

# ProfLotz, Phl421: Sartre, Fall 2017, Origin of Nothingness, Handout 3

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1. Where are we
  - a. If we are going to be able to grasp adequately what is going on when we encounter *négatités* in our experience of the world, we are eventually going to have to turn to examine consciousness (next chapters on the for-itself).
  - b. The in-itself is pure positivity; there is “no space” for not-being
  - c. So, there must be a being that is not characterized by “in-itself,” which is the for-itself
  - d. The for-itself is something paradoxical, insofar as it *must be negation* (Fichte: the ego is *pure activity*)
  - e. Thought experiment: extend the café/Pierre example to the entire universe: in order for not-being to be possible in the universe, there must be one being that is not only discovering “negatites” but also itself be characterized by non-being (i.e., it exists as negation; its essence is to negate itself!)
  - f. The for-itself *is* not-being; it is wrong to characterize it as “is” or as “in-itself”
    - i. The chair is, the chair is itself, the chair is what it is
    - ii. Consciousness is not, consciousness is not-itself, consciousness is not what it is
    - iii. Consciousness is a *lack* since it can never (fully) *be* what it is → temporality → freedom → anguish
  - g. Read carefully p.71/72
  - h. Remember: the being of consciousness is absolute; hence, S concludes that freedom is absolute; it cannot be derived from anything else than itself
  - i. S presents in the rest of the book a phenomenology of freedom that will always return to the “non-identity” of consciousness
    - i. Bad faith, transcendence, temporality, possibility, lack
    - ii. In this section he starts with anguish
  - j. So, what is interesting here is that S does not operate within the “normal” ways of addressing freedom: mind/brain, will/determinism, etc.; he wants to say that freedom characterizes human reality *as such*, and not just choices, acts, decisions, etc.; he cannot begin here, as all of these theories already presupposes a human being *in which* these other “things” (such as acts and wills) take place
  - k. “By this we must understand not a nihilating act, which would require in turn a foundation in Being, but an ontological characteristic of the Being required” (58)
  - l. According to S, *consciousness is not a thing*, it is pure difference and negation
  - m. Freedom (and its expression in anguish) is precisely the “non-identity” of consciousness; we can *never just be*, although we constantly try to do exactly this (bad faith)!
2. Where does Nothingness come from? (57)
  - a. Not from itself. Neither can being-in-itself be responsible for it.
  - b. Thus we need a being by which nothingness comes to things (57–58). (the for-itself.)

- c. “Furthermore — continuing our explication — he says that this special being must be one that is itself shot all through with nothingness — with absences, lacks, etc. If it weren’t, if it were purely positive, it would be just being-in-itself all over again. Hence it must be both. It cannot be mere nothingness; it has to be both a being and yet soaked all through with nothingness!” (from Spade, online)
  - d. So, although this is difficult to understand: the reality is, chairs are, numbers are; the universe is “full” and “positive.” So, how could it be that something *is not* there? Well, in the end, S argues, because there is one being in the universe (the for-itself, us) that is characterized by *is not* (it is constantly negating, even itself)
  - e. This “is not” S tries to first describe in terms such as questioning, distancing, etc.
- 3. The questioner can disconnect himself from the causal series (58), and this is what freedom is. (60) Freedom precedes human essence.
  - a. Freedom cannot be a property of existence
  - b. Freedom is not a single act
  - c. Accordingly, human reality must be free (which is indicated already in the café scene because *everything* recedes into the background for Pierre to show up as not being there
- 4. Temporality
  - a. S introduces the notion of freedom through time (63)
    - i. Although there is a continuity of consciousness, the present and the past are constantly negated which establishes a *distance* between past and present
    - ii. “the nothing that separates its present from all its past” (64)
    - iii. “consciousness continually experiences itself as the nihilation of its past being” (64)
    - iv. Temporality is non-identity
- 5. Anguish, distinguished from simple fear. (65–78); S will say more about anguish later; here he is only introducing the concept in order to find a *description of freedom that is not immediately object oriented*; instead freedom as anguish is about us as a whole
  - a. Anguish is self-related (65)
  - b. Anguish is not to be confused with fear
  - c. Fear is object-related and to me as a thing
  - d. Anguish is the absolute openness and difference between *me now* and *my past/future*
  - e. “Anguish then is the pre-reflective apprehension of freedom by itself” (78)
- 6. Example: Vertigo (anguish in the face of the future)
  - a. I am given to myself as a thing (objective possibilities, part of causal chain, etc.)
  - b. I escape fear by controlling myself as an object in the world
  - c. I am *in distance from the situation as a totality*, i.e., my conduct as a whole is a possibility of me (68) (think of the café example!!!)
  - d. “If nothing compels me to save my life, *nothing* prevents me from precipitating into the abyss” (69)
  - e. My overall conduct is only possible because my self is in the mode of not-being it (future)
- 7. Example: Gambler (anguish in the face of the past)

- a. "But what he apprehends then in anguish is precisely the total inefficacy of the past resolution" (70)
  - b. "I make myself *not to be* the past of good resolutions *which I am*" (70)
- 8. Psychological determinism, a flight from anguish. (78–85)
  - a. The attempt of make anguish the effect of something other than itself would turn ourselves again into something that is "itself" (without distance, break, negation, etc.)
  - b. Motives are not somehow "in" consciousness, as if consciousness is a "real" container; motives always – as everything – are an *object* of consciousness, i.e., they fall under intentionality
  - c. Motives are *for* someone motives
  - d. Consciousness negates itself and thereby becomes "a" transcendence (in this section already discussed as past and future) 71/72
  - e. Existence precedes essence (72); essence is the totality of someone's past; however, as we know by now (gambler), anguish *separates* us from the totality of the past; so, we are never *identical* with our past, since in this case present and past would fall into one moment (and we would be dead)
  - f. Psychological determinism tries to reduce us to "never being anything but what we are" (79)
- 9. Action/values
  - a. Is pre-reflective
  - b. "Our being is immediately 'in situation'; that is, it arises in enterprises and knows itself first in so far as it is reflected in those enterprises" (77)
  - c. I can put every act into question
  - d. With this distancing the past is revealed as *my* past and the future as *my* future (75)
  - e. In the moment in which I constitute the past as *my* past I turn it into a possibility of myself (79)
- 10. Freedom of the other
  - a. My own freedom is only limited by the freedom of the other
- 11. Upshot
  - a. (Self)Consciousness *distances* itself from the in-itself; we can only question the carburetor or judge that the house "is no longer" because we *are not* the motor or the house
  - b. The "distancing" (the non-identity) is not single acts; rather, we *are* distancing beings; our being *is* negation (including ourselves as beings); put differently, we *deny* the world its in-itself and we deny *us* as beings our in-itself
  - c. Remember, *since every act of consciousness is free for Sartre*, and since there is nothing unconscious about consciousness, we are constantly aware in whatever we do that we are acting freely (remember our discussion about the pre-reflective self-consciousness), with *nothing* to compel us and *nothing* to prevent us from doing whatever we choose.
  - d. We act as though we were not free, as though we were compelled. We try to find excuses, pass the blame, avoid our responsibility. We run away from anguish → bad faith (next chapter)
  - e. We are *as human reality* free AND we deceive ourselves as human reality