be immediately reported without recourse to reflection or memory, then that consciousness must include an awareness of itself, and that the phenomenologies of reporting one's current consciousnesses and of reflection support the view that one does not require recourse to reflection in order to report one's current consciousness. Sartre has *not* shown that every consciousness can be so reported. Sartre has not here countered, for example, Freud's claim that there are some mental processes (such as unconscious resistance) that are 'dynamically unconscious', meaning that the subject is unaware of them, cannot easily become aware of them, and hence cannot report them (Freud 1964, 68-71). In particular, the Freudian may argue that Sartre's argument here does not apply to dreaming, since one cannot be expected to hear and respond to questions about one's mental states when one is asleep.

Conclusions. These arguments implicit in Sartre's writings, therefore, have shown that any consciousness that contains an operative intention, any consciousness that can be reflected upon, and any consciousness that can be reported during its occurrence, must contain pre-reflective awareness as a part of its structure. These three categories are not coextensive. For example, although Sartre makes the point about one's ability to report one's consciousness in terms of activity (as do Hampshire (1982, 95-6) and Searle (1983, 90)), it does not seem to be restricted to paradigms of consciousness that have an intention as part of their structure, such as counting the second cigarette: I may believe that the figure in the distance is my brother, and be able to report without reflection that I *believe* (rather than, say, wonder whether) this. Furthermore, if I later reflect on that consciousness, I will not be surprised to find that I was believing, rather than wondering whether.¹¹ Similarly, it seems that I can move from desiring a cigarette to reflecting on that desire, where desiring a cigarette need not involve an intention to desire it.

However, these three categories do not necessarily cover all mental items or processes between them. Take, for example, a fleeting desire of mine that I neither reflect on nor report: Sartre has not shown that there was pre-reflective awareness of that desire since he has not shown that every desire is intended or that every desire *can* be reflected on or reported. Therefore, Sartre has not ruled out, for example, Freud's basic tenet that there are mental items and processes of which the subject has no awareness. A defender of Sartre's view that "every ... consciousness of an object is at the same

time ... consciousness of itself' (B&N: xxix) requires good reason to generalise the claim that is currently restricted to consciousnesses that involve intention and those that can be reflected on or reported without reflection. It may be argued that having shown that pre-reflective awareness is a feature of much of mental life, it may be considered more economical to generalise this feature to all consciousnesses than to postulate more than one type of consciousness. However, to make such a move would be to beg the question against Freud who maintains precisely that there are mental processes of which the subject has no awareness. Furthermore, such a generalisation may yet prove false.

In short, although Sartre's arguments have shown pre-reflective consciousness to be a part of much mental life, we have found no good argument for generalising this to the whole of mental life.

Candidate Counterexamples

In this section, I discuss three candidate counterexamples to Sartre's claim that *all* consciousness involves consciousness of it. I will first clarify the challenge brought by each candidate before assessing them together. In assessing these candidates, I will elucidate further the content of Sartre's notion of 'pre-reflective awareness'.

'Blindsight'. Possible counterexamples to Sartre's general claim emanate from recent neuropsychological research and the discovery of 'blindsight' and related phenomena.¹² Lawrence Weiskrantz describes blindsight in the following way:

"lesions in the cerebral cortex at the stage at which the visual inputs are normally first received, the striate cortex, ... cause restricted regions of 'blindness' in the visual field. Clinically one of the most common visual defects is one in which a half-field of vision is missing ... It was thought for a long time that those regions were absolutely blind. Patients typically say they do not see lights or patterns projected into such a 'blind' region of their fields. ... One of the surprising results to emerge recently from testing patients with field defects caused by striate cortex damage is that ... if required to respond by forced-choice to visual stimuli projected into their 'blind' fields, [they] can discriminate those stimuli, even though they may fervently deny that they 'see' them." (Weiskrantz 1988, 186-7).

At least one commentator (Natsoulas 1982, *passim*) characterises blindsight as visual perception in which the patient is unaware that he is seeing. However, it is not clear on what definition of ‘seeing’ blindsight is supposed to be an (abnormal) example of seeing: since it involves a lesion, it is physically distinct from normal seeing; since the patient claims not to be able to see anything ‘over there’, it is behaviourally different from seeing (i.e., asked a certain question, the blindsight patient will perform different speech-behaviour to the normal patient asked the same question); given this last point and given that “the sensitivities of blindsight are not the same qualitatively as that of normal vision” (Weiskrantz 1988, 190; cf. *ibid.*, 187), blindsight is functionally different from seeing; and given that an area is missing from the patient’s field of vision, it is phenomenally distinct from seeing.

However, it is clear that blindsight patients are aware, in some sense, of the lights and patterns projected into their ‘blind’ fields, yet typically express surprise when shown the results of the experiments and claim to have thought that they were guessing (see Weiskrantz 1988, 188). If Sartre’s theory is correct, the patient should be pre-reflectively aware both of his awareness of the object and of his act of *reporting* (i.e., giving information believed to be the case), but it seems that the patient has neither awareness, and believes himself to be *guessing* (i.e., producing an answer at random). Thus, it seems that the blindsight patient presents two counterexamples to Sartre’s contention: he is unaware that he is aware of the patterns, and he is unaware that he is reporting information.

However, Weiskrantz (1988) is misleading on this point. In fact, the patient’s response to questioning is not that simple:

“If pressed, he might say that he perhaps had a “feeling” that the stimulus was either pointing this or that way, or was “smooth” ... or “jagged” On one occasion in which “blanks” were randomly inserted in a series of stimuli in a reaching experiment, he afterwards spontaneously commented that he had a feeling that maybe there was no stimulus present on some trials.” (Weiskrantz et al., 1974, 721. cf. *ibid.*, 720).

One patient explained that “[w]hen I was certain, there was a definite pinpoint of light. ... But it does not actually look like a light. It looks like nothing at all.” (Weiskrantz 1980, 378). Indeed, it seems that the patients use the term ‘guessing’ to stress that they cannot *see* the stimulus (see Weiskrantz et al. 1974, 721 and Weiskrantz 1980, 378). This view is supported by the evidence that led Weiskrantz to claim that the patients’

“everyday vocabularies appear to lack words adequately to describe their experience” (1980, 378). Furthermore, the patients may be using the term ‘guess’ because they are specifically *told* to guess where the item is, or what it is like.¹³ At one point, Weiskrantz admits that

“the precise form of one’s instructions can make a difference. ... when he [patient E.Y.] was asked to report when he *saw* the light coming into his field - he was densely blind by that criterion. If he was asked to report merely when he was “aware” of something coming into his field, the fields were practically full.” (1980, 378).

Many patients talk of having strong ‘feelings’ in certain experiments, and weaker ‘feelings’ in others (*ibid.*), but this seems to be a way of describing the awareness of the object rather than the awareness of that awareness. It seems, then, that the patient is aware both of a ‘feeling’ and of reporting that ‘feeling’, but does not trust this ‘feeling’ to contain or convey accurate information. Weiskrantz (1980, 381) points out that the blindsight patient’s abilities to discriminate objects in the ‘blind’ field improve with practice. It may be that the patient learns both to trust the ‘feeling’ and to discern better its content.

Natsoulas (1982, 103-6) claims that blindsight patients cannot attend to this ‘feeling’. It seems, on the contrary, that it is the patients’ increasing awareness of the feeling that accounts for the improvement in pattern discrimination. Sartre’s theory of pre-reflective awareness must allow for this improvement in awareness.

‘Absent-Mindedness’. Another possible counter-example to Sartre’s thesis is ‘absent-minded’ behaviour, such as Armstrong’s much-discussed case of driving:

“something ... can happen when one is driving very long distances in monotonous conditions. One can ‘come to’ at some point and realize that one has driven many miles without consciousness of the driving, or, perhaps, anything else. One has kept the car on the road, changed gears, even, or used the brake, but all in a state of ‘automatism’.” (Armstrong 1968, 93).

It seems that the driving before the driver ‘came to’ must have been conscious, since “[u]nconscious driving would have led to automotive disaster” (Searle 1992, 138). However, it seems that the driver, although conscious of the road, the obstacles to be

avoided, the speed of the car, etc., was not aware of this consciousness before ‘coming to’. Thus, there can be consciousness without consciousness of it.

It seems that, in Sartre’s terminology, the driver is only nonpositionally aware of the road, the obstacles, etc., whilst positionally aware of a radio programme, his holiday plans, or whatever it is that is distracting his attention from the road (see 9-10 above).¹⁴ The idea of exhibiting purposive behaviour with only a nonpositional awareness of one’s activity is well illustrated by Heidegger’s example of using tools adeptly whilst focusing one’s attention on “that which is to be done” (1962, 99): the using of the tools is not unconscious (in the sense that without some awareness of the tools, the operator could not use them), yet the user is not aware of every movement, every twist and turn of the chisel.

It seems tempting at this point to attempt to dispose of this counterexample by emphasising Sartre’s claim that “every *positional* consciousness is at the same time a ... consciousness of itself” (B&N: xxix; my emphasis). Read in a certain way, this implies that Sartre believes that there is only pre-reflective awareness of positional awareness. If this is so, then Sartre would not be claiming that the driver in Armstrong’s case is aware of driving, since his driving does not involve positional awareness of the road, obstacles, etc., but only nonpositional awareness of them.

However, this move would be disastrous for Sartre’s position. To admit that one could drive without pre-reflective awareness is to invite the question: why cannot one *count* without pre-reflective awareness? Even if convincing reasons are given for why one cannot count nonpositionally, saving the counting argument, to admit that one could drive without pre-reflective awareness would be to undermine the derivation from that argument of the claim that “for every sequence of consciousnesses unified into a single project, it must be the case that each of its members is aware of itself” (see 23-4 above), and thus significantly weaken Sartre’s position.

Furthermore, the above reading of Sartre’s position seems a little forced. It seems clear from the context that the term ‘consciousness’ in the above quotation is being used in the broad sense of a synthetically united experience rather than in the narrow sense of an awareness which is a member of such a unity. Sartre’s sentences that emphasise that a consciousness aware of itself is a positional consciousness, it seems, are to be read as emphasising Sartre’s point that all consciousness is positional in the sense that one cannot just be aware of a ground without awareness of a figure. A consciousness is such that “on the ground of the world I am conscious *of* certain transcendent objects” (B&N: 312).

Thus, it seems that Sartre must claim that not only is Armstrong's driver aware of the road and the obstacles, but also (and counter-intuitively) that these awarenesses form part of a consciousness in the broad sense, of which consciousness the driver is aware. Therefore, in order to save Sartre's thesis, some account must be given of the phenomenological fact that in 'absent-minded', nonpositional, driving one does not seem to have the awareness of one's driving that accompanies one's usual, positional, driving.

Dreaming. According to Descartes (1984, 13), "there are never any sure signs by means of which being awake can be distinguished from being asleep". Thus, it seems that in dreaming there is no, or is not always, awareness of dreaming. This objection is avoided if dreams are not considered to be conscious experiences, so I will consider two arguments that purport to undermine confident assertion of this candidate before discussing Sartre's position on the matter.

One way to dispose of this objection is to deny that dreams are experiences. Malcolm argues that when a person says 'I dreamt so and so', she implies just that (a) on waking it seemed to her as though 'so and so' occurred and (b) that 'so and so' did not occur, and does not imply that she was aware of anything while asleep (1959, 66)¹⁵. The latter claim he considers to be absurd:

"the idea that someone might reason, judge, imagine, or have impressions, presentations, illusions or hallucinations, while asleep, is a meaningless idea in the sense that we have no conception of what would establish that these things did or did not occur." (ibid., 49-50).

Malcolm rests his claim on his definition of sleep-behaviour as "quite relaxed, nearly motionless, and breathing" (ibid., 27), justifying this definition by its being a paradigm case of sleep-behaviour used for ostensive definition. Malcolm's basic contention is that we could not establish that someone was having experiences while asleep, since there is no observer who could verify such a claim (ibid., 35-48): the observations of someone other than the (purported) dreamer cannot verify the claim, for such an observer would have to observe both sleep-behaviour and behaviour that implies that the subject is having experiences, with which sleep behaviour is incompatible; the 'dreamer' cannot verify the claim since one cannot be both asleep and aware that one is asleep; finally, the combined testimonies of the 'dreamer' that she just had a certain experience and of the observer that the 'dreamer' was asleep at the time do not constitute a verification, since either the 'dreamer' could have been faking the stillness

of sleep (so the observer was deceived) or the 'dreamer' could have been deceived by her memory.

However, all this rests on a spurious definition of 'sleep behaviour': in 'light' sleep, sleepers often do move about, perspire, and even talk, as well as exhibiting rapid eye movements and a degree of muscular tonality, and giving electroencephalogram and electro-oculogram readings resembling those of waking states (see P. S. Churchland 1988, 291-3). Malcolm says of people exhibiting such behaviour that "[t]hey are not ... fully asleep, although they are not awake", and cannot be dreaming "in that pure sense of 'dream' that has as its sole criterion the testimony of the awakened person" (1959, 99). However, it is precisely in such a state that people are said to be dreaming. It seems that here Malcolm's claim has weakened to the unremarkable, and generally agreed upon, claim that people do not have experiences in 'deep' sleep, although they may have them in 'light' sleep (see P. S. Churchland *ibid.*).¹⁶ Indeed, Malcolm occasionally writes as though that were his claim (e.g., 1959, 29-34).

Given that 'light' sleep *is* sleep, the observer can observe a form of sleep behaviour which implies that the subject is having experiences. Furthermore, given this behaviour, it seems rational to trust the dreamer's claim after waking from such sleep that she was having certain experiences, especially if her narrative seems to correlate with the direction of eye movements, the words she mumbled, etc. Finally, to say that the claim that dreams are experiences is *meaningless* on the grounds that the 'dreamer' may be misled by her memory and that such memories cannot be checked is a little strong: a similar argument could be constructed to show that it is meaningless to claim that an awake person ever experiences anything when not in the company of others.

Dennett (1976) gives a better sceptical argument concerning dreams. He argues that whilst all the empirical data we have concerning dreams is compatible with the "received view" of dreams as experiences, it is also compatible with the view that dreams are unconsciously synthesised and recorded during sleep and later 'recalled' as if they had been experienced, such that "it is not like anything to dream, although it is like something *to have dreamed*" (*ibid.*, 161). Thus, argues Dennett, "[i]t is an *open*, and *theoretical* question whether dreams fall inside or outside the boundary of experience" (*ibid.*, 170-1).

However, given that the "received view" is compatible with all the empirical evidence we have, it seems that there is no need to revise that view without good conceptual reason. One such reason may be the claim that the sleeper has no consciousness of his physical surroundings. However, it seems as though sleepers, in both 'light' and

'deep' sleep, are responsive to certain auditory stimuli, such as a baby crying, while not responsive to louder but less significant stimuli (see P. S. Churchland 1988, 294; Malcolm 1959, 32). Besides which, it is by no means an a priori truth that a person not responsive to external stimuli is having no experiences at all. Green (1968, 16), for example, distinguishes 'physiological unconsciousness' ("unresponsiveness to certain external stimuli") from 'psychological unconsciousness' (the state of having no experiences), and points out that dreams are by no means unique in their (purported) status as experiences had whilst physiologically unconscious¹⁷. A second motivation for revising our view of dreams may be that "sleepers do not and cannot *express* current convictions about the specious present (if they have any) while they are dreaming" (Dennett 1976, 166). However, although it is true that a person cannot report something of which they are unaware, it does not follow from this that a person cannot be aware of something which they cannot report: a totally paralysed person may be conscious. Furthermore, the inability to express one's experiences seems a corollary of physiological unconsciousness, which (as we have seen) does not entail psychological unconsciousness.

Thus, it seems that there is no good reason to suppose that the received view of dreams is incorrect. Therefore, Sartre must characterise dreams either (a) as created by the unconscious, and consciously perceived, or (b) as consciously dreamed, accompanied by a consciousness of dreaming. Sartre cannot accept (a) as an explanation, not only because it seems to entail that there are such things as mental images understood as subjective objects of awareness, to which notion he is emphatically opposed (at PI: 191-2, Sartre applies this opposition specifically to the concept of dreaming as awareness of subjective objects), but also because the 'unconscious' projection of the dreams would itself be a mental activity (i.e., a purposive sequence of consciousnesses) of which there is no awareness. Thus, Sartre must accept the counterintuitive thesis (b), which he does (PI: 189), but must also explain how this is compatible with Descartes's generally accepted claim that one can be deceived in dreams.

In his discussion of dreaming (PI: 186-206), Sartre claims that a dream is constructed by the dreaming consciousness's grasping of entoptic lights (spots of light in the eyeballs) and external stimuli (such as the noise of an alarm clock) as other than they actually are. That is, for Sartre, it is the nature of a dreaming consciousness to construct *imaginary* scenarios from available material. Thus, the dreaming consciousness is "imprisoned in the imaginary" and has "lost the very idea of reality" (PI: 193). If everything appears to the dreaming consciousness as other than itself, then it may be argued that (although Sartre does not argue this) its awareness of itself is an

awareness of itself as something else. That is, the dreaming consciousness is aware of itself in the same sense that it is aware of the entoptic lights. If this is the case, then it could be argued that it is in apprehending itself as a perceiving consciousness that the dreaming consciousness could be both aware of itself and be mistaken in its awareness of itself.

However, Sartre's account of dreaming seems inadequate: during 'lucid dreaming', which is not an uncommon phenomenon, the dreamer is aware of dreaming (see Green 1968, *passim*), and so is not "imprisoned in the imaginary". Furthermore, it is possible in a dream (lucid or nonlucid) for a dreamt event to appear strange or abnormal at the time (see Green 1968, 23-9 and 31-6), which indicates that the dreaming consciousness has not "lost the very idea of reality".

Moreover, it is not clear that Sartre *can* claim that the dreaming consciousness's self-awareness involves apprehending itself as something other than it actually is since such an apprehension involves a cognitive operation performed on the item apprehended. This distorted form of a consciousness's awareness of itself, therefore, would not be Sartre's "immediate, non-cognitive" awareness of itself (B&N: xxix). Furthermore, it seems that Sartre would require there to be nonpositional awareness of this cognitive operation of distortion, which itself would betray the fact that the consciousness so apprehended is not a perceiving consciousness.

Thus, it seems that Sartre has to explain how, in dreaming, a dreaming consciousness is aware of itself without apprehending itself as an image of something else, and yet the dreamer can be deceived in dreaming.

Assessment. Sartre's theory of pre-reflective awareness, then, must be able to explain the phenomenological difference between the experienced blindsight patient and the novice, the phenomenological difference between absent-minded and normal driving, and how it is that a dreamer can be deceived by dreams.

The first step in assessing these candidates is to emphasise that pre-reflective awareness, according to Sartre, is nonpositional (nonthetic) awareness (TE: 45; STE: 61; PI: 13; B&N: xxix). As we have seen (9-10 above), nonpositional awareness is indistinct, undetailed, unconceptualised awareness: it does not deliver a distinct, detailed 'this'. For example, one's nonpositional awareness of a person in the café does not deliver the conclusion 'that is not Pierre' - what is required to reach that conclusion is positional awareness of the person (B&N: 10). Similarly, "non-thetic consciousness of dreaming permits of none of the restrictive and negative

characteristics that we find in the judgement ‘I am dreaming’ (‘I am dreaming’, therefore I am not perceiving)” (PI: 189). Such conceptualisation is a feature of positional/thetic awareness only. Thus, the nonlucid dreamer does not, technically speaking, think that she is perceiving any more than she thinks that she is dreaming: she does not formulate such a thesis at all. Research into lucid dreaming supports this claim: even the lucid dreamer, it seems, makes no judgement and formulates no thesis, but simply has a ‘feeling’ that she is dreaming (Green 1968, 93-7). In nonlucid dreaming, this ‘feeling’ is either missing or very faint. Sartre’s ‘pre-reflective awareness’, then, is not full, detailed, conceptualised awareness of one’s current consciousness. It is not *knowledge* in Sartre’s sense:

“I have no positional consciousness of counting them [the cigarettes]. Then I do not know myself as counting. Proof of this is that children who are capable of making an addition spontaneously cannot *explain* subsequently how they set about it. Piaget’s tests, which show this, constitute an excellent refutation of the formula of Alain - To know is to know that one knows.” (B&N: xxix).

Again, it seems that Sartre’s term ‘pre-reflective’ echoes Heidegger’s ‘pre-ontological’: just as for Heidegger (1962, 32-3) Dasein’s pre-ontological comprehension of Being is not equivalent to the explicit, detailed understanding of Being that may be gained from engaging in ontology, so for Sartre my pre-reflective awareness of a consciousness is not equivalent to the explicit, detailed awareness I *may* gain (as we shall see in Chapter 2) from reflection on that consciousness.¹⁸

It may be objected that this reading of Sartre conflicts with what one commentator calls “Sartre’s frequent references to the “transparency of consciousness”” (Wood 1988, 211)¹⁹. However, Sartre generally does not use the term ‘transparency’ (‘*transparence*’)²⁰: his metaphor is the ‘translucency’ (‘*translucidité*’) of consciousness. ‘Translucency’ does not necessarily mean ‘transparency’: in addition to ‘transparent’ as a definition of ‘translucent’, the OED gives, “[a]llowing the passage of light, yet diffusing it so as not to render bodies lying beyond clearly visible”. Moreover, *Larousse* gives a similar definition as the *only* meaning of ‘*translucide*’, stating that because light is diffused through a translucent body, objects “are not clearly visible” (“*ne sont pas visibles avec netteté*”) through it.²¹ Indeed, it is clear that this is how Sartre understands pre-reflective awareness: he uses the phrase “a diffuse light” (PI: 14), claiming also that it is “vague and fugitive” (ibid.) and “evanescent” (B&N: 90).²²

It is important to note that nonpositional awareness is not illusory or hallucinatory. Sartre's metaphor of 'translucency' makes this clear: that which I seem to see through a translucent object (such as a frosted glass window) *is* there even though my awareness of it is undetailed. Nonpositional awareness, in Husserlian terminology, is apodictic but not adequate (Husserl 1950, 15-6); in English, whatever seems to be there is there, but not everything that is there seems to be there.

Whilst Sartre's translucency thesis does allow us to talk of awareness of current consciousness without thereby postulating full, detailed awareness of that consciousness, it is insufficient on its own to account for the distinction between lucid and nonlucid dreaming, the difference between Armstrong's driver and normal driving experience, or the improvements shown by blindsight patients. What is required is a further development of the translucency thesis that I find implicit in Sartre's work, but which he does not fully develop: the notion that one can be more or less pre-reflectively aware. At one point, Sartre writes of emotional consciousness that:

“a non-thetic consciousness of itself remains. It is to the degree that it does so, and to that degree only, that we can say of an emotion that it is not sincere” (STE: 79).

The idea of 'degrees' here should not be taken too literally: the phrase translated as “to the degree that it does so” and as “to that degree” is “*dans cette mesure*”, better translated as “to that extent”. What is required, then, is a theory of quite how (or, in what sense) one can be more or less pre-reflectively aware of an awareness. I wish tentatively to propose such a theory. To begin with, I do not wish to claim that the pre-reflective awareness itself can be of a greater or lesser intensity, only that the awarenesses (consciousnesses in the narrow sense) that make up the consciousness in the broad sense may be delivered more or less distinctly to pre-reflective awareness. If, as Sartre maintains, every consciousness in the broad sense is 'translucent', such that I am aware of it but not aware of it in full detail, then it may be that some of the awarenesses that make up that consciousness are more salient, more noticeable, than others. That may be, so to speak, because there is more of the more salient awareness. In particular, the positional awareness that is a part of the consciousness, as a focusing or directing of attention, is the *greater* part of that consciousness: my positional awareness of the table in front of me is a greater awareness than my nonpositional awareness of the shirt on my back. Just as a bright object will be more clearly visible through a translucent window than will a dull one, so a positional awareness will be more noticeable in pre-reflective awareness than will a nonpositional awareness. This is not to say that the positional awareness is itself presented adequately in pre-reflective

awareness, only that it is presented, so to speak, more adequately than are nonpositional awarenesses. This would explain why, when someone is asked what he is doing, his immediate reply reports his positional consciousness: he does not report his nonpositional awareness of his seated position, for example.

If this is the case, Armstrong's driver has a greater awareness of his positional awareness of whatever is occupying his attention than he has of his nonpositional awareness of the road. It is important to realise that he is not *unaware* of his awareness of the road, since driving along a road is a purposive activity and (as Sartre has shown; see 20-3 above) purposive activity requires pre-reflective awareness. Moreover, although Armstrong's driver is using a skill, and although it is the case that in skilled activity "the description of what one is doing, which one completely understands, is at a distance from the details of one's movements" (Anscombe 1963, 54; cf. Underwood 1982, *passim*), it is not the case that even in this situation one is *unaware* of the details of the particular situation and of one's movements. However practised a driver I may be, the pattern of obstacles to be avoided on the road is not the same every time I drive: even in exercising a skill, one has to deal with new contingencies every time (cf. STE: 59). The familiar experience of holding a conversation whilst driving, then suddenly braking as one passes one's turning, shows that even in nonpositional driving there is some awareness of the driving (at least, of the operative intention involved in the driving).²³

My proposed augmentation of Sartre's translucency thesis can also account for the difference between lucid dreaming (when the dreamer is aware of dreaming) and nonlucid dreaming (the sort that fooled Descartes). Nonlucid dreaming involves positing what might happen (being scared that *x* might happen, being excited that *y* might happen, etc.): that which is posited as what might happen usually then happens (see PI: 199). Thus, the dreamer will be more aware of his fear or excitement than of his *dreaming* as such. Moreover, research into lucid dreaming has shown that the lucid dreamer must focus attention on the images currently before her, and that lucidity is lost when the dreamer becomes excited and begins to think about (posit) what *might* happen (Green 1968, 101).

Finally, it seems that this notion of pre-reflective awareness can account for the improvements made by blindsight patients. At first the patient's 'feeling' that such-and-such a pattern is present is only a nonpositional awareness of the pattern (since she is focusing attention not on the 'blind' region via the 'feeling', but on guessing as she has been told to). As such, the 'feeling' does not discriminate objects well, and the patient has little awareness of it. However, as the patient learns that she can discriminate

objects, she begins to use the 'feeling' as a positional awareness of the 'blind' field, thereby refining her discriminative ability in that field and increasing her awareness of her awareness of the 'blind' field. A correlate of this increase in pre-reflective awareness of the 'feeling' is that when the patient answers the experimenter's questions, the patient is aware that she has a 'feeling' on which to base her answers and so no longer considers herself to be 'guessing'. Any increase in discriminative ability beyond this shift of positional awareness can be explained, within Sartre's schema, by a development in the patient's conceptualisation, or positing, of items with this form of awareness (similar to the development of the discriminative ability of a young child's eyesight).

Thus, none of the three candidate counterexamples to Sartre's thesis of pre-reflective awareness has been found to be a genuine counterexample to it, so long as pre-reflective awareness is understood, as I have suggested, to deliver a greater awareness of the positional awareness within a particular consciousness than of the nonpositional awarenesses within that consciousness.

Ostensible Objections

In this section, I discuss three objections that are often raised against claims to the effect that we are aware of our current consciousnesses, and show that Sartre's concept of pre-reflective awareness is immune to those objections.

The first such objection is, quite simply, that "I cannot, it seems, both be aware of my hand and at the same time aware of that awareness. To attempt to perform the double act is instead to oscillate between the two" (Honderich 1988, 84). Honderich supports this claim by defining 'awareness' as "fixing attention upon something ... thereby assigning it, by way of its content, to a type" (ibid.). Thus, Honderich's claim is just the claim that, in Sartre's terminology, one cannot have positional awareness of more than one figure at a time. Sartre concurs (see 10-11 above). Moreover, as we have seen, Sartre's pre-reflective awareness is not a fixing of attention, and so is as compatible with positional awareness of a figure as is nonpositional awareness of the ground.

The second objection is that to claim that every consciousness is such that there is consciousness of it seems to require an infinite regress (see Ryle 1949, 162-3), since the consciousness of the original consciousness is itself a consciousness of which there must be consciousness and so on: there must be consciousness of consciousness of

consciousness of . . . ad infinitum. To admit that there might be a final term of which there is no awareness is to violate principle that began the regress, and to raise the question: why could not the *first* term be the final term? Sartre anticipates this objection, and claims that:

“there is no infinite regress here, since a consciousness has no need of a reflecting consciousness in order to be conscious of itself. It simply does not posit itself as an object.” (TE: 45).

Sartre’s connection of the regress with positional consciousness seems to be due to his claim that a consciousness (in the broad sense) can contain only one positional awareness (see 10-11 above). Thus, positional awareness of my current consciousness would require a new consciousness of which there must be awareness (see B&N: xxviii and 19-20 above). Nonpositional awareness of my current consciousness, however, can be a part of that consciousness, just as nonpositional awareness of the ground is a part of the same consciousness that posits the figure. In short, Sartre’s concept does not require a regress since it is not the claim that every consciousness-in-the-broad-sense requires a consciousness-in-the-broad-sense directed upon it; it is the claim that every consciousness-in-the-broad-sense requires a consciousness-in-the-narrow-sense of it: one of the awarenesses that makes up the consciousness-in-the-broad-sense is an awareness of that consciousness.

This, however, seems to lead to a third objection: “A mental state cannot be aware of itself, any more than a man can eat himself up.” (Armstrong 1968, 324). Whilst it is true that a consciousness (in the broad sense) cannot be a positional consciousness of itself, and that an awareness cannot posit itself (see 12 above), it is not clear why a consciousness in the broad sense of a synthetic unity of awarenesses should not be able to contain in that unity a nonpositional awareness of the other awarenesses in that unity. Sartre’s theory of pre-reflective awareness does not require that the pre-reflective awareness itself is aware of itself, only that it is an awareness of the rest of the consciousness (in the broad sense) of which it is a part.

Rival Theories

In this section, I intend to show that traditional and contemporary theories of self-awareness (aside from Freud’s contention that we are debarred from easily becoming aware of part of our minds) can be divided between what I shall refer to as Cartesian Transparency and Rylean Opacity, and that neither are satisfactory.

Cartesian Transparency is the thesis that “we are always actually aware of the acts or operations of our minds” (Descartes 1984, 172; cf. *ibid.* 34); for Descartes, the term ‘thought’ extends over “understanding, willing, ... imagining ... [and] sensory awareness”, and is defined as “everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it.” (*idem* 1985, 195) . This view was taken up by Hume who gave a more precise formulation of it:

“since all actions ... of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear.” (1978, 190).

According to this view, whatever appears to be my current consciousness is my current consciousness, and whatever is my current consciousness appears to be my current consciousness; awareness of my current consciousness is both apodictic and adequate.²⁴

However, the latter part of this thesis is falsified by the counterexample of Armstrong’s driver whose current consciousness does not appear to him in every detail. Furthermore, the detailed self-awareness of Cartesian Transparency is, in Sartre’s terminology, a positional awareness and thus falls foul both of the objection that one cannot focus attention on two things at once and of the objection that, since the awareness of the “acts or operations of our minds” is itself an act or operation of the mind, such self-awareness requires an infinite regress.

Rylean Opacity is the view that we have no awareness of our current consciousnesses. For Ryle (1949, 167-81), I can only discover my own motives, beliefs, desires, etc., by inference from my own behaviour. However, as Hampshire (1982, 95-6), Sartre (B&N: xxix; TE: 89), and Searle (1983, 90) point out, people can usually report on what they are doing without recourse to behavioural evidence. Indeed, I may be aware that I *desire* a cigarette whilst exhibiting only writing-a-thesis behaviour. More sophisticated forms of Rylean Opacity allow that we can reflect later on our consciousnesses, but deny that we are aware of those consciousnesses as they occur. Thus, for example, Locke and Honderich (see 19 above). However, such theories require that in reporting activity, one is forced to reflect upon one’s consciousness, which phenomenologically does not seem to be the case (see 27-8 above). Moreover, such theories require that the difference between Armstrong’s driver and the normal driver is that the normal driver is constantly switching attention between the road and his awareness of the road. This is phenomenologically implausible: it seems that, in

normal driving, I maintain my attention to the road. Furthermore, if Sartre's observations concerning reflection (see 25-7, above) are sound, then an act of reflection requires a pre-reflective awareness of the consciousness later reflected on. Finally, if Sartre's argument concerning counting is sound (see 20-4, above), then it is a necessary condition of purposive activity that each consciousness that forms a part of that activity has some awareness of itself.

Another form of Rylean Opacity is offered by Armstrong, for whom a consciousness is never aware of itself, but is sometimes accompanied by another consciousness focused on it. "In perception, the brain scans the environment. In awareness of perception another process in the brain scans that scanning" (Armstrong 1968, 94). According to this view, normal driving involves consciousness of the road and simultaneously a separate, reflective consciousness taking the consciousness of the road as its object (1968, 327). However, as I pointed out earlier (pp. 10-11), it is not possible to simultaneously posit two distinct objects (except, perhaps, in cases of split-brain patients under experimental conditions: see 8, above). Furthermore, if the above consideration of Sartre's counting argument is sound then it is not sufficient for counting that a consciousness other than the counting-consciousness is aware of the counting-consciousness: the counting-consciousness must be aware of itself.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that Sartre's arguments for the claim that we always have pre-reflective awareness of our current consciousnesses yield only the conclusion that we have pre-reflective awareness of *many* of our consciousnesses - those that have intentions as part of their structure, those that can be reflected on, and those that can be reported. Furthermore, we have seen that pre-reflective awareness, if it is understood as delivering a greater or stronger awareness of the positional structure of consciousness than of the nonpositional structures, is immune to three candidate counterexamples commonly cited against theories of self-awareness. We have also seen that pre-reflective awareness evades three objections commonly raised against theories of self-awareness. Finally, we have seen that in these latter respects pre-reflective awareness fares better than either the Cartesian notion that we have full knowledge of our current consciousnesses or the Rylean notion that we have no such awareness.

It seems that the concept responsible for the strength of Sartre's theory is that of '*nonpositional*' awareness: Cartesian Transparency is born of equating awareness with detailed, focused awareness (Sartre's 'knowledge'); Rylean Opacity is born of the

same equation coupled with the observation that we do not have such *knowledge* of our current consciousnesses (see Ryle 1949, 162). It is the notion of nonpositional awareness, perhaps drawn ultimately from the Gestalt notion of the ground of experience, that allows Sartre to steer a course between Scylla and Charybdis.

However, this chapter has not shown that we are pre-reflectively aware of all of our mental life. That is, it has not here been shown that Freud's concept of 'dynamically unconscious' mental items (Freud 1964, 71) fails to refer. Sartre does have an argument against Freud (B&N: 50-4), albeit a confused one.²⁵ The general theme of the argument is that repression and resistance to psychoanalytic diagnosis are purposive activities that require *both* awareness of the semantic, rather than simply syntactic, properties of the urges and drives to be repressed and of the analyst's questions, *and* awareness of the intention in action of repressing a drive or complex, or of resisting diagnosis in order not to reveal that drive or complex. In short, according to Sartre, this purposive activity requires awareness and pre-reflective awareness, and so cannot be carried out by an unconscious mechanism. If Sartre's argument is sound, then he has forced the Freudian into the position of claiming that each individual is possessed of two autonomous minds, one of which can lie to the other. That is, if Sartre's argument is sound, it has shown that Freud's functional (see Freud 1957, 201-2) or structural (see Freud 1964, 78) taxonomy of the mental is not sufficient to allow repression or resistance as he describes them: this latter theoretical task requires that the distinction between the system unconscious and the system conscious (or preconscious), or between the id and the ego, be made an *ontological* distinction, thereby making it (contra Freud 1964, 79) a sharp boundary. Although such an argument does not amount to a disproof of Freud's position, it does require that the Freudian make the implausible claim that the unconscious is an organised 'mind', that each individual comprises more than one autonomous 'mind' (cf. CSKS: 138).

However, since Sartre's argument rests on the Freudian notions of repression and resistance, theories that postulate an unconscious without also postulating repression and resistance will be untouched by this argument. Moreover, Sartre has not countered Freud's argument that certain phenomena, such as the 'Freudian slip', constitute evidence of some sort of unconscious (Freud 1957, 166-7; 1964, 70). Sartre has not given a general argument against any concept of unconscious mental processes, and a full assessment of such concepts on Sartre's behalf is outside the scope of this thesis. Thus, we conclude that although Sartre has shown that we are pre-reflectively aware of much of our mental life, he has not shown that there are no unconscious mental processes.

Chapter 2

Reflection

This chapter is concerned with exegesis and assessment of Sartre's account of the extent and reliability of reflective awareness of consciousnesses. Sartre's concept of reflection forms a part of various interrelated theses apart from those concerning the reliability of reflective awareness, such as that concerning the transcendent ego (see 13 above). Such theses will be mentioned when relevant to the point at issue, but will not themselves be discussed or assessed in detail.

Sartre claims that there are two types of reflection, one 'pure', the other 'impure'. I shall delineate these two concepts, thus further elucidating Sartre's theory of reflection, before going on to assess his theory as a whole.

Pure Reflection

The basic form of reflection Sartre calls "pure reflection" (*réflexion pure*; e.g., TE: 64) and "purifying reflection" (*réflexion purifiante*; e.g., STE: 81). This is, he claims, "the simple presence of the reflective ... to the ... reflected-on, ... at once the original form of reflection and its ideal form" (B&N: 155). 'Original' though it is, this form of reflection "is rare, and depends upon special motivations" (STE: 91).

Although the object of reflection is always a *previous* consciousness (see 12, above), it seems that in pure reflection, the reflection always follows *immediately* from the consciousness on which it is directed (CSKS: 142). This is because pure reflection is motivated by a pre-reflective comprehension of the consciousness then reflected on, which comprehension is a part of that consciousness (B&N: 156; CSKS: 133-4). Pure reflection is not motivated by a consciousness that wishes to recall a consciousness long past: "on the plane of memory ... [w]e are ... no longer dealing with the reflective act" (B&N: 157).

Pure reflection, for Sartre, is ‘quasi-knowledge’, the reflected-on (*réfléchi*) a ‘quasi-object’ for the reflecting (*réflexif*). By this he means that although reflection is positional awareness, in the sense that the reflecting posits the reflected-on, reflection is:

“a lightning intuition without relief, without point of departure, and without point of arrival. Everything is given at once in a sort of absolute proximity. What we ordinarily call *knowing* supposes reliefs, levels, an order, a hierarchy. Even mathematical essences are revealed to us with an orientation in relation to other truths, to certain consequences; they are never disclosed with all their characteristics at once. But the reflection which delivers the reflected-on ... in indistinction without a point of view, is a knowledge overflowing itself and without explanation.” (B&N: 155).

Sartre claims that it is due to this “absolute proximity” that pure reflection is ‘certain’ in the sense that whatever the reflected-on seems to be, the reflected-on is (TE: 49; cf. STE: 24, 91; PI: 1, 187). That is, to adopt Husserl’s terminology, it is clear that Sartre believes pure reflection to be apodictic (see Husserl 1950, 15-6).¹

However, it is not clear whether Sartre considers pure reflection to be adequate in Husserl’s sense (*ibid.*), to deliver the reflected-on in full detail. Although the above passage does imply that the reflected-on is “disclosed with all [its] characteristics at once”, it also claims that reflection is a knowledge “overflowing itself” (*débordée par elle-même*) and delivers its object “in indistinction” (*dans une indistinction*) and “without explanation” (*sans explication*). Sartre uses the former of these terms (*débordante*), in *The Psychology of Imagination*, of objects of perception to express the fact that “there is always, at each and every moment, infinitely *more* than we see” (PI: 7). If the term is being used in that sense here, it seems that Sartre is claiming that in pure reflection the object is not delivered in full; if the term is not being used in that sense here, then what does it mean? Similarly, the terms “in indistinction” and “without explanation” seem to imply that the reflective consciousness cannot discriminate the detail of the reflected-on. The rest of this section will be spent analysing Sartre’s use of these three terms in order to clarify whether, or to what extent, Sartre believes pure reflection to be a reliable guide to its object.

The ‘overflowing’ of the object of perception in *The Psychology of Imagination* is attributed by Sartre to “the object present[ing] itself in profiles, in projections, in what

the Germans designate by the apt term *Abschattungen* [shadings, nuances]” (PI: 7). In the above quotation, however, Sartre explicitly denies that the object of reflection is thus presented. Soon after the above passage, Sartre links the term ‘*débordé*’ to his observation that:

“To discover oneself doubting is already to be ahead of oneself in the future, which conceals the end, the cessation, and the meaning of this doubt, and to be behind oneself in the past, which conceals the constituent motivations of the doubt and its stages of development, and to be outside of oneself in the world as presence to the object which one doubts.” (B&N: 157; cf. CSKS: 136).

Sartre evidently has in mind here Heidegger’s definition of the structure of Dasein (the mode of being characteristic of humans) as “ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in-(the-world) as being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)” (1962, 237). That is, according to Heidegger, the present is defined by my present activity, which itself is future orientated, is rooted in the past, and utilises objects and/or people around me. For Sartre, a consciousness that is part of an activity is future-orientated, rooted in the past, and conscious of an object or person. In this sense, every consciousness that is part of an activity ‘overflows’ itself since it makes reference to, and is the consciousness it is in virtue of, the past, the future, and entities outside itself. Thus, the ‘overflowing’ of the object of pure reflection is not a matter of the reflected-on having facets that are not available to the reflecting consciousness, but a matter of making references to consciousnesses and objects other than itself. The references themselves are part of the reflected-on, but their referents are outside of that consciousness. Thus, the reflecting consciousness is confronted with those references but cannot discern their referents. In the case of the past, for example, “reflection allows no doubt in so far as it apprehends the past exactly as it is for the consciousness reflected-on” (B&N: 157); inference from the reflected-on’s references to their referents is subject to error and hence no part of pure reflection.

Sartre’s claim that the reflected-on appears to the reflecting “in indistinction” and “without explanation” seems also to express this ‘overflowing’: where “mathematical essences” are (purportedly) “revealed to us with an orientation in relation to other truths, to certain consequences”, the reflected-on is revealed as referring to a past and a future that are not themselves revealed; the reflected-on appears “without point of departure, and without point of arrival” (B&N: 155). The reflected-on, moreover, may symbolise the ‘fundamental project’ (*projet fondamental*) - the (purportedly) freely chosen project of becoming a person with a certain set of character traits, a certain

biography, etc. (see B&N: 478-9) - yet this symbolisation is such that, although the reflecting grasps the reflected-on,

“it does not follow that it [the reflecting consciousness] commands the instruments and techniques necessary to isolate the choice symbolized [in the reflected-on], to fix it by concepts, to bring it forth into the full light of day ... this “mystery in broad daylight” is due to the fact that this possession is deprived of the means which would ordinarily permit *analysis* and *conceptualization*. It grasps everything, all at once, without shading, without relief” (B&N: 570-1).

Although pure reflection, according to Sartre, can provide raw material for ‘existential psychoanalysis’ (the attempt to discover an individual’s ‘fundamental project’), the reflecting consciousness cannot analyse the reflected-on precisely because the reflected-on is given “all at once, without shading, without relief”. Thus, it seems that pure reflection, for Sartre, is adequate as well as apodictic: all that is beyond the scope of the reflecting consciousness are the past, the future, the object, and the fundamental project of the reflected-on precisely insofar as these are beyond the reflected-on itself; items relevant but external to the reflected-on are not revealed in pure reflection precisely because the pure reflective consciousness affirms all and only the *intrinsic* characteristics of the reflected-on. The “*pure* reflective consciousness ... discover[s] the ... reflected-on in its reality” (B&N: 163)

Impure Reflection

A secondary and degenerate form of reflection Sartre calls ‘*impure*’ (impure; TE: 64; B&N: 155), ‘*complice*’ (variously translated as “conniving” (TE: 64), “accessory after the fact” (STE: 91), and “accessory” (B&N: 155)), and ‘*constituante*’ (constituent; B&N: 195). This form of reflection is the most common in everyday life (STE: 91; B&N: 159). It “includes pure reflection but surpasses it and makes further claims” (B&N: 155); it “effects there and then a passage to the infinite and ... affirms *more* than it knows, directing itself through the reflected consciousness upon an object situated outside consciousness” (TE: 64-5).

Impure reflection is the form of reflection that affirms the reflected-on as a manifestation of a particular ‘state’ (the “object outside consciousness” mentioned above) and thereby builds up the self-image or ‘transcendent ego’ (see 13, above). This form of reflection misconstrues the reflected-on as an appearance of a transcendent ego;

although the reflected-on is an actual, previous consciousness, the ego (that the reflected-on is understood as being a profile of) is entirely fictitious. Hence Sartre's use of the term 'constituent'. Impure reflection is "a passage to the infinite" in the sense that the state and the ego that impure reflection affirms are purported objects of which the reflected-on is (purportedly) just one appearance, which implies an infinity of possible appearances of that state or that ego (B&N: xxii-xxiii; CSKS: 116).²

Impure reflection, then, "seeks to determine the being which I am" (B&N: 170), that is, my ego. As such, "this reflection is in bad faith (*mauvaise foi*)" (B&N: 161). 'Bad faith', for Sartre, is self-deception in which the individual chooses not to notice some fact about herself. As Sartre points out, "I can in fact wish 'not to see' a certain aspect of my being only if I am acquainted with the aspect which I do not wish to see" (B&N: 43). This 'acquaintance without seeing' is Sartre's pre-reflective awareness: in bad faith, I have a nonpositional comprehension of some aspect of my current consciousness which I refuse to allow to become a positional awareness; I refuse to face that aspect in reflection. An example of such structures of consciousness which I refuse to face is the conferring of, rather than reacting to, ethical values (B&N: 38) and emotive values such as 'hateful' (STE: 91; I: 5). The direct reflective awareness of such structures of consciousness are forms of 'anguish', which is just "the reflective apprehension of freedom" (B&N: 39).

To become aware that I am "the one who gives its meaning to the alarm clock, the one who by a signboard forbids himself to walk on a flower bed or on the lawn, the one from whom the boss's order borrows its urgency ..." (B&N: 39) is to realise that my life and my activities are "without justification and without excuse" (*ibid.*). This realisation can be evaded by refusing to reflect upon my consciousness in its entirety, by refusing to become positionally aware of certain anguish-inducing properties of my consciousnesses. This evasion is aided by the hypothesising of a nature or essence which I am and in virtue of the characteristics of which I react to objective values in the world (see TE: 81; B&N: 40-1, 162). Thus, as a part of the project of bad faith, of flight from the anguish of facing one's creative role in the world, impure reflection is both the avoidance of apprehending the truth and the construction of a comforting fiction. It is in this sense that impure reflection is '*complice*'.

The project of bad faith requires, therefore, that reflection does not deliver the reflected-on in its entirety: the consciousness reflected-on must be delivered 'in profile' in order to conceal certain aspects of it. The reflected-on of impure reflection, then, is an object of consciousness like any other (where pure reflection posits a 'quasi-object'); impure

reflection is 'knowledge' rather than the 'quasi-knowledge' of pure reflection (see 46, above). Such reflection as knowledge of an object occurs, according to Sartre,

“as soon as [the reflecting consciousness] gets out of that lightning intuition without relief in which the reflected-on is given without a point of view for the reflective” (B&N: 160)

Thus, impure reflection views the reflected-on as an object in much the same way as a perceiving consciousness sees a table: from a point of view, in profile. For this reason, the reflected-on appears inadequately, as does the object of perception (see PI: 7) - there is more to it than is manifested in the profile currently presented to consciousness. Since the object of impure reflection is given in profile, it is - like the object of perception - “opaque” (B&N: 164). Since consciousness is not opaque, however, but translucent (*ibid.*)³, and since the consciousness reflected-on is not actually a manifestation of a state or fixed essence (*ego*), impure reflection misrepresents the reflected-on and is thereby not apodictic

Impure reflection, then, is a common form of reflection in which the reflected-on is presented in profile, or 'seen' from a point of view, and this profile is then linked to a thematized memory of previous consciousnesses (see B&N: 157) in order to construct a self-image which one then treats as one's 'nature' in order to evade the anguish of confronting the fact (of which one is pre-reflectively aware) that one has no such nature (see B&N: 43), that values are constituted by conscious activity rather than actions being the products of objective values (see B&N: 38). This 'bad faith' is not merely a momentary self-assessment but informs a whole way of living: “I refuse to discuss politics because I know my quick temper and I can not risk becoming irritated” (B&N: 170). Impure reflection, as a part of bad faith, is habitual.

“one *puts oneself* in bad faith as one goes to sleep and one is in bad faith as one dreams. Once this mode of being has been realized, it is as difficult to get out of it as it is to wake oneself up; bad faith is a type of being in the world.” (B&N: 68).

This “difficult” cessation of bad faith requires pure reflection. Since pure reflection delivers the consciousness reflected-on both apodictically and adequately, it delivers the aspects of consciousness that one evades in bad faith, such as one's free creative role in emotion and ethical valuing. It is in this sense that pure reflection is 'purifying' (STE: 91).

Empirical Evidence

We have seen that, for Sartre, there are two forms of reflection. In pure reflection, the reflected-on is apodictically and adequately present to the reflecting consciousness: whatever seems to be there is there and whatever is there seems to be there. In impure reflection, however, the reflected-on is presented “in profile” and is thematized. As such, impure reflection is neither apodictic nor adequate knowledge of the reflected-on. Furthermore, we have seen that, according to Sartre, there is a complex psychological motivation for preferring impure reflection to pure reflection, and that impure reflection is, as it were, habit-forming. These motivations themselves are not the concern of this chapter. Sartre’s position, as regards the nature and extent of one’s reflective awareness of one’s own consciousnesses, can be summarised, adequately for present purposes, thus: reflection is generally impure, and thus unreliable; impure reflection is habitual and thus pure reflection is not only rare but also difficult to perform.

Sartre does not adduce evidence for his claim that pure reflection is at all possible. Presumably, he regards it as a phenomenological claim: pure reflection must be possible since Sartre himself has experienced it. However, it is difficult to see how one could confidently assert that any reflective experience was both apodictic and adequate. One can assess whether one’s ‘seeing’ a dagger before one is illusory by gaining evidence from one’s other senses (can the dagger be touched?) or simply by asking others whether they see the dagger. However, if it is true that pure reflection is apodictic and adequate, then pure reflection is the *only* reliable empirical method of discovering the complete nature of a consciousness; if it is false, then there is *no* reliable empirical method of discovering the complete nature of a consciousness. Famously, we cannot look into the ‘minds’ of others and inspect their structures. Thus, it seems that there can be no independent empirical evidence which would support Sartre’s claim that pure reflection is reliable: such support requires epistemic access to the reflected-on, which access is independent of reflection; there is no such epistemic access.

It might be argued that evidence for Sartre’s theory might be gained by attempting pure reflection and deciding for oneself whether it is indeed apodictic and adequate. The difficulty with this is that if I find that my reflections are neither apodictic nor adequate, Sartre may reply by declaring them impure reflections, and if I managed to achieve a difficult pure reflection, then I would have no empirical evidence independent of that reflection on the basis of which to assess the reliability of that reflection. Sartre may argue that in pure reflection, one is so sure that the reflected-on is presented apodictically and adequately as to preclude all possible doubt over the reliability of pure

reflection. However, this feeling of certitude is beside the point here at issue, which is precisely whether such a feeling is misplaced. Moreover, to compare the results of one person's 'pure reflection' with those of another's is futile: there is no reason to rule out the possibility that we can all induce similar illusions or hallucinations by exercising similar techniques. Thus, it seems that phenomenology cannot be a method of assessing Sartre's claim.

To argue (following, for example, Ayer (1946, 48)) that the unverifiability of Sartre's claim renders it meaningless, or not 'factually significant', is illegitimate. For one thing, the verification principle - the principle that any proposition that is not a mathematical or logical truth is meaningless unless some possible empirical evidence could show it to be true (or go some way towards establishing it) - is itself a proposition that is not a mathematical or logical truth, and which could not be empirically verified unless one had an independent criterion of meaningfulness that was co-extensive with empirical verifiability. In the absence of such a criterion, then, the verification principle declares *itself* meaningless. Moreover, the required criterion which might save the verification principle would require us to declare as meaningless the unverifiable claim that perceptual evidence is (at least sometimes) a reliable guide to the way the world is (i.e., that there is no Cartesian demon), which claim is a prerequisite of verificationism. Thus, the possible independent criterion which seems at first capable of saving the verification principle in fact damns it.⁴

Furthermore, the empirically unverifiable claim that there is no Cartesian demon, or that sense-perception is at least sometimes reliable, may be a *true* claim. Therefore, Sartre's unverifiable theory of pure reflection may also be true. However, it remains that this unverifiability renders impossible any confident assertion of Sartre's claim on empirical grounds.

Moreover, it seems that since Sartre postulates two forms of reflection, one of which is neither apodictic nor adequate, his theory is not open to empirical counterexamples either. For example, the argument that reflection does not deliver its object apodictically and adequately since one may mistake one's own jealousy for hatred (see, for example, Searle 1992, 145 and 148) would be met by Sartre with the reply that both jealousy and hatred are 'states of the transcendent ego' attributed by a third party or self-ascribed on the basis of *impure* reflection and, as such, are outside the scope of pure reflection (see TE: 65).⁵

Stronger empirical support for the claim that reflection is unreliable can be drawn from what I shall henceforth refer to as 'the ambiguity experiment'⁶:

“[this experiment] involved the simultaneous presentation of an ambiguous sentence to one of a listener’s ears and a sentence furnishing a disambiguating context to his other ear ... Listeners were instructed which ear to attend to and were told to paraphrase the sentence they heard in the attended ear. ... The attended ear was always the ear receiving the ambiguous sentences” (Lackner and Garrett 1972, 361-2).

The results of this experiment clearly show that the paraphrase generally contained the meaning of the sentence indicated by the ‘disambiguating context’ rather than the other equally possible meaning (ibid., 364-6).

“At the end of each experimental session subjects were asked whether they had noticed anything unusual about the material they were paraphrasing, and they were requested to describe as much as they could about the material in their unattended ear. None of the subjects had noticed that the material being paraphrased was often ambiguous. None of the subjects could report anything systematic about the material in the unattended ear. Several were able to say more than that they thought it was speech; some said there were words (in English), but most were unable to say whether there were sentences.” (ibid., 367).

The fact that, on reflection, the subjects were unable to say much about the material presented in the unattended ear is compatible with, even predicted by, Sartre’s understanding of reflection. The subject was only nonpositionally aware of the disambiguating context; his positional awareness was of the sentence to be paraphrased. Sartre insists that reflection cannot legitimately affirm more about the objects of the consciousness reflected-on than was affirmed by the reflected-on itself. Since nonpositional awareness is undetailed awareness, Sartre’s theory requires that reflection does not deliver detailed awareness of objects of which the reflected-on was only nonpositionally aware.

Nonetheless, it is clear that it was due to the content of this object of nonpositional awareness that in each case the subject was positionally aware of the ‘ambiguous’ sentence as having a particular meaning rather than as having the other equally possible meaning or as ambiguous. It seems, therefore, that a reliable reflection will show the positional consciousness of the ‘ambiguous’ sentence to have been motivated by, or in some way to have taken into account, the object of the nonpositional consciousness. This is not equivalent to the claim that a reliable reflection will yield the observation that

‘the sentence attended to was ambiguous, and my paraphrase of it was based upon the content of the disambiguating sentence presented in my other ear’, since for Sartre the nature of objects of consciousness is a matter external to the consciousness itself. However, it remains the case that a consciousness ‘overflows’ itself in the sense that it makes reference to those objects and to its own motivation (see 47, above). Since for Sartre a reliable reflection delivers the consciousness reflected-on in its entirety, it seems that the subjects of the ambiguity experiment would have been aware - had their reflections been reliable - of these ‘references’, aware that their consciousness of the object of positional consciousness was affected by an object of which they were nonpositionally aurally aware. Since the subjects’ reports imply that they were not reflectively aware of this aspect of their performance, it seems that their reflections were unreliable.

However, it is not entirely clear from the report of the experiment whether the subjects attempted to *reflect* upon their consciousnesses of the stimuli when questioned, or whether they simply attempted to *remember* the stimuli themselves, the objects of those consciousnesses.⁷ Even if the subjects had reflected on those consciousnesses, their reflective consciousnesses did not follow immediately from the consciousnesses reflected on (the consciousnesses of the stimuli): they followed from consciousnesses of the experimenters’ questions. As we have seen, Sartre claims that a pure reflection must follow immediately from the consciousness reflected-on. A later recollection will already recall the consciousness as a consciousness of a particular type (e.g., perceiving), and this thematization requires that the reflected-on is presented ‘in profile’, under its aspect as ‘of this type’, which is the mode of impure reflection (see B&N: 157).⁸

Putting these points to one side, even if each subject had reflected on her consciousness rather than recalled the stimuli, and even if this reflection had followed immediately from the consciousness reflected-on, Sartre could still allow that the reflection failed to deliver the reflected-on apodictically and/or adequately. Sartre could declare such a reflection an example of impure reflection. This need not be the claim that each subject was refusing to reflect in the ‘pure’ manner in order to flee anguish, since Sartre describes impure reflection (as a part of bad faith) as habitual: having got into the habit of impure reflection, due to the anguish involved in pure reflection, the subject generally reflects in that way. Indeed, it could be argued that this is because the subject in question knows no other mode of reflection. Pure reflection could be understood on the model of a *skill* that one must practice in order to master, analogous to wine-tasting (a notion Sartre entertains, but does not explicitly endorse or reject, at CSKS: 142; cf. also P. M. Churchland 1988, 73-4): the fact that an inexperienced wine-taster cannot

taste the difference between wine a and wine b does not entail that no difference can be tasted between the two. Thus, one does not have to claim that only an existentialist's 'authentic individual' can discover her consciousness accurately by pure reflection; the minimal claim that only those well-practised in the art of pure reflection can so discover their consciousnesses will suffice.

Thus it seems that Sartre's claim that pure reflection is rare and difficult, on the grounds that impure reflection is habitual, and is motivated by a common desire not to discover the reflected-on precisely as it is, renders his theory that there is a reliable form of reflection as well as an unreliable one unfalsifiable, since it allows Sartre to declare that any empirical evidence brought against the possibility of pure reflection such examples are examples of the wrong sort of reflection. It must be noted, though, that Sartre's theory of impure reflection is far from an ad hoc measure designed expressly to deflect possible counter-examples brought against the view that reflection can be a reliable guide to its object. The theory of impure reflection clearly developed (from TE: 60-93 to B&N: 150-70) as a part of Sartre's theory that the ego is not a thing in, or 'behind', consciousness but is an object constructed by consciousness (cf. also I: 5; Sartre 1981, 10-11), and his related theory of bad faith. That the theory of impure reflection also neutralises any counterexamples brought against the claim that there is a reliable form of reflection is not, it seems, the purpose of it.

To argue (following, for example, Flew (1950, 7-8)) that an hypothesis that is in principle unfalsifiable - an hypothesis that is formulated such that there is no possible evidence that can be brought against it - is a meaningless hypothesis, is as illegitimate as Ayer's verificationism. Flew's claim declares itself meaningless unless it can in principle be empirically falsified. Such a falsification would require that there be a hypothesis that is both meaningful and in principle unfalsifiable brought as a counterexample. However, since every unfalsifiable hypothesis is declared meaningless by Flew's criterion, this criterion logically precludes the possibility of finding the counterexample required to falsify it. As such, it is itself unfalsifiable and thus declares itself meaningless. Moreover, since an empirically unfalsifiable claim - such as the claim that all sentient life will one day die out - may be true, it seems that Sartre's claim may be true despite its unfalsifiability.

However, there is certainly room for scepticism concerning the unfalsifiability of Sartre's theory that some but not all reflection is reliable. Sartre is obviously aware that people make errors when reflecting on their own consciousnesses, yet (as he himself points out) he requires that reflection be at least sometimes reliable in order to pursue his project of phenomenological investigation into the nature and workings of

consciousness. Sartre's phenomenology requires that pure reflection be possible (see STE: 91; PI: 1, 11; B&N: 150, 156). In short, Sartre's claim that there is a particular form of reflection that is both apodictic and adequate, yet sufficiently rare and difficult to perform to preclude any possible empirical evidence for the claim that there is no such reflection, is suspiciously convenient: Sartre needs this claim in order to protect his philosophical methodology from certain empirically based and devastating criticisms. This suspicion is deepened when one takes into account the empirical unverifiability of Sartre's theory: it seems that there are no empirical grounds on which Sartre can support his claim, and hence no empirical grounds on which he can have discovered that pure reflection is apodictic and adequate. However, suspicion - even legitimately motivated suspicion - does not constitute refutation: a 'suspiciously convenient' theory may yet be a true theory. Indeed, these considerations may be taken in another way: since the theory of pure reflection is all that Sartre requires to legitimate his methodology, and since there are no empirical considerations that show pure reflection to be impossible, there are no empirical considerations against Sartre's methodology. However, since there are no empirical considerations that can support the theory of pure reflection, there is no possible empirical vindication of Sartre's methodology either. Empirically, we are at an impasse.

This impasse is not in itself as problematic for Sartre's theory as it might at first seem. The following consideration might serve to somewhat alleviate any scepticism motivated by the unverifiability and unfalsifiability of Sartre's theory. To the question of whether reflection is a reliable (apodictic and adequate) guide to the consciousness reflected on, there seem to be three logically possible broad answers: (a) reflection is always reliable; (b) reflection is sometimes reliable; (c) reflection is never reliable. Sartre's position is a form of (b). Answer (a) is in principle empirically falsifiable, and has in fact been empirically falsified by experiments such as the ambiguity experiment discussed above (see also Nisbett and Wilson 1977, 233-42). Falsification of (c) would require empirical knowledge that there had been at least one reliable reflection, which itself would constitute a verification of Sartre's basic claim that reflection is sometimes reliable. As we have seen, such a verification is impossible. Hence, (c) cannot be falsified. Furthermore, as we have seen, no amount of empirical evidence supports (c) rather than (b), since no amount of empirical evidence falsifies (b). Thus, the unverifiability and unfalsifiability of Sartre's theory leaves that theory in good company. In the company, in fact, of the only other candidate answer to the question of the reliability of reflection that has not been shown to be false.

As empirical evidence cannot furnish us with reasons for affirming or for denying Sartre's theory that reflection is at least sometimes apodictic and adequate, we must turn to conceptual arguments concerning this claim.

Conceptual Considerations

Sartre does not argue for the possibility of apodictic and adequate reflection. Presumably, he considers his concept of pure reflection to be a phenomenological description of such an experience, to be assessed phenomenologically. However, we have seen above that phenomenology cannot prove that pure reflection is apodictic and adequate.

The claim that apodictic and adequate reflection is possible could be supported by the postulation of some conceptual or logical link between the concept of pure reflection and the nature of the consciousness reflected on. One such move is to define 'pure reflection' such that a pure reflection by definition delivers its object apodictically and adequately. However, such a move leaves unanswered the crucial question of whether that concept is ever or could ever be instantiated, the question of whether such reflection is psychologically possible. The only other such move, it seems, would be to define consciousness such that it could not have any elements that did not appear to a certain type of reflection. This move would affirm the adequacy of pure reflection, but not its apodicticity. However, Sartre argues that we "cannot ... say that the *esse* of that which is reflected-on is a *percipi* since its being is such that it does not need to be perceived [i.e., to be the object of a positional consciousness] in order to exist" (B&N: 150; cf. TE: 45). To deny this observation is to claim that every positional consciousness is the object of a further positional consciousness, which is to begin an infinite regress. Although a consciousness cannot be defined as the object of an actual pure reflection, it could be defined as the object of a possible pure reflection. However, to define a consciousness as an object of a *logically possible* pure reflection is again to ignore the issue of whether this logical possibility is also a psychological possibility, and to claim that a consciousness just is an object of a *psychologically possible* pure reflection is simply to reiterate Sartre's theory rather than provide a conceptual consideration in favour of it.

Given that no headway can be made for Sartre either by defining 'pure reflection' in terms of the consciousness reflected-on or by defining that consciousness in terms of pure reflection, it seems that the only conceptual considerations that may support Sartre's view would be concerned with the way in which reflection is aware of its

object. For Descartes, for example, our awareness of our own minds does not admit of error because mental items are known directly to the mind as opposed to the dubitable external world which is known only indirectly: error, for Descartes, occurs when an idea before the mind purports to represent an external object but does not actually correspond with any item outside the mind; error is then impossible in the case of awareness of our own minds since that awareness is not mediated by ideas (Descartes 1985, 196-7). This move itself cannot help Sartre since he rejects the indirect realist's claim that we are aware not of external objects but of internal representations of those objects (see p. 7, above), and so cannot distinguish 'internal' awareness from 'external' awareness, or indeed apodictic awareness from non-apodictic awareness, or adequate awareness from inadequate awareness, in this way.

However, according to Sartre, pure reflection is distinguished from perception and from impure reflection by the fact that the former does not present its object 'in profile' or 'from a point of view' (B&N: 155). Sartre further claims that:

"the certitude of the [pure] reflective act comes from apprehending consciousness without facets, without profiles, completely (without *Abschattungen*). This is evidently so." (TE: 49).

Unfortunately for Sartre, it is far from evident that an awareness free from *Abschattungen* is necessarily apodictic and adequate. To begin with, this feature of a consciousness cannot guarantee its adequacy. Sartre's thought, it seems, is that when I am aware of an object in profile (e.g., when I see an ashtray), that object has aspects that I cannot see, such as a back and an underside. However, it does not follow from this that an object has hidden characteristics *only if* it is delivered in profile. It may simply be the case that in pure reflection all the object's characteristics that are delivered are delivered at once, and those that are not delivered cannot (unlike the underside of the ashtray) be inferred from those that are delivered. An appearance without profiles, then, does not itself guarantee that the appearance is an appearance of the complete object.

Moreover, neither does lack of profile guarantee apodicticity. An experience is apodictic only if it is inconceivable that the experience occurs when its object does not exist (see Husserl 1950, 16). As Armstrong (1968, 106-7) points out, since the mental event desiring-a-cigarette and the mental event reflecting-on-a-desire-for-a-cigarette are 'distinct existences', it is at least logically possible for the latter to have occurred without the former. Thus, the entire object of reflection could be illusory (cf. P. M. Churchland 1988, 77). A defender of Sartre's theory might reply to this point that the

two mental events are not independent of one another but are united by a “bond of being” (B&N: 151), such that it is impossible for there to be a reflection without the existence of the object of reflection. However, this argument does not preclude the possibility that an event may seem subjectively to be a reflection when in fact it is not a reflection at all but an hallucination. To defend Sartre from Armstrong’s objection on the grounds that the reflected-on is given “as having always been there” (B&N: 332; cf. B&N: 152) is to beg the question: this property of the purportedly-reflected-on may be hallucinated along with the rest of the purportedly-reflected-on. It seems that as long as convincing hallucination is possible, it is possible for a seeming-reflection to be an hallucination. Indeed, Sartre himself allows that one may, in a dream, seem to reflect when one is not in fact reflecting (PI: 204). Thus, the way in which an object is presented in reflection cannot guarantee apodicticity any more than can any other characteristic of reflection: all such characteristics may be hallucinated. To this, however, Sartre may reply that in hallucination there is pre-reflective awareness of hallucinating (just as in dreaming there is pre-reflective awareness of dreaming), and in reflection the consciousness reflecting is pre-reflectively aware of reflecting. However, it may be replied to this that since pre-reflective awareness is not adequate or a conceptualised awareness, pre-reflective awareness cannot be relied upon to distinguish reflecting from hallucinating, that in order to be *sure* which of the two consciousnesses one is currently undergoing, to have a full understanding of a consciousness, one must reflect on that consciousness (see 36-8, above). This new reflection may also be illusory.

Thus, it seems that no conceptual tie can be established between pure reflection and its object that would guarantee the apodicticity and adequacy (or, indeed, either feature) of reflection, and that Sartre’s own observations on the nature of reflection are not sufficient to yield these features either. The question remains, however, whether there are any sound conceptual reasons to reject the possibility of apodictic and adequate reflection.

One way of arguing that reflection is necessarily unreliable is to claim that since reflection is a form of awareness, and all awareness is in some way unreliable, reflection is unreliable. P. M. Churchland argues in this way, giving the following evidence for the claim that all awareness is unreliable:

“In discriminating red from blue, sweet from sour, and hot from cold, our external senses are actually discriminating between subtle differences in intricate electromagnetic, stereochemical, and micromechanical properties of physical objects. But our senses are not

sufficiently penetrating to reveal on their own the detailed nature of those properties.” (1988, 29).

Thus, argues Churchland, it should come as no surprise to find that reflective awareness is similarly deceptive, substituting qualities that are not ‘really’ there for the intricate neural patterns that alone are present.

Sartre disagrees with the basic premise of this argument. the claim that secondary qualities are not ‘real’, writing that “[t]he appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it *is* the essence. ... essence, as the principle of the series, is definitely only the concatenation of appearances” (B&N: xxii; cf. CSKS: 120). A full assessment of this claim is outside the scope of the present work. Moreover, it is unnecessary. Churchland’s inference from ‘external’ senses to reflection is an illegitimate one: on the scientific realist account, the colours of my experience are constituted by the reaction of particular rods and cones in my eyes to the electromagnetic waves making contact with them; reflection involves no sense-organ to react to the ‘true’ nature of the reflected-on and misrepresent it. As Armstrong (1968, 325) points out, reflection is best modelled not on sense-perception but on proprioception - that awareness that each person has of the position of his or her limbs that does not require a sense organ and is such that only the subject can be aware in this way of her limbs. Although proprioception is not infallible (see Sacks 1986, 63-6), neither is it systematically deceptive. In particular, proprioception does not seem to deliver anything akin to the ‘secondary qualities’ listed by Churchland. Finally, Churchland’s argument as a whole begs the question: his conceptual claim that awareness is necessarily unreliable is based upon an empirical generalisation that may turn out to be false; it may simply be that reflection (or pure reflection) provides the counterexample to the claim that all awareness is unreliable. That is, the premise that all awareness is unreliable can be justified only if it can be shown that reflection is necessarily unreliable.

A stronger and more radical argument against Sartre’s theory is the argument that there are no fixed facts to be discovered about any particular consciousness, so the distinction between reliable and unreliable reflection is dissolved. One such argument can be drawn from Dennett’s ‘multiple drafts’ model of the mind. Dennett writes:

“all varieties of thought or mental activity ... are accomplished in the brain by parallel, multitrack processes of interpretation and elaboration of sensory inputs. Information entering the nervous system is under continuous “editorial revision”. ... Probing this stream at different places and times produces different effects, precipitates different

narratives from the subject ... there [is not] a single narrative (the “final” or “published” draft, you might say) that is canonical - that is the *actual* stream of consciousness of the subject, whether or not the experimenter (or even the subject) can gain access to it.” (1991, 111-3).

In short, Dennett is arguing that since “[w]e must stop thinking of the brain as if it had a single functional summit or central point” (ibid., 111), we must agree that “there are no fixed facts about the stream of consciousness independent of particular probes.” (ibid., 138). Although Dennett propounds his theory in terms of alterations made to representational contents, this latter quotation implies that this theory is to be applied to what Sartre calls the consciousness itself as well as to the object as it appears to consciousness (the ‘phenomenon’). Thus, there are “no fixed facts” about whether I was angry with Peter yesterday. My current memory of the event that indicates to me that I was angry with him is no more or less reliable than yesterday’s reflection that I was not angry with him: each ‘probe’ accurately reports its object, which objects are different but equally valid drafts of my catching sight of Peter.

Dennett seems to use the term ‘conscious’ in a different sense to Sartre. For Dennett, to say that an organism is conscious of an object is to say that in that organism there are partial neural (or equivalent) representations of that object in that organism’s brain. Dennett’s ‘stream of consciousness’ is the stream of continuous editing and revision of neural representations; for Sartre, the stream of consciousness is what Dennett calls “the *subjective* or *narrative* sequence ... the temporal smear of the point of view of the subject” (1991, 136). In this sequence of “experienced time”, whether or not it corresponds to “objective time” (ibid.), the subject is aware or conscious (in Sartre’s sense) of objects in the world (I: 4; PI: 4; B&N: xxvii), not of neural representations (cf. STE: 33-4). That is, I am now conscious of this word-processor, later I will be conscious of the street, etc. Within *this* stream of consciousness, there simply *is* a moment when I first catch sight of Peter, and this consciousness is of a certain sort (e.g., anger). Whatever the relation of this ‘catching sight of Peter’ to the various stages of neural editing of partial Peter representations, this ‘catching sight’ is the canonical or published ‘draft’ of my awareness of Peter within the stream of consciousness, within the temporal smear of my point of view.

Even so, Dennett may still be right to claim that neural patterns corresponding to items acting on my sense organs are under constant revision as they move around the brain. In which case, a weaker claim against reflection may be made: since the canonical draft of the experience is followed by later edited drafts, it may be impossible to recall, or to reflect upon, the canonical draft. All reflection, therefore, is unreliable.

However, as we have seen, Sartre's claim is not that reflection is always reliable, but that there is a particular species of reflection that is reliable. Such reflections, according to Sartre are difficult to perform and follow on immediately (in experienced time) from the consciousness reflected on. Sartre agrees that memory is unreliable (TE: 48; B&N: 157). The weaker Dennettian argument against the possibility of pure reflection would be devastating only if it could be shown that the canonical draft of the consciousness is always and necessarily altered immediately after 'publication', that one cannot immediately focus attention on it. This strong claim, however, has not been shown: all that has been shown is that editing and revision does occur in the brain, which does not itself entail that pure reflection is impossible.

Thus, we have seen that neither arguments against the reliability of reflection on the grounds that all awareness is unreliable, nor arguments based on the notion that the object of reflection is constantly revised in the brain, can prove that pure reflection is impossible. The latter species of argument do, however, show that reflection is often unreliable, especially if the reflection is performed some time after the consciousness reflected on, and therefore is reliant on memory, with which claim Sartre concurs.

Conclusions

Sartre's theory of reflection, then, is that reflection is usually unreliable since the unreliable form of reflection is both motivated by a common desire and habitual, but that reliable (apodictic and adequate) reflection is possible. We have found that no empirical evidence can count either for or against this view, although empirical evidence does show that reflection is at least sometimes unreliable. We have seen further that there are no conceptual arguments that prove either that reliable reflection is psychologically possible, or that pure reflection is psychologically impossible.

Thus, we are left with the verdict (or non-verdict) of 'not proven'. On the positive side, Sartre is right to reject the Cartesian idea that reflection is necessarily infallible or incorrigible, but negatively we have not found any reason to decide between his theory and the view that reflection is always unreliable. This difficulty, however, is a difficulty for any theory of reflection: either it claims that all reflection is reliable, which is false, or it claims either that reflection is sometimes reliable or that reflection is never reliable. There is no reason to prefer either of these latter two over the other.⁹

There remains a suspicion. Sartre's 'pure reflection' seems to be an activity available only to those well-practised in the art of reflecting. In Sartre's theory as a whole, such a person is the existentialist hero who evades bad faith. Minimally, and given only those parts of the theory with which this thesis is concerned, such a person is the practising phenomenologist. Sartre's methodology, therefore, requires the claim that there is a reliable species of reflection, but Sartre cannot empirically, phenomenologically, or conceptually show this to be the case. The claim that it is the case, therefore, is suspiciously convenient for Sartre's purposes.

Concluding Remarks

We have seen that Sartre's theories of pre-reflective awareness and reflection are coherent and offer a distinctive contribution to the debate over the nature and extent of our awareness of our own consciousnesses.

In particular, we have seen that pre-reflective awareness is superior to both the Cartesian view that we always have perfect awareness of our current consciousnesses and the Rylean view that we are unaware of our current consciousnesses, and that the concept responsible for the strength of Sartre's view is 'nonpositional', indistinct or undetailed, awareness. However, we have also seen that despite Sartre's renowned opposition to the notion of 'unconscious' mental states (see B&N: xxviii; CSKS: 138), his arguments for pre-reflective awareness have failed to show that we are aware of all of our 'consciousnesses' (in his sense of that term; see p. 7, above). Assessment of Sartre's opposition to the notion of the unconscious, it seems, should deal not only with Sartre's explicit argument against Freud but also with whether or how Freud's proposed evidence of the unconscious could be accommodated within Sartre's schema without reference to an unconscious (see p. 44, above). In particular, this would involve an assessment of the merits Sartre's theory of 'bad faith', as opposed to Freudian repression and resistance, as a theory of self-deception.

We have seen further that Sartre's theory that reflection is generally unreliable but there is a rare, reliable form of reflection (on which Sartre's philosophical methodology rests) cannot be shown to be true or be shown to be false. However, we have also seen that the same is true of the theory that all reflection is unreliable, and that the theory that all reflection is reliable has been shown to be false. Further assessment of Sartre's theory of reflection, it seems, should involve assessment of Sartre's claims concerning the motivation and habitual nature of impure reflection, to discover whether those (or similar, augmented) claims can be empirically or conceptually verified or falsified. This too requires an analysis and assessment of Sartre's theory of bad faith.

Notes

Introduction

¹ Here the distinction between Sartre's understanding of intentionality as 'directedness' and the contemporary understanding of intentionality as 'aboutness' becomes clear. Sartre's nonpositional awareness can be said to display 'aboutness', since items are present to consciousness, but it does not display directedness: the directedness is the focusing, the positing; the item posited is the intentional object (TE: 41).

² It may be argued that positional awareness cannot be equated with knowledge since I could have positional awareness of the proposition '2+2=5'. However, it may be argued that this *is* knowledge of the proposition '2+2=5', which is not to be confused with knowledge *that* the proposition '2+2=5' is true (or, knowledge that 2+2=5). Here 'knowledge' is being used in a sense similar to Russell's 'knowledge by acquaintance', meaning that the object is present to consciousness, and can be inspected in its entirety. Ryle (1949, 161) attacks such a use of 'know' on the grounds that it "abuse[s] the logic and even the grammar of the verb 'to know'". However this may be in English, it is not the case with '*connaître*', which is often best translated as 'acquaintance with'. Moreover, there is at least a close connection between Sartre's use of the term 'knowledge' and the sense on which Ryle insists ('knowledge that x'): if I am nonpositionally aware of a figure standing to the left of the centre of my attention, and that person is my brother, I may not know that that person is my brother simply because I do not have sufficiently detailed awareness of him. To gain such awareness would require positional awareness, or knowledge, of him.

³ The distinction between nonpositional consciousness and unconsciousness is important: nonpositional awareness *is* awareness (cf. B&N: 334). Sartre talks of nonpositional "consciousness (of the body)" as a part of action (B&N: 330) and, as Searle puts it, "it is a mistake to say that, for example, I am unconscious of the feeling of my shirt against my skin in the sense in which I am unconscious of the growth of my toenails." (1992, 138).

⁴ Part of the confusion over Sartre's concept of reflection arises from Sartre's claim that reflective awareness is positional whereas pre-reflective awareness is not. Danto, for example, confuses 'reflective' for 'positional' when he talks of "the reflective consciousness I have of objects" as opposed to pre-reflective awareness of awareness (1991, 47). Mirvish (1987, *passim*) does the same.

⁵ Such a definition is not misleading if the term 'consciousness' is understood as being used in the broadest sense (see n. 6, below). Catalano is unclear over the meaning of 'consciousness' in his work.

⁶ When Sartre makes claims such as the claim that "[e]vidently the reflective *is* the reflected-on" (B&N: 155), he is discussing reflection in terms not of consciousness but of 'being for-itself' (*être pour-soi*), a term roughly equivalent to consciousness in the broadest sense of an enduring 'mind' (B&N: 77, 103). Thus, Sartre is claiming not that the reflecting consciousness is the consciousness reflected-on, but that in reflection, it is the same *pour-soi* that is reflecting and reflected-on. That is, I can only reflect on my *own* previous consciousnesses - I cannot reflect (in Sartre's sense) on a consciousness that is part of the stream of consciousness of another (see B&N: 153, 222; CSKS: 121). In the absence of any evidence of such a form of telepathy, this claim seems sufficiently plausible to allow Sartre to hold it. Wider's reading of Sartre as claiming that "the reflective must be and not be the reflected-on" (Wider 1989, 339) is unnecessarily paradoxical: the reflective is a consciousness distinct from the reflected-on, but both belong to the same *pour-soi*. Similarly, Glynn's discussion of Sartrean

reflection in terms of reflecting and reflected “subjects” (1987, x-xii) is misguided: the reflecting and the reflected-on are distinct consciousnesses belonging to the same ‘subject’, if ‘subject’ here is understood as *pour-soi*.

⁷ This is not to be confused with the claim that reflection just is memory. Sartre talks of “non-reflective memories of unreflective consciousnesses” (TE: 48; cf. TE: 46-7), the intentional objects of which are the intentional objects of previous consciousnesses rather than those consciousnesses themselves.

⁸ Catalano is inconsistent on this matter, claiming for example that “consciousness is *directly* an awareness of something other than itself and simultaneously and indirectly an awareness of itself; as when we are absorbed in a book, we are directly aware of reading and indirectly aware of *ourselves* as reading.” (1974, 33). On the contrary, if consciousness is directly aware of an object and indirectly aware of itself, then in reading there is direct awareness of the text and indirect awareness of reading (see TE: 46-7).

⁹ For talk of ‘self’ as an element in pre-reflective awareness, see also Bantel (1977, 86), Leland (1975, *passim*), McCulloch (1994, 10), and Macann (1993, 114). It is unclear whether Manser (1966, 53) and Hammond, Howarth, and Keat (1991, 107) mean to include a self in their definitions of pre-reflective awareness as awareness “of what one is doing”, or whether this is just careless wording.

¹⁰ Manser (1966, 6) points out that this is “very like” Hume’s assertion that:

“when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other ... I can never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and can never observe any thing but the perception.” (Hume 1978, 252).

However, there are differences between Hume’s claim and Sartre’s, and making these differences explicit may help to clarify Sartre’s position. Firstly, Hume’s ‘entry into himself’ is, presumably, an act of what Sartre calls reflective awareness rather than unreflective awareness. If it were the latter, Hume would begin with a sentence like ‘when I am aware of a backgammon set ...’. Sartre believes that the self *is* present, albeit fleetingly, in certain reflective experiences, although this ‘self’ is not the Cartesian ego that Hume denied (see pp. 8 and 13, above). Secondly, Sartre believes that in reflection, the object of the consciousness reflected on is present along with that consciousness itself. Whether Hume agrees is difficult to tell: it depends on whether he means by ‘perception’ the object of perception or the whole mental event ‘consciousness-of-object’.

Chapter 1

¹ It seems that if Putnam (1975, *passim*) is right, and the concept ‘water’ (for example) refers to the Lockean ‘real essence’ of water (i.e., H₂O) whether or not the thinker of the thought containing that concept is aware of this real essence, then a person may not know whether she desires water or twin-water, since she may not know that there is a difference between them, or with which of the two she has previously had dealings. Incidentally, it seems that Sartre would agree that one’s understanding of one’s own thoughts and experiences is limited by the fact that the essence of the object is always beyond one (see TE: 40; B&N: xxvii), although Sartre’s understanding of a thing’s ‘essence’ (being) is not Putnam’s (see B&N: xxv-xxvii; CSKS: 120).

² Blackham (1952, 111), Macann (1993, 114), Warnock (1970, 94), and Wider (1993, 242-3) are among those who make this connection between pre-reflective awareness and negation.

³ Wider may be basing her reading of Sartre on his claim that “in the perception of the object, the For-Itself acknowledges itself to itself as not being the object” (B&N: 140). To preserve consistency with Sartre’s claims that pre-reflective consciousness is nonpositional, this ‘acknowledgement’ must be understood as nonpositional.

⁴ For a swift summary of the debate surrounding it, see Wider 1993, 241-2 and 244-5.

⁵ It may be argued that Locke did not think that all consciousness of consciousness is reflective, for although he claimed that the ideas of “Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing, and all the different actings of our own Minds” are acquired solely “when the Soul comes to reflect on, and consider” the “operations of our own Minds” (1975, 105; emphasis removed), he also wrote that:

“It [is] impossible for any one to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive. When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will any thing, we know that we do so.” (1975, 335).

Exegesis of Locke’s *Essay* is not the point here. I will take the ‘awareness of awareness’ in the latter quotation to be (according to Locke) constituted by the psychological possibility of reflection (see his discussion of the ability to report one’s thoughts *after* thinking them: 1975, 111-3), but it does not matter for my purposes whether this is an accurate rendering of Locke’s position: it remains the case that somebody might hold such a view.

⁶ Sartre gives a similar argument at STE: 58-61, where the example is writing. However, I have misgivings about this passage: Sartre claims that “[t]o write is to maintain an active awareness of the words as they come to birth under my pen” (STE: 59). This seems phenomenologically false: in writing, I am aware of the words before I write them, aware of each word as *the next word to be written*.

⁷ Sartre’s own terms for these types of intention are inconstant and confusing. What Searle calls the ‘prior intention’, Sartre calls the ‘resolution’ (*résolution*) and the ‘motive’ (*motif*; B&N: 33-4), the latter of which is particularly odd since Sartre denies that it actually *motivates* anything. What Searle calls the ‘intention in action’, Sartre calls the ‘present inclination’ (*affectivité du moment*; B&N: xxviii) and the ‘operative intention’ (*intention opératoire*; B&N: xxix). Because Sartre’s terms are neither consistent nor particularly expressive, I will adopt Searle’s for greater clarity.

⁸ This does not deny Searle’s contention that where an action satisfies a prior intention, the intention in action is caused by that prior intention (Searle 1983, 94), and so does not entail that a prior intention cannot cause an action: whether or not I do ϕ at t_3 may be dependent on background factors other than prior intentions, just as it is the case that my striking the match caused the match to light even though, had the matchbox been wet, I could have struck the same match and it would not have lit.

⁹ It may be objected to this that ‘learning by reflection’ is a common experience. I may, for example, reflect that I have been becoming too fond of whiskey in recent months. However, Sartre’s claim that reflection never teaches is a claim restricted to the object of reflection itself, a particular consciousness: reflection never teaches about that consciousness, since the subject already has pre-reflective comprehension of that consciousness. The act of then analysing this consciousness in terms of, and in comparison with, other consciousnesses goes beyond what is directly delivered in reflection. As we shall see in Chapter 2, this is an example of what Sartre calls ‘impure reflection’.

¹⁰ As Sartre puts it: “the consciousness which says *I Think* is precisely not the consciousness which thinks. Or rather it is not *its own* thought which it posits by this thetic act.” (TE: 45).

¹¹ Sartre does allow that in reflection we may make a judgement about the status of the belief, which judgement cannot be made pre-reflectively (such as the judgement that “I believe it, but I do not know it”: PI: 189). Such judgements about the belief, however, do not show that I was not pre-reflectively aware of the belief. This point is discussed - with reference to dreaming rather than believing - in my assessment of the candidate counterexamples (see pp. 36-7).

¹² For ‘related phenomena’, see Weiskrantz 1988, 192.

¹³ Weiskrantz et al. (1974, 711-720) record that in four of the five types of experiment, the patient is told to guess. They do not mention whether this is also the case in the fifth, but I think we can safely assume that it is.

¹⁴ In the passage quoted above, Armstrong includes the possibility that the driver, before he ‘comes to’, may not have been ‘conscious’ of anything. In Sartre’s terminology, Armstrong allows for the possibility that the driver has awareness of the ground without awareness of a figure. As we have seen (p. 11, above), Sartre denies such a possibility. My assessment of this candidate, however, does not hinge on whether there can be nonpositional awareness without positional awareness.

¹⁵ Malcolm’s second criterion, that ‘so and so’ did not occur, is not a necessary condition for having dreamt ‘so and so’: “a well-known Duke of Devonshire ... once dreamt that he was speaking in the House of Lords and, when he woke up, found that he *was* speaking in the House of Lords” (Moore 1959, 241). Whatever the historical status of Moore’s tale, it does seem to comprise a logical impossibility.

¹⁶ Although unremarkable and, now, generally agreed upon, this point does serve one of Malcolm’s purposes: that of disproving Descartes’s assertion that we are always conscious (Malcolm 1959, 1).

¹⁷ Other experiences with this status are waking dreams, near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences, and hallucinations. Green and McCreery (1975, *passim*) analyse all such experiences such that the subject’s whole (seeming) environment is hallucinated, including the body.

¹⁸ Thus, it is mistaken to claim, with Hammond, Howarth, and Keat (1991, 108), that for Sartre later reflection on a consciousness cannot provide one with details of that consciousness that one did not notice pre-reflectively. Similarly, Leland is mistaken to claim that “the ... structure of [pre-reflective] self-consciousness is indistinguishable from the structure of reflection” (1975, 140). For Sartre, the “total definition of a consciousness [can] be given only by reflection” (PI: 189; cf. CSKS: 142).

¹⁹ Others who read Sartre as believing in the transparency of the mental include: Bergmann (1982, 159); Caws (1979, 55); Hammond, Howarth and Keat (1991, 104); Neu (1988, 80); and Whitford (1982, 30). Morris recognises the distinction between ‘transparency’ and ‘translucency’ but claims that, in some cases, Sartre must mean ‘transparency’ by ‘translucency’, since “[s]ometimes it must be the case that consciousness yields a perfectly clear, transparent view of its object” (1992, 105). However, Sartre applies his metaphor of ‘translucency’ just to pre-reflective self-awareness (see, for example, B&N: 77). Sartre does once use the term ‘transparency’ to emphasise his claim that there is nothing in consciousness obscuring the worldly object (TE: 93), but later uses the term ‘emptiness’ (*vide*) to express this (B&N: xxxii).

²⁰ Sartre uses the term ‘transparency’ twice. At TE: 93, ‘transparency’ does not refer to pre-reflective awareness (see n. 19, above). At B&N: 164, however, it does seem to: see Chapter 2 n. 3, below.

²¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn., s.v. ‘Translucent’ (18: 412); *Grand Larousse Universel*, 1994 edn., s.v. ‘Translucide’ (15: 10365).

²² The common misreading of Sartre as believing in the transparency of the mental may be due to his claim that “Consciousness ... is pure “appearance” in the sense that it exists only to the degree to which it appears” (B&N: xxxii; cf. STE: 23). Hammond, Howarth, and Keat, for example, take this to mean that “[a]ny conscious act has the characteristics it has only by being aware of them” (1991, 108). However, a more natural translation of the original is “Consciousness ... exists only insofar as it appears” (“*La conscience ... n'existe que dans la mesure où elle s'apparânt*”). This translation does not carry the implication, carried by Barnes’s translation, that consciousness must appear in all its detail: it claims only that consciousness cannot exist without appearing, which is equivalent to Sartre’s claim that consciousness cannot exist without there being consciousness of it. This latter claim is not understood by Sartre to imply that a consciousness must appear in all its detail (as I hope to have shown above). Furthermore, something that appears indistinctly *does* appear: if I can see a person through a frosted glass window (a paradigm of translucency), and that person is my brother, then I am conscious of my brother even if I do not recognise him through the frosted glass. After all, what else could I be conscious of? “A hare vaguely perceived is nevertheless a specific hare.” (PI: 15).

²³ It may be objected to this that another familiar experience is one of driving out of one’s road, and ‘automatically’ driving to a destination one often drives to rather than to the intended destination. However, Sartre’s claim is not the pre-reflective awareness of the operative intention is a sufficient

condition for the successful execution of purposive activity, only that it is a necessary condition (see p. 20, above).

²⁴ Actually, Descartes's and Hume's claim is that I am apodictically and adequately aware of both the object of my current consciousness and that consciousness itself. I am here only concerned with the claim insofar as it relates to the current consciousness itself.

²⁵ Sartre's discussion is confused in that Sartre discusses a system of 'ego', 'id' and 'censor' (B&N: 51-2), and defines the 'ego' as "a psychic totality of the facts of consciousness" (B&N: 52). It seems that Sartre has conflated Freud's early triptych of 'conscious', 'unconscious', 'censor' (see Freud 1957, *passim*) with his later replacement of it with 'ego', 'id' and 'superego' (see Freud 1964, *passim*). It seems that Sartre intended to discuss Freud's later position (hence his use of 'ego' and 'id'), but misunderstood the relation of these concepts to Freud's earlier concepts: Freud explicitly claimed that "ego and conscious, repressed and unconscious do not coincide" (1964, 70), and the 'censor' is a part of the early, not the later, scheme. Mirvish (1990, 219) suggests that Sartre is using the term 'censor' to refer to the censoring activity of the superego. Although this reading may furnish us with the most perspicuous version of Sartre's argument, it seems that this is not Sartre's understanding of the term 'censor' since he writes of "*Es, Ich, Ueberich* expressing themselves through the censor" (B&N: 53).

Chapter 2

¹ Although Sartre believes pure reflection to be apodictic (see B&N: 157), he also claims that, in all reflection, "reflection *modifies* the spontaneous consciousness" (TE: 48) insofar as the reflected-on is "self-conscious as the consciousness reflected-on ... so that its meaning as reflected-on is inseparable from the reflective" (B&N: 152). I cannot see how these two claims are to be reconciled. If the reflected-on is a previous consciousness and that previous consciousness was not, at the time it occurred, being reflected on, then it seems that it was not then aware of itself as being reflected on. Since the reflected-on is a consciousness which, along with its pre-reflective self-awareness, existed before becoming an object of reflection, it is unclear how a reflection could both be apodictic and present the reflected-on as pre-reflectively aware that it is being observed, as "like a man who is writing, bent over a table, and who while writing knows that he is observed by somebody who stands behind him" (*ibid.*). Sartre's claim that "[t]he reflected-on is profoundly altered by reflection" (*ibid.*) is a part of his attempt to establish "a bond of being" (B&N: 151) between the reflecting and the reflected-on, to show that these two items are not independent of one another. Since this 'bond of being' is common to reliable (pure) reflection and unreliable (impure) reflection, it plays no role in his account of the distinction between pure and impure reflection. I shall, therefore, ignore this claim and its attendant difficulties in the rest of this chapter.

² Impure reflection, for Sartre, is the only form of reflection that formulates an ego: contra Glynn (1987, xii), pure reflection is not "knowledge of the self"; contra Bergmann (1982, 159), it is not the case that "the self is always in the foreground of our [reflective] self-consciousness".

³ In the passage here referred to, Sartre uses the term 'transparency' ('*transparence*') rather than his usual 'translucency' ('*translucidité*'). We have seen in Chapter 1 (p. 37) that '*transparence*' is not equivalent to '*translucidité*'. Given this, given the frequency with which Sartre uses the term '*translucidité*', and given that the passage at B&N: 164 repeats a point made at B&N: 103 where Sartre uses the term '*translucidité*', it seems that this use of '*transparence*' is to be considered a slip of the pen or a printer's error, and is not to be taken as indicating a commitment to the Cartesian theory of the transparency (as opposed to translucency) of consciousness.

⁴ Incidentally, Sartre himself connects the verifiability of a theory to its 'satisfactoriness' (STE: 34) and its 'coherence' (CSKS: 139). On his own terms, therefore, it seems that his theory of reflection is 'unsatisfactory' and 'incoherent'. My criticism of Ayer's verificationism applies equally to Sartre's: on its own terms, Sartre's verificationism is 'unsatisfactory' and 'incoherent'.

⁵ It seems that Sartre would anyway disallow such claims as that "sometimes behaviour is the outcome of desires we explicitly disavow or beliefs we explicitly deny" (Churchland 1986, 308; cf.

Neu 1988, 83). It cannot be confidently asserted that a person has a certain desire or emotion that that person disavows unless it is denied that consciousness, or anything other than behaviour, is criterial for the desire or emotion: if there is essentially more to a desire or an emotion than just behaviour, then one's ascriptions of these to others are inferences from behaviour, and as inferences they are fallible. Ascriptions of desires or emotions are infallible only if the behaviour alone is criterial for desires or emotions, the ascriber has a correct definition of the behaviour of the desire or emotion in question, and the ascriber has scrutinised sufficiently the behaviour of the person to whom the desire or emotion is being ascribed. Sartre, rightly or wrongly, refuses to allow the first of these conditions (see I: 5; CSKS: 129). He argues, for example, that consciousness is ineliminably criterial for emotion since only consciousness can explain the teleology of emotion (STE: 35-48). This seems to be another instance of his general claim that purposive behaviour requires consciousness (see pp. 20-4, above).

⁶ Nisbett and Wilson (1977, 233-42) present a wealth of similar evidence of error concerning one's awareness of one's own motivational states, situation evaluations, cognitive processes, and effects of stimuli on behaviour. My comments on the ambiguity experiment apply equally, *mutatis mutandis*, to the many experiments discussed by Nisbett and Wilson.

⁷ See Introduction n. 7, above.

⁸ If it is the case that any attempt to reflect upon a consciousness that begins by classifying that consciousness is necessarily an impure reflection, then it is not clear what the *motivation* of a pure reflection is. When asked about this motivation, Sartre replied: "I know nothing about it" (CSKS: 142).

⁹ The only theories of reflection that escape this difficulty, therefore, are those that simply deny that there is any such thing as reflection (e.g. Ryle 1949, 167-85; Nisbett and Wilson 1977, 246-57). An assessment of this larger claim is outside the scope of this thesis.

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