A Social Theory of Freedom

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For my sons, Oliver and Eli, who taught me everything I know to be true.

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I have drawn on ideas published previously in journal venues, although these ideas have been integrated into an entirely new suite of arguments:

1. The Grammar of Experience. *Philosophy* 89:2 (2014) 223-250, winner of the Royal Institute of Philosophy Essay Prize 2013

2. Imitative reasoning. *Social Epistemology* 23 (2009) 381-405

3. Solidarity: A motivational conception. *Philosophical Papers* 41 (2012) 57-95

4. Towards a theory of freedom. *Theoria* 134 (2013) 1-25

5. Self-constructions: An existentialist approach to self and social identity, *Out of the Shadows: Analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy*. Sharon Crasnow & Anita Superson, eds, Oxford University Press, 2012, 451-92

Introduction.

> "Did you have a genius of a great-great-grandmother who died under some ignorant and depraved white overseer's lash...when she cried out in her soul to paint watercolors of sunsets, or the rain falling on the green and peaceful pasture-lands? Or was her body broken and forced to bear children (who were more often than not sold away from her)—eight, ten, fifteen, twenty children—when her one joy was the thought of modeling heroic figures of rebellion, in stone or clay?...And the freedom to paint, to sculpt, to expand the mind with action did not exist [for her].…And so our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read."
>
> — Alice Walker *In search of our mothers' gardens*

Freedom

This book is about something really important to people, something that people throughout history have both died and lived for, something that people languish without, even when they don't know they lack it. It is about something for which heroic people have been willing to sacrifice life and limb—if only they could make a bargain with the devil—so that those who come after them, loved one and strangers alike, might not have to live without it. This book is about freedom. In spite of being a work in academic philosophy, tendered in service of the foundations of social science, it is not about an arcane or occult subject matter.

But what is freedom, that it should play such a consuming role in human life, and so a central role in its study? This book constitutes an answer to that question. In academic philosophy, the concept of freedom is routinely defined by what it is not; it is set as a contrary either to *metaphysical* determinism or to *political* domination. This book will be taking a different approach to the question—one that will ultimately admit of the slogan that freedom is freedom-to-be, freedom to embrace and construct identities in the social world.

"I want to be free to live my own life;" "he's free to do things his own way;" "you're free to leave now;" "this is a free country;" "she's as free as a bird;" "I'm no longer free to do as I please." Is there one single understanding of freedom shared among these various uses of the term *free*, or are there multiple and quite distinct centers of gravity in its range of uses, to which a conversationalist must always be alive? One way with this question, the one that animates contemporary philosophical thinking on the subject, is to say that the usages of the variants on the term *freedom* divide cleanly into two classes. The first class consists of those usages that are concerned with political or legal matters or with rights—for instance whether one is a prisoner or slave or some other rights-deprived individual. This is the topic that matters to people everywhere, whether they ever strike an academic posture toward the notion of freedom or not. The other class consists of those usages that are not so much concerned with rights but with something else, something more diffuse, something less easy to put one's finger on, something much less sticky with blood. These latter are reputedly abstruse and largely obscure issues of interest only to academic philosophers, under the label of *metaphysics*. What brings these two cleanly divergent usages together under a sometime-broader covering notion denoted by the term *freedom*, according to the prevailing philosophical wisdom, is the idea that *freedom is the obverse of constriction*: in the first instance it is the obverse of constrictions wrought by those laws, institutions, customs and practices that are monumentally important to people's conduct of everyday life, while in the second instance it is the obverse of some other and much more esoteric kind of constriction, something to do with iron-clad laws of nature. Freedom, according to prevailing philosophical wisdom, is the thing on the other side of constriction. It plays the role of opposite to every type of constriction.

I believe that thinking this way about the conception of freedom is profoundly mistaken, and I hope to convince you as much. I believe that modern academic philosophy has not seen the issues around use of freedom language clearly enough.

Philosophers have failed to notice, for instance, that when the subject of a freedom attribution is the human being in a social setting—as contrasted for instance with metaphorical attributions to non-human entities ("the toilet is free now") or even when contrasted with attributions to human beings in splendid isolation, which sound odd in any case ("Robin Crusoe would never be free to leave the island")—the uses of the term *free* are strikingly tight. They do not divide cleanly into two non-overlapping piles. Because the central uses are so pivotal to human life, they anchor and restrain all our other employments of freedom language. There is consequently no room for more than one center of gravity under the term *freedom* in the human lexicon. Furthermore, the sense of freedom conveyed in the anchoring uses is nowise a simple matter of an obverse to constriction. This shall be the first landfall we shall mark en route to our larger destination in this philosophical voyage. It will be (to change metaphors) the fulcrum whereby I hope we shall wreak a kind of paradigm shift upon the topic of freedom.

The clue to appreciating this critical fulcrum point is to notice that no human beings are genuinely free who *believe* they are constrained or otherwise *genuinely feel* hampered. Persons under threat, either to themselves or to loved ones, lack freedom. For instance, persons living in restrictive religious communities, but who are neither bound in shackles nor under constant surveillance or threat to life, might nonetheless feel unable to leave their community, even if they wished to do so. Similarly, a person whose child has been kidnapped feels obliged to follow the kidnapper's instructions—they are unfree with regard to the kidnapper's wishes. Both of these hypothetical persons are *right* to feel unfree, because the power to enslave a human being works

also—indeed one could make a case that it works *most effectively*—on the internal resistance of the subject.[1] Thus it should be clear to us right from the start that the sort of thing we humans always try to illuminate by uses of the term *free* when we are talking or thinking about human beings in their natural (that is to say, their *social*) habitats, is the sort of freedom that counters power working on subjects' internal resistance. In other words, the freedom we care about is the capacity to resist power as wielded by other human beings, either directly or through human-made institutions that control a culture machine. It should also be clear that this sort of freedom is *not* straightforwardly the obverse of constraint. For, if nearly anything whatsoever—real or imagined—can function as constraint when believed by the relevant subject to be one (think of the power of a belief in unseen spirits, for instance), then clearly what we need to understand is that freedom, at least in large part, is something internal to subjects; it isn't simply a straightforward contrary of some feature of external conditions that "add up to" constraints.

This point carries a certain moral sting to it that intellectual honesty compels us to disclose: for it is not only the literally enchained, the threatened, the diseased, the poor and the otherwise disenfranchised who are subject to privations of freedom. Children of parents of great wealth or status are also at risk of such privations. We acknowledge as much when we acknowledge their susceptibility to dissolution, to depravity and to corrosive callousness. Theirs is the other extreme of the spectrum—glutted with so much for which they have to toil not a whit, they are robbed of the capacity to hunger after what is worthy, because their souls—unlike that of Alice Walker's great-grandmother—crave nothing. (There is perhaps no better way to understand the tragedy of the fictional Michael Corleone of *The Godfather* saga.) Since both extremes on the spectrum of power and wealth are at comparable (albeit experientially different) risk of suffering the same human misery, it is clear that privations of goods and opportunities are

not in themselves the privations of freedom, even if privations can sometimes be parlayed into unfreedom. Freedom is not simply the opposite of material lack of opportunity; it is not simply the thing on the other side of the poverty of impediment. Indeed each person has to make *of themselves*, in a personal developmental arc, someone who is free. Since this is true, privation and impediment are not in and of themselves obstacles. To the contrary, privation and impediment can be in service of freedom. Consequently the anti-thesis of human freedom cannot be classical determinism. (So the question of whether determinism rules out freedom is simply inapt, as I will be arguing in chapter 5.) It is equally true that we require (as I shall argue) an existential framework for articulating a theory of freedom—a framework whose primary ontology is focused on selves and self-understandings in a social world.

The fulcrum point we have gestured at portends a certain unobvious philosophical conclusion about the nature of freedom—namely, that the term *freedom* is not to be associated with a metaphysical subject at all—that it doesn't pick out some fixed feature or fact about some region of the universe of facts that could be conceivably thought to be its subject matter. There is no straightforward subject matter for the student of freedom, where by contrast there is for the student of nematodes. Instead, the term *freedom* is a broadly logical term—what it picks out is determined by various facts taken in relation to one another—more precisely, they must be taken in relation to one another *by* a very particular subject. This is substantially analogous to the way that the referents of pronouns ("he" and "she" for instance) are fixed only in the real-time (and importantly also the instantaneous and logical) relationship between speaker and context. Consequently, it takes philosophical inquiry to reveal the true profile of freedom.

It is no small philosophical point that freedom is a logical subject matter; and making it will occupy the lion's share of our attentions. The balance of the book will then be devoted to

working out just what sort of work the concept of freedom already performs in practical life and what more work it can be expected to perform, especially in the context of large academic issues in the social sciences. It is not enough to say that freedom is really just a logic. It is important also to articulate a theory of freedom (chaps 1-3); to display instances of how it works in a variety of settings (chapter 4); and to display the *form* of its logic, especially as against the familiar (metaphysical) accounts of freedom (chapters 4-6). We need subsequently to consider the sort of work we can expect the theory to play in more theoretical, social-scientific contexts (chapters 7-9). The theory I will propound in these pages will—perhaps surprisingly—be an existential one, but one with some interesting twists.

A philosophical tract is not a crime novel—or anyway should not be. So here is the thumbnail version, prefaced by a brief and unconventional primer on the difference between phenomenological and purely analytical approaches in academic philosophy.

Why existentialism: The object orientation

“We are tied down to a language which makes up in obscurity what it lacks in style.”
— Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Existential thought is a branch of phenomenology. Phenomenology, in turn, is the study of the features of experience, including the objects that inhabit experience—the objects that *show up* in it, in the phraseology of some phenomenologists—and the ways they interact. It is therefore about the *identities* of things by their category, and how those identities shape their interrelations.

It is perhaps commonplace that images are representations of things—real, imagined, or even abstract—and that furthermore images represent things as being one way rather than

another, and even furthermore that this is subject to evaluation as to truth and falsity. In philosophy we are interested in describing the way that people represent the world as being, and especially in how they furnish these representations *to themselves*.

Suppose I take a snapshot of an apple on my desk with a digital camera, as a means of preserving a representation of it. I can then work with this digital image in a pixel-by-pixel fashion, using specially designed software. A software application so suited treats the image as a filled array (in the apple snapshot's instance, two-dimensional) of information. The information is all of the same kind, the elemental values of my mode of representation—values of color or light, say. Manipulating that array is a matter of changing the relevant values in the array in various ways. Contrast this way of working on a representation with a different one: the way employed by drawing or design software—for instance in Microsoft Word or Powerpoint. Such software allows you to insert "objects" into your image—items that it recognizes as belonging to *fixed and distinguished* categories. To create a stand-alone image, the software allows you to combine objects of different (software-defined) categories in spatially overlapping ways. Sometimes the drawing software sanctions some combination of first-order (software-defined) objects into higher-order "combination" objects, while banning or disallowing others. I will refer to this broad method of handling an image as *object-oriented.*

The pixel-by-pixel image has a fixed *resolution.* It represents the apple on my desk by containing information that *corresponds structurally* to features that can also be discerned by the human eye. By contrast, the object-oriented image has a *logic.* It represents the apple on my desk explicitly (rather than implicitly, as it might in the pixel-by-pixel image) as having parts that fit together to make a certain whole. These relations of parts to whole are not *directly* represented by the pixel-by-pixel representation, though the structures that "emerge" from the pixel-by-pixel

representation might "contain" that information (assuming for the moment that we can invoke a suitable theory of information containment). In addition, the object-oriented representation is *scale-free*: one can reproduce it at any scale one likes and at any convenient resolution, without loss of information. By contrast, the pixel-by-pixel image's scale (like its resolution) is fixed. The pixel-by-pixel image is as logic-free as anything can be; it is also category-free, open to any construal of the information. Where contrariwise the object-oriented image is as resolution-free as an image can be, but (at least potentially) restricted in its object categories to a fixed (software-defined) set.

Analytical philosophical methods are analogous to the pixel-by-pixel method of handling an image—hugely information intensive treatments of the world that do not rely on or commit to any fixed ontology. Ontology can be left entirely implicit, if the analyst so wishes. By contrast, a phenomenological approach (of which the existential approach is one branch) is more analogous to the object-oriented method: it is concerned with the way that experience appears to the subject as *already-structured* and strives to re-describe a subject's experience in these terms, in the logic of part-to-whole. (Of course the phenomenologist has first to identify the menu of objects that subjects have available to them in the representation of experience, but that's just part of the phenomenologist's job description.) The distinction between object-oriented analysis and its no-fixed-categories contrary shows up most obviously in the contrasting ontologies. And by extension, the distinction can play a role in phenomenology: a theory of experience can be given in either terms. And finally, the distinction can be seen as playing a role in epistemology as well: a theory of knowledge can be more or less oriented towards a fixed-categories ontology, more or less suited to learning the facts of a no-fixed-categories world. Thus the distinction between

object-oriented analysis and its no-fixed-categories alternative is quite fundamental, and prior to the characteristic disputations in the various philosophical sub-disciplines.

In ordinary life, a human being's native corpus of images, representations and other means of memorializing the objects of experience is a rich body of material presented to cognition. A great deal of that material comes in through the front door of perception—indeed much of what is explicit in experience is narrated in experience itself as having come in through that front door. But many of the materials for constructing a representation must come in through the windows and the cracks in the walls. I venture that a vast portion of what makes the entire domicile of experience habitable—the "building's utilities," as proves fitting to our present metaphor—has to have been original with the very structure, more or less operational at birth.

So each method of analyzing the cognitive corpus very likely has a place. There is a place too for bringing many means of analysis together in collaboration. But when it comes to analysis of human experience *as it appears to the subject*, I am convinced that the phenomenological approach will encounter much greater success in the first instance, for perhaps obvious reasons (some of which are now attested to by the wealth of recent findings in cognitive science). My reason for choosing a phenomenological approach is also perhaps obvious: freedom is something that shows up in experience, and (as so many have testified) is hard to find it when one takes a third-personal perspective on a life. I shall be advancing a first-order account—a phenomenology—of freedom for exactly this (obvious) reason.

It is much less obvious that we should pursue a full-blown *theory* of freedom in these terms. There is, after all, a distinction between the appearance and the reality. And the truth about freedom might be completely different from its image in our experiences. I hope to

persuade you in the course of this book that while the distinction between appearance and reality is generally a good one, the distinction by itself does not amount to a proof of the independence of reality of any given subject matter from the way it is experienced. There are cases—freedom among them—where the appearance shapes the reality. (This is not the same thing as saying that there is nothing to the reality but the appearance—which might lead to the erroneous conclusion that there is no reality at all.) Many features of the world fall in this category, and are often difficult to characterize or study adequately because they do: pain, subjectivity, consciousness, even selfhood, as we will have many an occasion to remark again in the course of this journey. Noticing this failure of dependence, some philosophers have adopted the terminology of "social construction" to refer to such realties. But this terminology is insufficiently discriminating, because there are many species of dependence relations. And a theory of a phenomenon such as freedom or selfhood requires more refined tools for the articulation of the appropriate dependence relation. (Indeed the notion of social construction has been on more than one occasion conceptualized as the idea that some purported reality, or some segment of it, such as for instance all the talk of morality, is a form of mass hysteria—an elaborate and profoundly misguided exercise in marking our own homework. This is just further evidence of the fact that we require careful philosophical discriminations among the types of dependence relations of reality upon appearance.)

I hope to convince you here that, once we've achieved a compelling first-order account of freedom, in phenomenological terms, the theory we will have devised by the end will be wanting for nothing. I hope to convince you that freedom is fundamentally dependent upon how one experiences one's life—specifically, how one experiences one's past and present as putting pressure on one's future. This shows up most starkly in the activity of aspiration. I hope to make

it clear that there is nothing more to an analysis of freedom than an analysis of the logic of certain relations of parts of one's life to the whole of it, as experienced from the "inside"—from the subject's own framework in which they shape their aspirations. Such an account of freedom is not to be associated with scientific "lawlessness," much less with human unpredictability. There is much philosophical work to do in coming to a satisfying account of the matter. And once we've done so, this account of freedom, as I will demonstrate here, will prove itself worthy of serving the foundational needs of a broad spectrum of social sciences. It will provide a way to conceptualize the human being without having to treat the subject as a primarily biological or primarily physical entity. It will provide elements for a foundation of social science that will allow social science convincingly to defend its independence of biology and physics.

No doubt there will be skepticism: how can a theory of freedom, in experiential terms, overcome our worries that the laws—the *laws*—of nature, whether they are ultimately discoverable by science or not, foreclose freedom, because if the scientific ideal of prediction prevails, every behavior of a human being can (at least in principle) be computed from knowledge of the initial condition of the universe? Surely the fact that someone's behavior is subject to prediction from the laws of nature is evidence of that someone's unfreedom. That, anyway, is what the skepticism alleges. But is it really good evidence? Is the fact of being subject to anticipation evidence for one's lack of freedom, so that being erratic (being completely random, completely without regularity, hence maximally unpredictable) is the highest—indeed the only—realization of freedom? Surely not.

To respond to the skepticism, it is important to do more than strike this posture of incredulity vis-à-vis its aversion to predictability: it is important also to attack its ground as well—the flawed assumptions that lie at its base. I will do that in two steps. First, it is important

to take notice of the fact that the ideal of predicting the behavior of some entity or system on the basis of natural laws is not reachable even in the regime of physics: not even physical laws guarantee predictability. So it is hard to see how a scientific understanding can ever pose the threat envisioned. But it is not physics, as a predictive science, that poses the true threat: the true threat emanates from our biology, construed as a collection of features of our being that are beyond our control, but which impact our behavior in a way that might be alleged to "hems us in" straightaway from birth. It is thus the specter of biological determinism that is really threatening to the idea of human freedom. And this specter is closely allied with the philosophical foundations of the study of sociobiology that was launched in 1975 (with its proponents now preferring more recently minted labels such as *evolutionary psychology, evolutionary anthropology*, and *behavioral ecology*) with the publication of Edward O. Wilson's magnum opus *Sociobiology*. In these new disciplines, predictions vis-a-vis of human behavior, such as mating behavior, attractiveness judgments, child-rearing behavior and other social behavior, is understood to be "statistical"—in other words, as predictions about central tendencies in a class of relevantly similar behaviors, and therefore not falsified by a small number of outliers.[2] Still, the threat to human freedom from this corner of science is seen to loom just as large by those expressing the skepticism we are now seeking to counter. However there is an important way of philosophically repulsing the threat, one which does not concern itself with the alleged fact that such theories issue in "statistical" predictions only. The counter is to the very argument in the philosophy of science that is intended to establish the threat: that argument is simply either invalid or self-neutralizing, as we can tidily demonstrate in the space of the next few paragraphs.

Let's begin by first articulating the argument that is very much a favorite with friends of sociobiology—and indeed it was set down more or less completely by Wilson himself: "if the brain evolved by natural selection, then even the capacity to select particular aesthetic judgments and religious beliefs must have arisen by the same mechanistic process" (Wilson 1978, 2). The point being this: there is nothing special about human beings, and the human brain in particular. So if, as must be admitted, the brain is an evolved organ, its functions must be subject to the same analysis in biological terms as well. Of course by this he meant "nothing but biological terms," and of course that's where the argument goes off the rails. It becomes in the end a self-undermining argument—undermining the very threat it was meant to pose to unbiologized treatments of human behavior. Let's formalize this argument as follows:

1. Biology explains animal behavior, utilizing principles of natural selection.
2. Human beings are biological too; they evolved by natural selection.
3. The human brain, like any other organ, is a device for survival and reproduction.

Therefore, biology explains human behavior too, utilizing principles of natural selection.

Now if one accepts this argument as valid, one must also accept as valid another argument with exactly parallel logical structure but slightly different content (I've bolded here the differences):

1. **Physics** explains the behavior of **physical bodies,** utilizing **physical principles**.
2. Human beings are **physical** bodies too; **physical principles** apply to them.
3. The human brain, like any other organ, is a **physical body**.

Therefore, **physics** explains human behavior, utilizing **physical principles**.

If one accepts the conclusion of this parallel argument, one is explicitly denying the need for biological theory—indeed for evolutionary theory—as independently valuable in the enterprise of scientific explanation. Whence biology, as such, is made irrelevant. The logic of reduction sweeps the board of all but physics. If one accepts the original argument as valid, therefore, one concludes that it is a self-neutralizing threat. Better to deny the validity of the original argument: if biology is not to be made an irrelevant theory, then it cannot be thought to threaten other, otherwise well-supported theories of human behavior, simply on the grounds that human beings are biological too. The skeptical argument is revealed as reductionistic, and the would-be reduction is repulsed.

What repulsing the reductionism in the skeptical argument does for us here is alert us to the need for identifying the correct key terms in which to think about the way that humans interact. We do not need to accept exclusively physicalistic, behavioristic or biologistic terminology in the description of human behavior. Any more than we have to accept a desire-belief (propositional attitude) psychology—something we shall repulse in chapter 1. And we can do considerably worse than examine the human and social sciences to identify terminology or ontology in common among them—or devise an ontology to capture the commonalities—something we shall undertake to some extent in chapter 9. While much of the modeling of human action in contemporary analytical philosophy—like that in biology and a preponderance of psychology—is universalistic, the preponderance of modeling in the social sciences is much more sensitive to the presence of individual variation. This is one hallmark of social science—it is sensitive to the presence of processes and interactions in social contexts that tend to generate differentiation and persistent individual variations from any purported common or "central"

tendency. Indeed it rejects the idea of emphasizing or looking for a central tendency, focusing instead on the interactions of variants and the variety of patterns they create and re-create. Among other things, I will be contending that we need an appropriate vocabulary in which to think about the cultivation, development, maturation, consolidation, dissolution and re-consolidation of Selves and identities in social contexts.

It is important to emphasize the observation that this doesn't put the social sciences outside a privileged circle of "natural" sciences bound together by a single scientific methodology. Biology—a natural science if there was one—is itself about variations, and patterns of variation in the manifold of living forms. And biology is arguably every bit as historical as—if not more so than—social sciences have to be.

It might seem at this point that the position developing here recapitulates the dualism between natural and social science so central to the Diltheyan school of hermeneutical philosophy, focusing as the latter did on the differences between causation and action, and distinguishing social science as fundamentally in an interpretive rather than merely explanatory role vis-à-vis human action. Hermeneutical thinkers insisted that the methodology utilized in analysis of the significance of a human text or an event in human history has to be fundamentally different from the methodology of the natural sciences. But such resemblance to hermeneutics as might be suggested by what I have said here so far is entirely superficial. It is true that the category of *action* will play an important role in the science that is intended to grow in the soil we shall be cultivating. But there are fundamental differences between this philosophy and the hermeneutical philosophy. We shall be continuing to remark on differences between social sciences and other sciences—the natural sciences for instance: but we will be insisting on no more differences than exist between, say, chemistry and physics, or between biology and

chemistry. Moreover, we will shall not insist on special differences *in methodology* at all. It is true: the subject matters will differ; as will the theories. But we should expect no less. Just as we expect that both subject matters and theories should differ between any two natural sciences. Each science has to employ the lens appropriate to its subject matter. The subject matter of social science is the human being in society. And studying that subject, as I'll be arguing, requires understanding how Selves are made. And to understand that, we must make sense of the freedom to make them. But there's nothing special about social sciences requiring a special lens. By parity: the subject matter of chemistry is the molecule in the context of chemical reaction; and studying that subject matter requires understanding of molecules as such, not simply as comprised of elemental parts. Chemistry will thus be employing a lens distinct from that of physics.[3] And of course biology employs another lens still.

My theory of freedom: the plot twists

> "I wanted to make something to mark my presence in an unmistakable fashion, something that would defend this individual presence of mine from the indiscriminate instability of all the rest."
>
> — Italo Calvino *"The Spiral"*

I will be propounding a broadly existential theory of freedom. By that I mean that I will be propounding a theory that (1) takes seriously as its primary data the phenomenology of experience; (2) seeks to render that phenomenology in the (identity-fixed) object-oriented terms that experience of human life itself throws up; and (3) acknowledges freedom as integrally characterizing some slice of the totality of human experience but (and very importantly) integrally *not* characterizing another (disjoint) slice of that totality—which as a consequence will be integrally characterized instead by the absence of freedom. In other words, the theory I will advance will take seriously that we humans are not always free; sometimes we are slaves. And

that reality is attested in experience. This account diverges from that of its hero Jean-Paul Sartre, but not that of all existentialists—notably not that of Simone de Beauvoir nor that of Maurice Merleau-Ponty—in that it takes seriously the possibility of unfreedom in human life. I will nonetheless build on what I find to be unimpeachably insightful in Sartre: namely, the focus on finding freedom itself in the experience of the subject. By building on these elements in ways that illuminate the ways that humans also can be unfree, I will arrive at a conception of the experience of freedom that I think would be more agreeable to those of his following who have also found some of his doctrines infelicitous. To do that I will be dividing among forms of objectification (the treatment or experience of a figure in one's experience as an object rather than as a subject) that were thrown together indiscriminately by my predecessors. I will distinguish something I will refer to as *neutral objectification*, something that I see foreshadowed in Beauvoir, and then articulate a new category of objectification that I shall refer to as *cancellation*, for the sake of marking the difference between The Look that transfigures neutrally and another Look—a morally objectionable one—that is possessed of the power to dehumanize. This distinction Sartre himself could have used to surpassingly good effect in many of his writings on social difference, or at any rate so I shall argue. I will use the distinction between neutral objectification and cancellation to further distinguish the variety of experience in the context of racial, gender and other notable socially-important differences. I will nurture in this soil the seeds of an account of self-construction, love relationships and large-scale solidarities among the unrelated and the unacquainted, all in service of developing a taxonomy of categories to serve as tools of analysis in social-scientific contexts. I will then apply these tools in preliminary fashion to produce accounts of certain aspects of social life, accounts that are illuminated by philosophical study of human individuality from the inside—enlivened by study

of what it is like to lead life as a free individual, on the one hand, and what it is like to lead a pinched life, on the other. These, I fervently hope, can serve as foundations for de-biologized treatments of a variety of social realities.

It is perhaps valuable to set down early on why de-biologized foundations of social science are earnestly to be wished for and why improvements upon such mainstream de-biologized foundations as do now exist—those wrought by social constructionist philosophies[4]—are needed. It is well appreciated that biologized foundations of social sciences do little to explain the patterns and specificities of cultural differences one does indeed find as one travels the globe. Furthermore, evolutionary accounts can give no account of the plasticity wrought in human behavior by reasoning and discourse. That there can be systematic change in human behavior consequent upon thinking, talking and reasoning—interventions that do nothing whatever to change "outer" circumstances—and that individual humans can bring about changes in their own behavior almost at will by such acts, is inexplicable in biological terms; in biological terms these are phenomena that would have to be consigned to the outer darkness of "outliers". And yet these phenomena are characteristically human realities; they are the bread and butter of human daily life. Social constructionist philosophies have a standard way of handling such phenomena: they say that these characteristically human activities can bring about changes in the "meanings" of things, and hence can change behavior. Because, according to social constructionist theories, the facts of social life are wrought by us—they are in the way we think about the world, including the expectations we have and the "statuses" we confer upon various cultural instruments (for example, money, art and inscriptions in legalese).[5]

One strand of criticism of the constructionist philosophy contends that the material in people's heads is insufficiently rich, that it is not robust enough to provide support for an account

of the stability of cultures and how they can reproduce themselves, let alone provide support for an account of systematic changes in human cultures and institutions over time in more-or-less causal terms. Institutions are themselves more substantial than social construction theories make them out to be (Thalos 2003; Epstein 2015). And social constructionists seem to be unconcerned with anything else of social scientific significance. This is one error they commit.

But there's a more importat reason still for being critical of social constructionist theories of society: they do not say why it should matter at all what is in people's heads. Of course they take for granted (as I'm quite happy they should do) that purely biological conceptions of the social are inadequate—that's something for which I myself am willing to fight. But social constructionists don't have an account of how it could matter what people actually think as contrasted merely with what they do—with their behavior. Given that the former, but not the latter, are arguably quite private and possibly inaccessible to others, if one could work with behavior purely, that might be an advantage. And of course there are advocates of more behavioristic accounts of the social—behavioristic models are not entirely inappropriate to research in contagious disease, for example. The point I am making here is to contrast areas of inquiry where behavioristic models are not out of place where they are so. Social constructionists have not explained why "mentalizing" is important to accounting for some phenomena—racism, for instance; why isn't a model referring only to behaviors sufficient? I believe it really is desperately important what's in people's heads, for many but not all scientific purposes. (And we mustn't forget that other things besides what's in the head matter to social sciences too.) But the question is: what difference does taking account of the mental make?

My account here will assert emphatically that the stuff in people's heads matters deeply, and that it does so for a very specific reason: what's in people's heads is not just a matter of

bookkeeping—not just a matter of who did what, what other people's expectations might be, and what my own priorities happen to be; it's also a matter of keeping track of *who I am and aspire to be*, and this has profound consequences for my agency. Not only do the facts of the world—social and natural—register in our heads; but so do our self-understandings. Social psychologists refer to this as the Self, and by that they mean the self-concept—a set of characterizations that one takes to be true (or false) of oneself. Our Selves contain within them worlds of imperatives, as well as the seeds of numerous forms of evaluation of simple facts. Selves are heavily impacted by how we think and reason about events. Most importantly, Selves are the most important determinants of action. And they are where freedom lies, as long as certain conditions are met (describing which will be a major objective of this book). Just to be clear: these ideas are very much in agreement with the fundamental idea of social construction. (And they are well-attested by research in social psychology, as will become clear in the chapters to follow.) The difference is that I am also explaining in a specific way why we need to unpack the mental—or at any rate, some features of it—in order to have a satisfactory foundation for social science.

There is an arc of philosophical influence that passes from Aristotle through Descartes and on to Sartre. Central to it is the idea (realized in different ways in their respective systems) that reasoning has a role to play in the constitution of the person as an acting self, as well as how that person undertakes to take action.. Running counter to this theme is another (to be found in Nietszche, Freud and Marx, among others) according to which streams of thought as they are occasioned in human minds are the surface manifestations of much more substantial motivational icebergs that may in their turn be manifestations of profound power differentials among tribes, peoples, classes or other power-wielding entities in the social world. These thought streams are best construed as rationalizations rather than as exercises of reason; and they function much less

as causes of the large-scale shifts and changes in the social order than as consequences and symptoms of them. They are all but inconsequential, except insofar as symptoms too sometimes require therapeutic treatment for the patient's sake. So we're best off ignoring them when proferring accounts and explanations of the social.

The collision between these two contrary philosophical undercurrents occurs in practically all aspects of the human sciences (and the humanities too). Resolution of these divergent opinions is not likely to occur soon. Still, I want to be clear that my proposal will favor the Aristotelian arc. On my account, human beings reason, sometimes well and sometimes badly; and in so doing they change their world—mostly in micro, but sometimes also in macro features—by first changing who they understand themselves to be. Sometimes reasoning, in favorable circumstances, can amount to a first exercise of freedom that can result in free action as well.

Mine is an account of freedom as the logic of aspiration. It is *not* (by contrast) a theory of how limbs are made to move in a world governed by natural laws. In other words, this is not a theory of freedom-within-the-world-machine. It is not a metaphysics of freedom, but a logic of it in social life. I shall also insist that there are no remainders of the subject of freedom when once the logical relations of parts to whole, in the relevant elements, have been revealed.

Preliminaries to preliminaries

Recent history in our own era of philosophical scholarship on freedom demands that one address two issues before advancing new ideas on the topic: (1) determinism; and (2) the relationship of the conception of freedom *un*qualified to conceptions of freedom in the political sense. I propose to tell you in brief right now what I shall do with these issues in upcoming chapters. But I will

not be able to fulfill my promises right away, not until I have laid out my framework and set out my conception (in the first two chapters). After that will come more nuanced negotiations of these more contemporary issues. Here now are my gestures.

First, my conception of freedom will skirt the problem of determinism. This is because my conception of freedom is not a conception that is counter-posed to the conception of metaphysical determinism. In my conception, freedom is not a purely metaphysical notion. Thus it is compatible with any view one wishes to take on the purely metaphysical subject of whether all events are caused by events that precede them in time. This makes mine a compatibilist view of a certain sort. Some compatibilists believe that, not only is freedom compatible with determinism, but also that freedom *requires* determinism (and so is not compatible with the failure of determinism; see for a very recent instance Steward 2012). I am *not* such a compatibilist. I am of the opinion that the topic of freedom is simply and thoroughly independent of the question of determinism, even though I hold that determinism fails on its own terms *as an independent philosophical doctrine*, just as I hold that biological determinism fails on its own as a philosophical doctrine.

Second, I hasten to say that my conception of freedom encompasses political conceptions. Aristotle is right: the human being is a political animal. Hence freedom is nothing at all if not a conception tailor made for action in a social and political context. Any other conception of freedom is stunted. Consequently I hold that the topic of freedom does *not* divide into political conceptions (on one side) and metaphysical conceptions (on another). I say that there is only one conception of freedom worthy of the name, and its application covers the full spectrum of instances where the term is prosaically apt (not simply metaphorical or poetical).

Finally, it is important to note that freedom is generally—in philosophy as well as in, I dare say, almost every academic or legal context—understood as premised on a certain metaphysical principle. It is generally thought to necessitate the so-called *principle of alternative possibilities*.[6] This principle says that a doctrine of freedom is nothing at all if it does not portend that the future is open in some sense. (What could the term "free" mean, according to this line of argument, if it didn't have such resonances?) I don't think this is correct, and I will try to convince you as much throughout the book. Freedom, as I shall argue, does not entail or necessitate alternative possibilities. Nor is it premised upon a principle of this sort.

But in fact you, gentle reader, probably do not require much convincing on this matter, or at least so I shall maintain. As a gesture of good faith that you will not need much convincing, I ask you now to consider two standard scenarios associated with recent discussions of freedom. Suppose that a man has been apprehended for questioning by authorities in a certain police state. At a certain point in the proceedings he is left alone in an unlocked cell—indeed the whole facility is unlocked and no one is on the premises. He is nowise apprised of this fact, and truly the roughness with which he has been treated to this point (befitting police reputation) has left him with the impression that he will be locked up for the foreseeable future. For days on end he remains in the cell; believing it futile, he makes no move to let himself out. Is he free? There is perhaps some disagreement on this, but it is no exceptional opinion that he is decidedly not free. So: in spite of the fact (made true by simple hypothesis) that he is in possession of an alternative possibility to depart the premises, it is not without authoritative precedents to insist he is not free to do so.

The second scenario:[7] suppose that a woman who is planning to carry out an assassination of the present head of state is abducted for the briefest of time, and in a way that

she never discovers, by a brilliant but deranged neuroscientist with political convictions, who has invented a certain remotely controlled device for implanting in brains. (Indeed she's not the only one whom he has implanted with his device: he is out to maximize the chances of his revolution.) With this device implanted in her brain, the formerly abducted woman, now at large, can at any moment become subject to the neuroscientist's remote tampering with her brain. At any time he can remotely initiate a certain brain event that will result, in the woman's mind, in a decision to go through with her assassination plot, should she suddenly opt against doing so. So, while it might seem as though (both to her and to us) that she is in possession of an alternative possibility of not going forward with her plan, no such alternative possibility exists for her. But, as it happens, our assassin never wavers: she never once hesitates or reconsiders; she proceeds as she has always intended to do. The neuroscientist never has occasion to tamper remotely with her brain. Has her freedom been in any way compromised or abrogated? Once again, there is disagreement on the matter, but again it is no slim minority that adheres to the opinion that she is free when she puts her plot into action. After all, the neuroscientist has done nothing at all but abduct her temporarily and infect her with an ultimately inert device. So, while it is (again by hypothesis) true that there is no scenario subsequent to abduction on which she fails to carry out her plot, nonetheless she is free to do so—at least according to a sizeable and not unreasonable opinion.

These cases in concert undermine the idea that freedom requires an open future: (1) the assassin case shows that the alternative possibilities principle is arguably unnecessary for freedom; (2) the prisoner case shows that the alternative possibilities principle does not guarantee freedom either. So it's insufficient, just as it is unnecessary. Alternative possibilities are nowise logically linked to freedom.

Of course it will be remarked that the *facts* of the situation matter much less than *what the agent believes the facts to be*. For instance, the prisoner is not free to go because he does not believe that he is. This point we have observed already. But this point is no trivial concession. It works to the decisive disadvantage of the principle of alternative possibilities. For the point can be put this way: the agent's construal of a situation *screens off* the agent's condition vis-à-vis freedom from the true facts (the metaphysics) of the situation in which he or she acts. And this is just to say that our judgments as to whether someone was free in a particular action is much more to do with whether they themselves see alternative possibilities for themselves, and much less to do with whether their perceptions as to alternatives are really correct. This is a truly deep point, utterly monumental.[8] First of all, it is one proof of the stance I shall be proclaiming about the independence of freedom and metaphysical determinism: freedom and metaphysical determinism are not to be counter-posed as opposites. Secondly, it shows that the philosophical work of understanding freedom will lie in understanding why the screening off condition holds. That is the work we shall undertake in this book.

Accordingly, understanding the nature of "truly open futures" is nowise crucial to my account of freedom. Freedom, as such, does not require an open future. But I promise you, in spite of this, that the conception of freedom I shall be propounding here is truly worthy of the name.

A fundamental point I will be making, and which will be clear very soon, is that Sartre and his French cohort of existential thinkers missed an enormous opportunity to illuminate certain important features of the human condition, in spite of coming very close. Very soon I will be picking up the threads of the argument where they were left it off. The Sartrean school had sought to counter a certain over-intellectualism about the Self, agency, and morality during their

era, but their efforts failed because they missed an important turn in the existential road to that destination.

Dueling conceptions of the history of freedom

> "There must have been a moment, at the beginning, where we could have said No. But somehow we missed it. "
>
> — Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

To launch us on our journey I wish to pose a question that is raised by two very different conceptions of freedom that emerged in the 19th century. I will return to answering this question by way of closing the book.

A lengthy quote from a rather under-attended passage of JS Mill's well-beloved tract *On Liberty* will prime the pump. In this passage, Mill seems to be providing a natural history of personal liberty, which he sometimes refers to as "individuality":

> There has been a time when the element of spontaneity and individuality was in excess, and the social principle had a hard struggle with it. The difficulty then was, to induce men of strong bodies or minds to pay obedience to any rules which required them to control their impulses. To overcome this difficulty, law and discipline, like the Popes struggling against the Emperors, asserted a power over the whole man, claiming to control all his life in order to control his character — which society had not found any other sufficient means of binding. But society has now fairly got the better of individuality; and the danger which threatens human nature is not the excess, but the deficiency, of personal impulses and preferences. Things are vastly changed, since the passions of those who

> were strong by station or by personal endowment were in a state of habitual rebellion against laws and ordinances, and required to be rigorously chained up to enable the persons within their reach to enjoy any particle of security. In our times, from the highest class of society down to the lowest every one lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. Not only in what concerns others, but in what concerns only themselves, the individual, or the family, do not ask themselves — what do I prefer? or, what would suit my character and disposition? or, what would allow the best and highest in me to have fair play, and enable it to grow and thrive? They ask themselves, what is suitable to my position? what is usually done by persons of my station and pecuniary circumstances? or (worse still) what is usually done by persons of a station and circumstances superior to mine? I do not mean that they choose what is customary, in preference to what suits their own inclination. It does not occur to them to have any inclination, except for what is customary. Thus the mind itself is bowed to the yoke: even in what people do for pleasure, conformity is the first thing thought of; they like in crowds; they exercise choice only among things commonly done: peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes: until by dint of not following their own nature, they have no nature to follow: their human capacities are withered and starved: they become incapable of any strong wishes or native pleasures, and are generally without either opinions or feelings of home growth, or properly their own. Now is this, or is it not, the desirable condition of human nature? (1869, chap 3)

Contrast this now with a classical sociological conception of the origins of "individuality" or personal liberty. Here now is the philosopher and sociologist R. G. Collingwood describing pre-modern life:

> The individual counted for nothing except as the member of his guild, his church, his monastic order, his feudal hierarchy. Within these institutions he found a place where he was wanted, work for him to do, a market for his wares. He could devote himself to fulfilling the duties assigned him by his station in that great organism within which he found himself lodged (1927, 23).

The Renaissance, according to Collingwood, broke with this culture. It gave birth to modern individualism, expressed in "the freedom of discovering that one can leave one's ordained place and march out into the world without being struck dead by an offended God" (1927, 30–31).

Mill thus sees freedom as being the natural order of things, the original. By contrast, social organization, which comes afterwards, "withers and starves." So that what is done by "civilization" has to be undone again.[9] The task of enlightenment, by his lights, is so to foster practices of freedom in a regrown social organization (perhaps he thought of it as more artificial still) so as to allow individuals opportunities to thrive in the new and in many ways unfortunate new order.

Collingwood, by contrast, seems to see no natural order, no "original" as even a logical precursor to the way human life is lived collectively. This is the comfort of the organism. He held that individualism is the newcomer and indeed that the individualist quest for freedom lead to a largely undesirable lack of coherence of the activities of mind—the aesthetic, religious, and scientific modes—that originally cohered much more closely. (According to Collingwood, God was most definitely offended, for this freedom comes at the price of an internal conflict, which is the disease of modernity. The curse of modern individualism is, therefore, the deep cause of the miserable condition— this fragmentation—of modern consciousness.)

How is the dispute between Mill and Collingwood to be resolved? *Can* it *be* resolved? This is the sort of question to which a theory of freedom should apply itself centrally, and yet few thinkers have pursued the question in a judicious way (as contrasted with merely as a rhetorical device)—indeed Mill and Collingwood do little more than assert their positions.[10] I shall render my answer in the Conclusion. For it takes a full-fledged theory of freedom to make true progress on the question.

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[1] This is a point that was made long ago by George Simmel (1986) writing on the topic of power.
[2] So says David Stamos (2008, 34-5).
[3] I've argued precisely this point independently elsewhere (Thalos 2013a).
[4] John Searle's *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) is an iconic representative of this class of philosophies. But counter-cultural examples of social construction philosophy (for example, Sally Haslanger's *Resisting Reality Social Construction and Social Critique* (2012))) also adhere to the same axioms.
[5] Bishop (2007) and Searle (1995) are different ways of fleshing out the constructionist program.
[6] This is the same principle of alternative possibilities (PAP) pronounced by Harry Frankfurt (1971) who also famously rejected it as a precondition of moral responsibility, much as P.F. Strawson (1960) did before him.
[7] These are famously known as *Frankfurt-style counterexamples* to the PAP.
[8] In the terminology used by Paul Bloom (2010), freedom—like pleasure, and especially pleasure in art—is *deep:* it is mediated by our beliefs. I will come back to the topic of depth in the Conclusion.
[9] Mill's sentiments align very well with those of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1964).
[10] The classical sociologists in Collingwood's time did considerably more. We shall discuss their work in chapters 7 and 9.

1.

An existential prelude

"You wanna fly, you got to give up the shit that weighs you down."
— Toni Morrison, *Song of Soylomon*

The main character of Toni Morrison's brilliant novel *Song of Solomon* utters this line in a moment of clarity. It shall serve as the refrain of my book, my existential anthem. Coiled within its deceptively simple sentiment is an understanding of freedom as a return on investment—an investment constituted by struggle, specifically against chains. The chains are crucial, as is the apprehension of their true toll. The message I aim to bring out is that one has to *make of oneself* someone who is free. A free person is a *freed* person—better yet, a *self-freed* person. Thus it is no more a mark of freedom to *rage* against ineluctable physics or immutable human biology than simply to *wish away* impediments of every kind. Freedom is not simply a matter of being unencumbered. Impediments are simply not the point.

Freedom, by contrast with idle daydreaming, is a matter of *intelligent struggle*. It is the intelligence of the struggle that renders it freedom. This book will be arguing that freedom is a logical relationship—a certain intelligent distance—between one's circumstances (which may include the demands of others) and one's own aspirations, which are actions (and powerful ones) in their own right. Freedom is not a simple material reality, although it rests on a variety of capacities inherent in the living matter that comprises us (notably, but not exclusively, cognitive capacities on which aspirations rest). In other words, freedom is much less concerned with how events are brought about, and more concerned with how certain aspects of a person's life fit together, past to future, within that person's conceptualization of things. And while I shall insist

upon *intelligent* struggle, I shall not be insisting upon *intellectual* struggle. Freedom is not academic.

I will present a full-fledged theory of the operations of freedom in chapters 2 and 3. The present chapter presents material preliminary to that theory, material meant to situate the theory in the context of current and recently inhabited philosophical territory in both Anglo-American and European contexts.

My conception of freedom emerges from within a certain framework, namely the framework wrought at least in its infancy by Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. Mine is thus a conception of freedom worked out partly from within a specific branch of the existential tradition. But mine is not precisely *that* existentialism; it is instead a cousin or extension of it. It is an extension hospitable to the social and cognitive sciences, especially those sciences that throw light on the nature of social struggle, whereas initial explications of existentialism in the Sartrean school were very self-consciously anti-science—demanding resistance to limiting human universals, particularly as regards gender and race.[1]

Still, without engagement with the seminal ideas in the writings of Sartre and Beauvoir, my ideas would have been malformed, underdeveloped, and fundamentally lacking in depth. The insights that Beauvoir and Sartre can lend are profoundly illuminating, though unfortunately their writings are not as well studied in Anglo-American strands of philosophy today as they deserve to be. In tribute to Sartre and Beauvoir, I shall present some of the ideas we share in common first, while simultaneously marking my dissent at critical points, until it will be time to take leave entirely of these intellectual benefactors. I will signal that fork in the road when we reach it.

It is fair to say that Sartrean existentialism has few friends today. Iris Murdoch in *The Sovereignty of the Good* presents a scathing caricature of that branch of existentialism—representing it as the intellectual veneer upon a certain posh lifestyle. I will strive to show that this indictment is undeserved.[2] Sartrean existentialism unites in a distinctive way two elemental insights that are found nowhere else together: (1) the insight that phenomenological analysis—the analysis of experience from the "inside"—counts for little unless it can be fused with an analysis of agency from the "outside," and one (moreover) with room in it for freedom; and (2) an analysis of encounters with loci of foreign subjectivity ("Others") that represent the permanent possibility of systemic, irresolvable conflict. When forged together, these elemental insights constitute a worthy humanism as well as a foundation for social science. Moreover such an existentialism is a fitting companion to every form of liberationist activism. It is capable of fomenting revolutions of the kind most devoutly to be wished for.

The impossibility of freedom?

Philosophy since the era of Immanuel Kant has been skeptical of the idea that there is room for freedom in any "objective" (or as philosophers in the European tradition say, "transcendental") description of the world: freedom can manifested only from a non-objective vantage point (indeed it can have no bearing on how things really are in themselves[3]). This is Kant's legacy. Such a position might well be supposed furthered by a certain argument, due to Thomas Nagel, that he has advanced independently, about different "points of view." In the opening paragraphs of *The View from Nowhere* (1986), Nagel announces that he will be grappling with

> a single problem: how to combine the perspective of a particular person inside the world with an objective view of that same world, the person and his viewpoint included. It is a problem that

> faces every creature with the impulse and the capacity to transcend its particular point of view and to conceive of the world as a whole…. [And t]hough it is a single problem, it has many aspects. The difficulty of reconciling the two standpoints arises in the conduct of life as well as in thought. It is the most fundamental issue about morality, knowledge, freedom, the self, and the relation of mind to the physical world (3).

But what exactly is this problem Nagel speaks of? Why is there any difficulty at all with integrating a first-personal perspective with what Nagel calls an "objective" perspective—something that I shall more neutrally refer to as a *non-personal* or *apersonal* perspective?

It appears to Nagel that, "given a complete specification of the condition of the agent and circumstances of action, it is not clear how this would leave anything further for the agent to contribute to the outcome—anything that he could contribute as source, rather than merely as the scene of the outcome" (113-4). For in any non-personal perspective on the world, "we cease to face the world and instead become part of it; we and our lives are seen as products and manifestations of the world as a whole" (114). In other words, since the world contains no subjects, because "everything I do or that anyone does is part of a larger course of events that no one 'does', but that happens, with or without explanation," it must not contain any freedom either (114).

My argument will show that Nagel's quandary is no quandary at all. The reconciliation Nagel speaks of is decidedly impossible (as he rightly thinks), though for quite different and indeed trivial reasons. The reconciliation he speaks of is impossible because his own construal of "points of view" simply dictates that it is. Nagel seems to believe that the reconciliation is impossible because the non-personal perspective *entails* that actions are events in the world to which the agent can contribute *as a "source rather than merely as the scene of the outcome."*

The agent, in that point of view, seems to dissolve into a puddle of "risk factors" or something of the kind, rather than to *hold together* as an engine and hence source of outcomes. I say that *even if* it's true that the apersonal viewpoint carries an entailment that entities embedded in it are decidedly *not* sources, the entailment does not come from authoritative axioms regarding how to construe non-personal perspectives. So we should simply reject Nagel's construal. For why should someone who acknowledges the apersonal viewpoint as a legitimate one *also* accept axioms that enjoy the entailments Nagel speaks of? There are no indefeasible reasons for doing so. It is quite sensible to refuse such axioms and hold out for a different characterization of the apersonal point of view, one without these implications—especially if one is (for one simple example) conducting a social-scientific inquiry that draws on elements of game theory.

But more importantly, I will insist that one should not conflate "points of view," on the one hand, with "axioms," on the other. If there is any entailment of Nagel's conclusion (to the effect that the agent is no source but is instead merely "scene" in the apersonal point of view), it must come from a true analysis of the ontology and metaphysics of a point of view. The form of words Nagel uses suggests a phenomenological approach—he seems to suggest that he is providing analysis of points of view. But he nowhere offers a phenomenological analysis of this topic. To attain a true phenomenology of the point of view, we have to proceed differently—the way we ourselves shall be proceeding, for instance, following the lead of the incomparable Jean-Paul Sartre.

There are to be sure important metaphysical features of points of view—features that can be adduced through a phenomenological analysis. And it is indeed correct that these features have bearing on the question Nagel raises. But Nagel's own framework—the analysis he himself produces—does not genuinely treat these features of points of view at all. His analysis simply

does not capture what it is to have a point of view. It misses entirely the characteristic elements. That is its deep flaw, in light of its stated objectives. Once the phenomenology of points of view is revealed—as it will be once we turn to a Sartrean analysis instead—we will notice a true conflict. But in no way does this true conflict amount to irreconciliability between points of view, in the logical sense that Nagel has in mind. Thus Nagel does not cast doubt on the objectivity of freedom, any more than did Kant. But Nagel's error suggests that we require rather better understanding of freedom than we have had so far—an understanding that does not merely put it as the contrary of determinism. It is now time to deliver on some of these promissory notes.

Points of view

Freedom applies (when it does) to occasions of action. But how can we conceive of action as even potentially an opportunity for exercising freedom? The iconic model of action in contemporary analytic philosophy is as an event consequent upon a pair of other events, understood as the occasioning of two mental attitudes: one, a desire, and the other a companion belief about how that desire can be satisfied in the circumstances. Furthermore, the consequence relation is construed as a specimen of causal relation: desire plus belief *conjointly cause* action. I will refer to this as the *interventionist* conception of action because it proposes that action is an intervention in an ongoing stream of events connected by relations of cause and effect. If this were the only way to construe action, then quite plausibly Nagel's contentions would be unavoidable; certainly there is no reason here to postulate a space for freedom, and quite possibly to do so is to court incoherencies. But there is plenty of reason to question the belief-desire model as an adequate or complete conception of action.

In 1979, John Perry published an influential paper that began thus:

> I once followed a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor, pushing my cart down the aisle on one side of a tall counter and back the aisle on the other, seeking the shopper with the torn sack to tell him he was making a mess. With each trip around the counter, the trail became thicker. But I seemed unable to catch up. Finally it dawned on me. I was the shopper I was trying to catch.
>
> I believed at the outset that the shopper with a torn sack was making a mess. And I was right. But I didn't believe that I was making a mess. That seems to be something I came to believe. And when I came to believe that, I stopped following the trail around the counter, and rearranged the torn sack in my cart (Perry 1979, 3).

Perry writes that before he believed it was he himself who was making the mess, the only appropriate response open to him, as someone who desired the mess-making halted, is to search out the mess-maker. When he learned that that person was himself, the options suddenly changed. And that the only difference between the former condition and the latter is a condition of belief utilizing an indexical such as “I”, “here” or “now”—whose elimination removes our ability to act.[4]

By contrast, I don’t believe that indexicals, as such, have much to do with the basic preconditions for action. (To believe as much is to set oneself up to repeat Nagel’s mistake since that takes the phenomenology out of focus and brings to the fore instead the ways we describe it.) “Essential indexicals” are symptomatic of a deeper requirement for action: in order to take appropriate action, the would-be agent must appreciate him or herself as situated vis-à-vis the action context in a way that makes changing something about that context conceivable. The agent must be able to embed her or his point view within the larger scene. More precisely, the agent must be able to appreciate how she or he is embedded vis-à-vis that scene. This

requirement goes beyond the interventionist conception. But it is not, as such, a matter of indexical belief. We have to recognize that many non-human animals without language, and certainly without indexicalized language, are nonetheless capable of action in the relevant ways, even if they are not sophisticated agents in the ways that humans can be (at least some of them). But even the naive agent must appreciate how his or her point of view intersects upon the scene on which she or he would act.[5] To recognize that this does not come to the same thing as utilizing an indexical, one only needs to notice that appreciating one's embedding in a scene is a much larger requirement than being able to say (for instance) that I am the mess-maker—the former requirement demands a much greater command of the details of the scene than the latter. So, for example, someone appreciating a narrative of days gone by as historical or completely fictional will appreciate that her point of view does not admit of action upon any narrated scene in that narrative simply because she commands the details of her own embeddedness vis-à-vis the target environment. Relatedly, someone looking at a photograph of Perry's sugar trail, taken from Perry's own vantage point once he learns that he is the mess-maker, does not automatically have the options that Perry reports finally feeling empowered to pursue. Agency requires at the very least that one has some command over the details of one's point of view in relation to the target environment. Agency is thus very demanding in metaphysical terms—its demands are not linguistic as such. It demands an appreciation of one's point of view in relation to a scene or environment in view. It demands appreciation of details that amounts to what one can only refer to as *command* of the situation—indeed to the point where one is actually creating one's little corner of the world. This condition is what Sartre would refer to as being *for-itself*. It is, for Sartre, a precondition of being a conscious subject of experience. I will be contending that this is the very *logic of experience*. In my view, action is intertwined with and consequent upon

experience of this sort. Thus an account of agency must emerge from an analysis of this type of experience. This is existentialism.

In favor of freedom

I shall simply stipulate that from here on out, when I say "existentialism" or "existentialist," I mean to be referring to the existentialism of Sartre and his circle, as well as those who participated later on in the program of research he launched—such writers (and they were initially all French thinkers) as Beauvoir or Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The word "existentialism" is used in many ways, and I don't mean to deny anyone else the right to use it as they wish. Indeed it is used within the discipline of philosophy to embrace also the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, among many others. I shall *not* be engaging in any substantial way with the ideas propounded by these thinkers. However, to lighten the burden of unrelenting qualifiers for this book's readership, I will simply dispense with the adjective "Sartrean" when I wish to refer to the brand of existentialism that Sartre pioneered.

Existentialism is premised on the idea that phenomenology, as a discipline, is stunted, or at the very least poorly motivated, if its single explanatory target is epistemological or purely cognitive—if its ambitions are to give analysis of purely intellectual or knowledge-oriented cognition. To put it a different way, phenomenology is inadequate if it assumes that the target of analysis are knowledge states, because human beings are not simply knowledge machines. What existentialism seeks to explain, in giving an analysis of human experience, is not merely how subjects come to be apprised of their circumstances or more broadly of the facts of their world; it seeks in addition to explain how that experience serves as foundation for their judgments about how to proceed in that world as authors and sources of action. If experience is the root of the

tree, then its branches are action. So how is a subject's or subjects' agency rooted in their experience? And perhaps most importantly, how is a subject's corpus of judgments and activities rendered authored by that subject, on the basis of that subject's experience? What is experience like, such that it can give rise to actions that taken together make up the life of a *Person*? This was Sartre's explanatory target, and he self-consciously embraced the label of "existentialism" for it, even as he embraced for it the methodology of the phenomenologists of his day. Existentialism is fundamentally a repudiation of the "primacy of knowledge" and an affirmation instead of the primacy of action—the primacy of ontology in what I will ultimately refer to as *world-making*.

The key to the entirety of Sartre's answer to this question, which comes out quite clearly in magnum opus *Being and Nothingness,* is a core axiom of freedom deeply embedded in the distinction between *thing-in-itself* and *thing-for-itself*. The *in-itself* is a thing with a fixed essence, while, by contrast, the *for-itself* is not. In the place of a fixed essence, the *for-itself* enjoys only a history (a *facticity,* as Sartre likes to say), and a completely open future. Nothing in a for-itself's future is beholden to its past; while for the *in-itself*, its essence mediates between its past and its future. This is the fundamental distinction in Sartrean philosophy, to which everything else clings. And it is, in my estimation, a beginning of wisdom for any account of agency. But I will eventually argue that this distinction is not what it seems to be. More precisely, it should not be read as its surface grammar suggests. For this distinction suggests a metaphysical reading; it presents as a taxonomic distinction. But it needn't and, more importantly, it shouldn't be so read—anyway, not in the context of Sartre's project. Instead, the distinction is logical: one and the same entity can be both in-itself and for-itself. Sartre's own examples reveal this to be the case: all depends on the point of view or perspective taken in a

given episode. Still, there are many points at which Sartre himself treated his distinction as though it were a metaphysical one rather than a purely phenomenological one. He clearly appreciated a mistake made much earlier by Descartes—and one we will begin discussing in this chapter, and continue further in chapter 3—but he could not keep himself from making an analogous one.

The distinction between in-itself and for-itself is best read as illuminating different categories of episodes, even in the life of the same entity. Throughout I shall treat the language of *in-itself* and *for-itself* as markers dividing between narratives and even moments within a single narrative, in an individual's life or experience. Still you might wonder if there is any entity at all that enjoys moments of for-itself—in any point of view, personal or apersonal. While it is the ultimate aim to be able to discern which events in any given life qualify for the more exalted status, one must begin with the ambition of setting down the principles that ought to be employed in the exercise. Toward that end it will be a good idea to explore how Sartre himself has given us the key to scrutinizing episodes in a life in both ways.

Sartre was a master of phenomenology. He was a brilliant examiner of experience, able to devise examples and dramatis personae in a manner that allowed others to examine their own phenomenology more productively. His examples are justly famous (and have drawn scrutiny in their own right for reasons that Sartre could not have anticipated). This is not a book in Sartre scholarship. Still, it is important to take the measure here of the stream of experience Sartre surveilled in defense of his analysis.

At the time that he brought forward his examples, the kind of cases Sartre discussed were unprecedented. He explored human motivation in sociological terms and at a very micro-sociological level, anticipating important ideas that would be later introduced by the pioneering

sociologist Erving Goffman in the 1950's and social psychologists many decades later. Sartre's appreciation of the role of motivation in how one experiences oneself and one's surroundings was many, many decades ahead of its time. Since Sartre's time, both sociology and psychology (cognitive and social psychology especially) have made strides to catch up, but nothing has yet overtaken Sartre's analysis in richness and ability to illuminate experience, especially in the motivational dimensions of experience.

Sartre understood that experience contains a wide variety of materials in it, about the world as well as about the elements of the Self that prepare it for action. And he was keenly aware that this material did not function in a purely representational mode. He understood that experience is rich also with *affect* and evidence of the subject's *implicit motivations*. None of Sartre's own philosophical contemporaries appreciated this fact to the same extent. The phenomenologists uniformly were concerned with materials that had only what might be called "intellectual" or "propositional" reality. The messy world of affect was put aside as in some sense philosophically unworthy. This attitude towards affect is decidedly Cartesian—which was characteristic of the European phenomenology of Sartre's day, and an attitude that even Hume was unable to challenge (as I argue in Thalos 2013c).

In many respects Sartre himself seemed to view Descartes as an anti-hero—someone from whom to draw inspiration towards an opposite destination point. The first and perhaps most important step in Sartre's anti-Cartesianism is illustrated in his conception of *anguish.*[6] I am in full agreement with Sartre's anti-Cartesianism, in spite of my own admiration of Descartes. I find Sartre's presentation of that anti-Cartesianism, here and elsewhere—stealthily signaling his opposition to Descartes—very powerful. Thus I will present that anti-Cartesianism in the way Sartre might have done—but all credit must go to Sartre for the content.

Sartre pointedly defines anguish as something that differs from *fear*, but which illuminates the reality of freedom—it is the evidence of freedom in human experience. When you stand at the edge of a precipice, or even at an intersection with heavy traffic, you could be struck with *fear* at what might *befall* you—what might happen if by some happenstance of which you are not the source, your ankle turned, you tripped or simply lost your balance. Fear is of what might befall. By contrast you would not experience fear but instead *anguish* if you were to consider deliberately taking certain measures yourself, for instance throwing yourself off the precipice or simply stepping out into the intersection in the way of traffic. In the former case you are afraid because of what might happen no thanks to anything you initiate. In the latter case you are confronted by the possibilities that you might *yourself* realize. The latter experience is quite different from the former. The experience of anguish to which Sartre alludes is, as psychologists now will tell us, an experience of *arousal.* Arousal is a *physiological* condition of action-readiness, involving elevated levels of alertness, heart rate, blood pressure, and so on; whereas fear can be purely passive (for example, fear of winter, old age or of the rising cost of living). Arousal is being prepared now to take steps to cope with a present danger or opportunity—to yourself be the difference made. Arousal takes notice—it is a telltale marker—of the fact that you are a source and not merely the scene of an event.

Of course some forms of fear—fear upon encountering a predator, say—might *also* involve arousal. Since it not only confronts you with what might befall you, but *also* and at the same time what you might be called upon to do in response. But this observation doesn't damage Sartre's point. For we should then have to be clear that anguish is more elemental than *that* second form of fear, which is composite rather than elemental, involving as it does both an active component (anguish) *and* a passive component (elemental fear).

The reality of anguish is in its very existence evidence too for the truth of freedom. It is our own personal evidence of freedom in our own experience. Elemental anguish—anguish without fear—would be absent if world-changing action were out-of-the-question impossible; indeed what would anguish be for? We would be equally well served by simple (un-compound) passive fear if no world-changing actions were possible. And if anguish were absent, we would notice no differences between the experience of imagining falling off the cliff by accident and imagining instead jumping off.[7] But the fact that passive fear and anguish differ, the fact that fear of predators is composite and not simple, speaks to the fact that true action is sometimes taken. To be sure not all happenings in a given person's life will qualify as actions, but some do—at the very least those that are attended by anguish.

Others

If acting when confronted by precipices and predators were enough for being genuinely free, our philosophical task (of demonstrating the reality of freedom in human life) would be complete at this point. But it's not. A life consisting of an unrelenting stream of dealings with predators and precipices is no life of freedom. Whatever else it might be, it is not even a characteristically human life—any more than is a life consisting of a series of moving one's arm up and down much discussed in the present milieu of neuroscience.[8] These are not lives rich with characteristically human experiences. So there is still much to do to convince that human life is shot through with human-specific freedoms.

Sartre saw this point clearly—unlike many philosophers working in the area of free will today. He also recognized that the human-specific freedoms are the most important. And with the aim of characterizing these, he supplied a distinctive piece of existential philosophy—a

distinctively Sartrean doctrine of “the Other”. This doctrine puts a certain motivationally important spin on yet another anti-Cartesian piece of analysis of experience that was in fact shared among the European phenomenologists of his time.

Recall that Descartes’ method begins with the “I” of experience. A first-personal voice animates the proceedings in the *Meditations,* all quite explicitly in the service of knowledge. For Descartes, the main function of the “I” is to generate knowledge of what lies beyond experience. Descartes employs epistemic categories, for example the twin concepts of error and certainty, to advance his project beyond the bounds of epistemology into the area of ontology, and continues to apply his method well beyond metaphysics too—into the province of the moral, for example. In advancing this program, Descartes commits a philosophical error quite early on. My diagnosis of this error shall pace itself (though more pedantically) through the anti-Cartesian analogs of Cartesian moves and motions employed by Sartre—who, to reiterate, deserves all the credit. Sartre masterfully reveals to us Descartes’ error—the error of taking the “I” of experience for a metaphysical category; and so reveals that Descartes’ method is incapable of grounding progression out of the realm of epistemological questions (granting to Descartes that it deserves its station there to begin with) into the space of ontology. It shall be a first priority in my agenda here to illuminate this error, so that we shall not repeat it as we go forward, as we continue by drawing on important elements of Sartrean existential philosophy. For, unfortunately, Sartre too was seduced by one of the many temptations that occasion this error. So let us begin now to lay out the core elements of an existential theory of human-specific freedom—a social theory of freedom—but let us move slowly enough to ensure good notice of the error, and prevent ourselves stumbling against the same stones.

It seems that all we have as subjects is the content of experience—the sort of thing that one would put in words by saying that it seems I am sitting here in front of the fire, warming my feet by its flames. But in fact—and as Descartes perceptively notes—experience comes structured: there is to be sure the content (the fire, the feet, the warming of the first by the second in the arc of the experience), but the whole thing is framed in terms of *my* having that content presented to *me*. In other words, experience has a kind of narrative quality to it, where "the world" (or anyway some collection of external agencies, external to my experience) is narrator, and "I" am the narrated-to. Descartes then reverses the voice of experience from passive to active—a note that at least initially seems false. He puts it like this: "I think something." This is a false description of the experience, for there is no "I" in the relevant experience (a reality to which Hume was very much attuned). More precisely, there is no *object* in the relevant experience to which an "I" might refer as a simple matter of fact.[9] "It is I"—as a statement of identification of an element of one's experience—is not a simple acknowledgement of facts on the ground, as I will presently explain; it is instead an act of judgment, and as such a very important exercise of power.

It is here then that Descartes makes his mistake: he says that what this "I think" amounts to—and what no subject of experience can challenge on pain of having to revoke title to absolutely everything—is the idea that there is an "I" embedded in experience. The suggestion is that the "I" is part of the content of experience, at least contained in it as a logical consequence: "I think; therefore I exist." This is Descartes' fundamental mistake. It was Sartre's first fundamental insight that he noticed this mistake: he noticed that the conclusion Descartes drew is not warranted by his method. So in the numerous instances in *Being and Nothingness* where Sartre describes an experience, he uses the first-personal voice to analyze as well as to narrate

the experience, but everywhere he scrupulously refrains from drawing any conclusions whatever about the subject of experience. Nowhere does he infer an existent. In this way he shows rather than tells us about Descartes' error.[10] He shows that the "I" must always be an empty placeholder. Ultimately he proclaims that no qualities of any kind can be attributed to the Subject of experience. In this way he also draws attention to what Descartes *should* have said, namely that experience comes structured so as to reveal a relationship between an appearance and the "window" upon the experience—the *subject position* within experience.

This then is Sartre's own surpassingly important contribution: "I think"—construed as the content of experience—does not imply "I exist" if we think of "I" as referring to some object. This is because it positively does not refer to an object in the content of experience. Rather, "I think" implies only a window upon the world so thought about. Experience reveals a point of view to which "I" seems to refer. Whereas it seemed clear to Descartes that the window throws light on the occupant of the subject position, it was clear to Sartre that the window of experience cannot throw light on that which engenders it—it cannot throw light on the viewer whose perspective is opened up. That, according to Sartre, is itself part of the logic of first-personal experience. For the window, as Sartre was quite clear, is entirely unidirectional; in the terms of the window metaphor, light does not pass in both directions through the subject window. The relation of subject-to-object is asymmetrical. So the window of subject-hood cannot cast light on the entity in the subject position. (Anticipating: to do that, we shall require two separate windows, with each opening onto the other. This possibility is opened up in the social world.)

Sartre shows us that what is revealed in experience, and therefore what cannot be challenged on pain of having to revoke title to absolutely everything—is that experience reveals the pervasive existence of *subject-hood as such*. I will sometimes refer to this as *pure presence*

or simply as *presence.* In addition to inferring the reality of presence, Descartes drew the further inference that there is indeed a *subject entity* embedded in experience—and so proceeded to believe he had incurred the (welcome) philosophical debt of having to say what the subject is like, metaphysically speaking. But this was unwarranted. The truly warranted conclusion is merely to subjecthood. Descartes lost his philosophical footing because he thrust an unwarranted referential "I" into the description of the contents of experience.

This is—to repeat—a fundamental insight. And it is decidedly consistent with—even unavoidable—in a naturalistic philosophy. (Hume himself could have approved.) But where does it lead? Sartre seems to believe that it leads to the most fundamental of all distinctions—to a distinction between Subject and Object, between the *in*-itself and the *for*-itself. But ultimately he too committed Descartes' error, or something very like it, when he advanced from this point. For he then proceeded to proclaim it as (or conflate it with) a metaphysical distinction—that between *the* in-itself and *the* for-itself. He began to think of his argument for presence in ontological rather than phenomenological terms; he began to think of it as a foundation for his own axiom of freedom. But this move is inapt, as we will see by turning now to the doctrine of the Other. For the doctrine of the Other is the true key to understanding the nature of subject-hood—the key to understanding the nature of that to which the phenomenological method leads unerringly. It is a deeply *anti*-Kantian place, as many phenomenologists (Edmund Husserl, Edith Stein, and Maurice Merlau-Ponty) agreed.[11]

To recognize this error is not to deny a distinction between Subject and Object. It is instead to appreciate that, while the distinction between Subject and Object might sound like an ontological distinction—a marker of a difference between non-overlapping *kinds* in the world—it is instead a logical distinction. For, as Sartre's own analysis of the Other shows, the Subject is

a merely *temporary* locus of center—where by "center" we shall mean the Cartesian origin of spatial coordinates. The Object by definition is not a center, since there can be only one locus of center at a time. The Subject by definition has a window—the only possible one—on the entire space. It is the only possible one because there can only be one.[12] That there can only be one subject is the *logic* of experience. Turning now to a more positive characterization of the Object, the Object is a *resident* in the space of experience. The Subject, by contrast, is *not* an occupant of space. This should have been our first clue that what we are now grappling with is not a metaphysic but a logic. And the fact that this is a logic is precisely what Sartre's own examples clearly establish. Existential methodology opens out onto a philosophical vision distinct from empiricism but not incompatible with it—indeed, required by it. It is a vision that acknowledges the compatibility of analytical and object-oriented representations. The best way of approach to this idea is via the sort of entry that Sartre himself gives us in The Look (Part III, chapter 1.IV of *Being and Nothingness*). I will present it now, without lyricism, in plodding but I trust serviceable imitation of inimitable Sartre.

I am enjoying the view from my favorite park bench, when I notice the figure of a man in the distance. I am at liberty to speculate wildly about that man's relationship to other objects I locate in the space whose very center (whose "origin" as the geometer says) I occupy—for now, anyway. For instance, I might speculate as to how the man in the distance manages to avoid being blown to one side by gusts of wind, as nearby objects of similar apparent size and substance are now being blown. Wild speculation might be admissible on this point *only* if I've never interacted face to face with objects of his kind. In that (strictly hypothetical) condition I might experience the whole world—indeed, space itself—as emanating from my point of view (my Self) as its center, a Cartesian point without extension. I am a Subject—an entity with a

perspective—upon a universe of Objects themselves without "windows"—available for viewing from the outside, but nothing on the inside looking out.

But let me be looked upon just once—for example by that man in the park as he approaches my bench. As he catches my gaze, I am locked into an experience of vertigo. I am displaced from the center of the universe, even as I experience that very center flee from me and towards him (*not* me!) as Subject. And suddenly I become no longer Subject, but now one of many Objects—Others—in that universe I once transcended absolutely (in the posture of a potentate). An Other in my world—an Other with a capital O—was once upon a time an object distinct from myself, bearing a spatial location relative to me as center, and bounded in space and time. Before I encountered this man, before my first close encounter, I knew Others only as objects or bodies, bounded in time and space, within my universe, I its sole Subject. For, to be an Object is, as Sartre puts it, to be *for-another* rather than to be *for-oneself*, to be eligible of being acted upon rather than acting. When I encounter that man's gaze, I encounter myself, for the first time, as an Other, an Object in another Subject's universe. I become phenomenally present to myself as an Object. I feel exposed for the first time, vulnerable, an entity with an exterior, embedded in a universe that is open to view and to being acted upon by Others. In my displacement from the former status to the latter, I am *objectified*.

I, which was once upon a time a for-itself, have become an in-itself. I, which was once upon a time a Subject, have become an Object. Clearly the line dividing these things can shift, depending on the grammar of the experience, as it were. For experience comes with a logical form. [13] This is the profound meaning of Sartre's analysis. *The distinction between Subject and Object is a logical one,* as is the distinction between in-itself and for-itself—a point we gestured at somewhat differently earlier. I propose then that we use the following terminology, more

suited to this logical conception: *for-itself* v. *for-others* (and not *for-itself v. in-itself).* This too is language Sartre uses indiscriminately within this tight circle of ideas. .

Back now to the narrative. When I encounter that man's gaze, I encounter myself, for the first time, as an Object in another Subject's universe—a universe made and governed no longer by me. I become phenomenally present to myself as an Object. (An Object is an *explicit* presence in a phenomenal description; it signals that the experience in question is at least partly *object-oriented*—to use the terminology we introduced in the Introduction.) This experience of objectification is absolutely transfiguring. For Sartre, objectification would be the symbol of a kind of social or moral problem; and this conception of it would ultimately cause him to miss an important philosophical opportunity, and so where we shall have to part company with him. Sartre came to believe that objectification is something that Subjects cannot tolerate, not phenomenally, not philosophically, nor apparently in any other way. He thought that objectification was experientially and motivationally noxious—not merely aversive in any variety of degrees for different people in different contexts, but unequivocally and unconditionally repellent. And so Sartre came to believe—ironically, indeed perversely—that there is no true objectification; he came to believe that the ego (the first person of experience) is permanently able to elude objectification, and that therein lies its freedom. For Sartre, the ego is a permanent fugitive; he concluded that therefore the Self is never present as a figure in its own experience, even in the moment when reflecting on itself. In such moments, it must transcend that which it reflects upon. The "I" cannot self-identify with the "me" of experience. But if that were right, however, how should we even know what objectification is, or whether it is noxious, if it does not actually befall us in experience? How should we have learned the first principles of

Sartrean phenomenology? What should we make of the drama on the park bench? Has Sartre performed a bait-and-switch?

Sartre's theoretical motivations for sustaining his animadversion to objectification is clear: he resolutely maintained that in confrontation with the Other, the Self is no longer free. Here is what he says:

> This is because of the fact that by means of the upsurge of the Other there appear certain determinations which I am without having chosen them. Here I am—Jew, or Aryan, handsome or ugly, one-armed, etc. All this I am for the Other with no hope of apprehending this meaning which I have outside and, still more important, with no hope of changing it. Speech alone will inform me of what I am; again this will never be except as the object of an empty intention, any intuition of it is forever denied me (Sartre 2012, 581/671).

And again:

> Thus suddenly an object has appeared which has stolen the world from me. Everything is in place; everything still exists for me; but everything is traversed by an invisible flight and fixed in the direction of a new object. The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously effecting (Sartre 2012, 301/343).

For Sartre, the Subject cannot "maintain" a world while under scrutiny by an Other:

> When I am posited and mundanized as an object, I can no longer constitute and maintain a world. Under the look of the Other, the situation retreats from my grasp (Sartre 2012, 311/355).

Some features of this de-centering are shared by that experience Sartre describes as "shame," which is painful, according to Sartre, at least partly because in it the Subject feels trapped in her facticity. I am "irremediably what I am (rather than as someone with future possibilities as someone who can become otherwise)" (2003, 312); the future is lost to me. Sartre writes that the gaze of the Other paralyzes my transcendence and reduces me to that which I am (I am what the Other takes me to be).

> The Other's look touches me across the world and is not only a transformation of myself but a total metamorphosis of the world (Sartre 2012, 316/360).

How can this be? Why is the Other's gaze so very noxious? Sartre:

> Thus my being-in-the-world, by the sole fact that it realizes a world, causes itself to be indicated to itself as a being-in-the-midst-of-the world by the world which it realizes. The case could not be otherwise, for my being has no other way of entering into contact with the world except to be in the world. It would be impossible for me to realize a world in which I was not and which would be for me a pure object of a surveying contemplation (Sartre 2012).

An "I" cannot exist without a point of view at the center of the universe. The Other's gaze takes the center away—it de-centers me:

> First the Other's look as the necessary condition of my objectivity is the destruction of all objectivity for me. The Other's look touches me across the world and is not only a transformation of myself but a total metamorphosis of the world (Sartre 2012, 316/360).

For Sartre, a "de-centered" world is not one where I can exist as a Subject. There is, apparently, no room for *inter*-subjectivity in Sartre's conception of subjectivity; there can be no collaboratively constituted world in which I act as a free entity. It's as though Sartre believed that the Subject cannot act freely in world in which it is perceived as a something—in which it has been characterized (captured in a category) by an Other.

Sartre's phenomenologist contemporaries did not agree with him on this. For example Husserl:

> When I realize that I can be an alter ego for the other just as he can be it for me, a marked change in my own constitutive significance takes place. The absolute difference between self and other disappears. The other conceives of me as an other, just as I conceive of him as a self (Husserl 1973b,243-44).

> As a consequence, I come to the realization that I am only one among many and that my perspective on the world is by no means privileged (Husserl 1973, 645; quoted and translated in Zahavi 2001)

Husserl sees no problems with the concept of a co-constituted world; in fact, he conceives of objectivity as the result of multiple co-constitutions, and therefore argues that a clarification of objectivity requires analysis of the experience of the Other, because the Other is a necessary pre-condition of the possibility for my experience of an *objective* (as opposed to a merely subjective)

world. So encountering the Other as a Self rather than as an Object merely, endows the world with an objective validity:

> Here we have the only transcendence which is really worth its name, and anything else that is also called transcendent, such as the objective world, depends upon the transcendence of foreign subjectivity. (Husserl 1959, 495; quoted and translated in Zahavi 2001)

Merleau-Ponty, like Husserl, did not share Sartre's concerns about the dilution of subjectivity in the Other's gaze (or its eradication, if that's a better description of Sartre's concerns). For Merleau-Ponty, the "dilution" is already realized in the subject's embodiment—which is ineluctable. Thus he writes that we cannot even recognize another subject unless we acknowledge that which is Other—*alterity*—in ourselves:

> If the sole experience of the subject is the one which I gain by coinciding with it, if the mind, by definition, eludes 'the outside spectator' and can be recognized only from within, my cogito is necessarily unique, and cannot be 'shared in' by another. Perhaps we can say that it is 'transferable' to others. But then how could such a transfer ever be brought about? What spectacle can ever validly induce me to posit outside myself that mode of existence the whole significance of which demands that it be grasped from within? Unless I learn within myself to recognize the junction of the for itself and the in itself, none of those mechanisms called other bodies will ever be able to come to life; unless I have an exterior others have no interior. The plurality of consciousness is impossible if I have an absolute consciousness of myself (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 427-428, quoted and translated in Zahavi 2001).

And thus an openness toward others is secured the moment that I define both myself and the other as co-existing relations to the world (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 114; quoted and translated in Zahavi 2001).

For Merleau-Ponty, the Self is a marriage of subjectivity and objectivity, and therefore it is enabled to take action, to be free—a point which we shall take up at more length in chapter 2.

Assessing Sartre's discomfort with objectification

Sartre was profoundly troubled by "The Look". In his magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*, he describes it as involving "alienation," and so something that we would (and rightly) want to escape (if we can be said to truly experience it in the first place). This we can do only by denying that there is genuinely another subject there aware of us and capable of passing a judgement by way of attributing essence to us. The natural response is a defensive reaction—to seek to objectify in return, or even preemptively:

> My defensive reaction to my object-state will cause the Other to appear before me in the capacity of *this or that object*…. My constant concern is to contain the Other within his objectivity, and my relations with the Other-as-object are essentially made up of ruses designed to make him remain an object. But one look on the part of the Other is sufficient to make all these schemes collapse and to make me experience once more the transfiguration of the Other. Thus I am referred from transfiguration to degradation and from degradation to transfiguration without ever being able either to get a total view … or to hold firmly to either of them (Sartre 2003, 393-4).

But of course,

> Everything which may be said of me in my relations with the Other applies to him as well. While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me…Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others (Sartre 2003, 475).

It is a brave vision. Unblinking, unwilling to look away from a mortal danger. But the crisis Sartre envisions has all the marks of the artificial, the wholly manufactured. The drama, the danger—they strike the reader as manifestly exaggerated, contrived even, discomfitingly poetic. For this reason some interpreters have proposed that Sartre was not really speaking of real-time relationships to concrete Others; he was instead dealing with transcendental concerns about the nature of self-awareness in experience (Busch 1975). The obvious trouble with this interpretation is simply that Sartre's language is too large for that, too perplexingly palpable, too epic—too sticky with blood. If Sartre in these statements is not talking about personal relationships, what could he possibly have said that would have enabled a reading of him as seeking to do so, had he so intended? If the high urgency of the tone he actually takes is insufficient, what would he have had to say to convince us he was in fact talking about personal interactions? [14]

It would be easy at this point to conclude that Sartre made certain mistakes in scrutinizing his phenomenology, that he paid perhaps too much attention to his own private, even Manichean horror of his materiality—or that he was simply terrorized by the prospect of being an entity subject to exposure to Others, on public display. But I take a different view of the matter. While I am prepared to concede that Sartre might have made philosophical errors, I am less sanguine about challenging his ability to render the human experience faithfully. He was no shrinking violet. I am thus drawn instead to an alternative interpretation—to the idea that Sartre is seeking

to describe something primal in experience, and that he is adamant in not denying it the fundamentality in analysis that it plays in life. Thus I maintain that while there is something unquestionably right in both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty's positions, they do not take seriously, at a primal level, something that Sartre is very profoundly attuned to: the fact that Others will not always agree with ourselves about how to constitute the world and—more elementally—how to characterize us. That they therefore pose a primal risk. He over-generalizes however when he says: "conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others" (Sartre 2003, 475). Conflict is not universal; sometimes there is concord. But perhaps Sartre is right that concord is rare and conflict dominant, but without empirical research, who's to say? Disagreement as to how to constitute the world—especially as to how to characterize *my* Self—might be indeed quite common. Hence Sartre's saying might be better recast as: conflict is a potential outcome of any contact with an Other, because shame always threatens.

Accordingly I shall defend Sartre on this: that there is potential for shame in every human contact. And love relationships are no exception: while many relationships are safe, it still remains that many aren't. The experience of trust betrayed is closely allied to the experience of shame. The daily newspapers are filled with stories of people whose trust has been betrayed, to say nothing of those cases of betrayal that stay "in the family" and never see the light of day. Indeed for certain ones among us the potential for conflict really and truly rises to the level of menace at nearly every turn: the Woman, the slave, the Black, the Jew—as Sartre was keenly aware. And it is befitting the dignity of these cases—it is befitting their moral gravity, and the solemnity of the demands they make upon our decency—that he should poetically memorialize the threats in them in the dramatic way that is so characteristic of his polemical style. However not every human contact results in such a drama, or even a high level of threat of such drama. It

takes social science to reveal the numbers, however. This is where social science can be useful, and also where a phenomenology of the social—a phenomenology that has learnt its Sartrean lessons—will serve the social sciences. What is required, and what I shall make it my business to provide in the remainder of this chapter, is a way of discerning between the cases where the threat looms large and those where that danger is moderated or made to vanish. I shall make it my business to provide an account of how certain forms of abuse involve a special species of objectification, distinct from a garden-variety, morally unproblematic sort.

What was Sartre's own solution to his apparently manufactured quandary? Sartre ultimately opted to locate freedom in the "transcendence of the ego"—in the retreat of the "I"'s current location to successively greater levels of removal. We are free, it would seem, insofar as we can retreat from view by Others. First, I reflect upon the fact that I am looking at a tree; then I reflect upon the fact that I am reflecting upon the fact that I am looking at a tree; then I reflect upon my meta-reflection; and so on, apparently indefinitely. At each stage the "I" (the Subject) moves outside the orbit of the things reflected upon. In this way the "I" is never caught, even if the "me" is always caught—the "me" who is just the shell, lacking subject-hood, and found in the street and the supermarket. In this way, Sartre thought, the "I" could be "monstrously" free. But this is a purely metaphysical solution to a rather different sort of problem than presents itself in The Look. It is "purely metaphysical" in a derogatory sense—in the sense that it doesn't solve any real problems; it doesn't solve any problems that anyone cares about. For even the freedom it speaks of is not a freedom anyone cares about—Sartre has performed a bait-and-switch.[15] What we care about is freedom for "me", the being who is present to Others, the being-in-the-

world who is found in the street and the marketplace. That's where I have to fight my battles. What does freedom for an artificially defined "me" have to do with it?

Sartre chose a philosophy that could speak of "monstrous freedom," which all too frequently in his time was interpreted as the freedom to do monstrous things, to act even against one's character, and against human decency in the bargain. This is a philosophical mistake. The unfortunate examples in the ensuing discussions of Sartre's philosophy distracts from the true evidence and basis for freedom. There is, for example, the case of Janet's young bride, simply beside herself "in terror, when her husband left her alone, of sitting at the window and summoning the passers-by like a prostitute" (Sartre 1962). Less abrasive against contemporary sensibilities, but still well within the class of "monstrous", is the case of the driver behind the wheel of an automobile, aware at every moment of the possibility that he will deliberately veer into oncoming traffic. In my view, what these strange examples purportedly of "monstrous freedom" do is draw attention to the nature of some of the most important *barriers to* freedom: self-restraint due to an at least partly socially-constructed Self. These are the boundaries that routinely contain or restrain behavior, in terms that we would never describe as restraining—for good reasons: it is because some of the most important barriers to freedom are indeed barriers the Self constructs—or is helped to construct—in the process of socialization. Thus among the first defenses against my "monstrous freedom" is my own self-conception—my sense of what is appropriate to me—which might either be authentic (self-imposed) or externally imposed upon me. This is a topic we will discuss at some length very soon (chapter 2). We will discuss at equally great length another critical barrier to freedom—the judgments of *others*, and in particular *their* conceptions of myself (chapter 2, 4, 7-9). The exercise of freedom importantly engages the judgment of others, sometimes challenging it, sometimes acquiescing, sometimes in

simple agreement with it. Construction of Self is negotiated in the context of such engagements and challenges. Their boundaries are the boundaries of freedom, because they are the boundaries of what we can imagine for ourselves. These shall be themes in coming chapters.

Sartre, by contrast, believed that a Subject either (1) is really and truly open to objectification, to being made an entity with a fixed essence, or (2) simply believed (falsely) that he or she could be so objectified—what he came ultimately to label "bad faith." Sartre ultimately opted for the second horn of this dilemma, since he felt that (1) is an impossibility of a certain sort. In opting for (2) and denying (1), Sartre sided with Descartes and Kant against Husserl—accusing the latter of hypostatizing the subject, which is itself supposedly a form of philosophical bad faith, a very serious form of self-deception.

Now I maintain that Sartre made the philosophical error of choosing (2) and rejecting (1). Among many reasons, the most mundane is that it is a simple matter of his own principles that (2) entails (1), so that Sartre's position becomes ultimately philosophically unstable. Moreover his position incurs a debt to explain bad faith—a very puzzling condition indeed. Here is my argument for this point. Consider: either (1) is true, in which case I can be objectified or (2) it is a case of bad faith for me to believe that I can be objectified when I experience The Look. Sartre, as we noted, held (2). But if (2) is the case, then (1) must *also* be true. For if I believe that I can be objectified, having experienced The Look, and I do this in bad faith, then I am deceiving myself. And if I really can deceive myself, then I am treating myself as an object to be handled a particular way without my consent (since that's more or less what bad faith amounts to); and if that's true, then I must be susceptible to objectification. (Indeed wasn't it Sartre who took Sigmund Freud to task for advancing the idea that a person can deceive himself in the psychodynamic dance in which Id, Ego and Superego are supposedly caught up?) So Sartre's

own system ultimately becomes untenable. More importantly, he sold out his phenomenological roots, casting aside the respect a true phenomenologist owes to the phenomenology of experience—in this case the phenomenology of being objectified, which he ultimately simply denied.

Sartre scholar Sebastian Gardner argues that Sartre sought to kill two birds with a single stone—to handle the two problems: (1) how to conceive of freedom; and (2) how to understand the nature of agency—essentially by inventing a way of conceptualizing experience that simply identifies the conditions of subject-hood with freedom. The idea of the for-itself, according to Gardner, could be made to contain within it the notion of freedom, so that the very idea of world-making captures both what it is to be a Self (as an entity that is permanently absent from experience proper) and at the same time what it is to be free (Gardner 2009). (I've been referring to the fundamentality of freedom in Sartre's system as the *axiom of freedom*; Gardner proposes to think of it as a single solution to two parallel problems.) This would explain why Sartre's difficulties with objectification: the Other represents an abrogation of my freedom, because the Other represents a challenge to my very subject-hood—understood as my capacity for world-making.

Gardner might well be right. But if he is, then Sartre's philosophical instincts were to cut the wrong corners. Objectification for Sartre is key to human beings' coming to learn who (and what) they are—we are fundamentally social beings who are subject to being taken as such by Others in the process of objectification that Sartre himself describes. By Sartre's own lights in *Being and Nothingness*, we cannot come to that self-knowledge without having experienced objectification. If the Subject is not to be locked permanently into the Cartesian first-personal mode of self-knowledge, then something like objectification must be possible. Sartre obviously

sought to liberate the Subject from the Cartesian prison. (Readers of Sartre are palpably released in the very reading of *Being and Nothingness*—or rather, they recognize the fact of never having inhabited the Cartesian prison. Who among us pines for the Cartesian cell?) So if Gardner is correct that the axiom of freedom is meant to solve the transcendental problems of Self (as a transcendental category) and freedom simultaneously, then it is a poor solution to a theorist's imagined problem. What is required instead is essentially a disentanglement of freedom and subject-hood. This is what I am out to do in this project.

Disentangling freedom, as such, from a philosophical account of agency requires solving the problem of the logic of action (instead of the problem of freedom) as the more elemental, and allowing the solution to the more elemental problem to inform analysis of subject-hood (on the one side) and freedom (on the other). This means of proceeding will have the added benefit of making it possible for subjects sometimes to lack freedom—to be slaves. This is a reality that, because of his (Gardnerian) solution, Sartre could never acknowledge; he had to invent the concept of bad faith to paper over the true facts of life.

The solution we shall implement is considerably simpler (and independent also of concerns about transcendental problems). Moreover, it is organically connected with important ideas in contemporary social psychology. The first-personal structure of experience is the very logic of the experience of a Subject—there is no other way to be a subject of experience except via the logic of action. The phenomenology so dictates. And the phenomenology also indicates that the Subject can be taken as an Object: Sartre proved as much. There is thus a phenomenological proof of the embedding of Subjects within a world of objects—a proof of the compatibility of our object orientation with the analytical orientation. True: Subjects are analytically inscrutable, as Subjects; they cannot be broken down further in the analytical mode.

But this does not prevent them being insertable—embeddable—within a more embracing, more broadly speaking analytical model. We might refer to such a model as *textured*—involving both Subjects and Objects at the same time. A textured representation is a special kind of object-oriented representation. The fundamental idea is that within a model of the universe, we can build things up around Subjects. Within such a model, an agent/person is a whole comprised of a subjective first-personal point of view (a Subject) embedded in (or if you prefer, conjoined to) a body and a self-conception, which are in their turn comprised at least partly of materials constructed around and about that point of view. Once that picture of the person/agent emerges, one can construe agency as the activity of such an entity. The constructed materials are the Selves we shall be speaking of; and because they are constructed, they are eligible of a developmental arc over a lifetime.

Self and Subject are different things. Subjects are eligible of objectification. Selves are a bit more complicated, as upcoming chapters will describe. Agents, last of all, comprise all these self-relevant elements. It is this last, and not either of the previous two, that takes action in the world.

Action

There is a logic to action. Local wisdom currently dictates that one acts in order to bring about a future that would not happen except for one's interventions. This seems a sensible conception of action, but it is in fact deeply flawed. Let me, to start with, enumerate the two fundamental ways in which it goes counter to ordinary common sense. First, it presupposes that the agent grasps (or is in some other way apprised of) the future as it would unfold except for that intervention. Second, it presuppose that the so-called *intervention* were not *already* a part of how the world

was going to be, so that the proceedings to that point demanded or called for an intervention. The language of *intervention* is problematic because it generates a spurious boundary between the agent and the world. The reality is that agents are always and already interacting with the world all the time, so how is the conception of action as intervention really apropos? The conception of action as intervention is especially problematic for Sartre: for him, as for any phenomenologist, the agent is world-making on an ongoing (*not* occasional) basis because a subject's experience is at once self- and world-constituting.

Acting, in the view that shall unfold in upcoming chapters, is not intervention; instead, it involves ongoing world-making, which comprises many activities, many simultaneous. Among them is the activity of projecting ("seeing") into the future; indeed it can involve seeing many potential futures. And it involves committing to realizing one of the potential arcs as best as one can, most importantly by creating a Self who is suited to doing so. Self-constitution is fundamental; from it flows action that is worthy of regarding as free. Self-constitution is the construction of an ever-changing, dynamic *self-conception* in real time.

A phenomenologist has no problems in populating the world with objects that are in some sense outside the perceptual field but nonetheless represented in experience; these are experienced without being perceived.[16] Husserl's discussion of the unseen facets of objects (their "back sides", as it were), the aspects not presented to the viewer, is rightly renowned: we experience the objects in our visual field as having back sides, even though we do not have explicit representations of those back sides. In the same way we can be said to experience the immediate past, as well (as I would insist) a number of possible extensions of the present arc of experience. (Indeed, what is object permanence if not the combination of these facets of our capacity for experience?) Sitting with the menu at the restaurant we project the present arc of

experience as potentially containing either the beef or the falafel dish, without seriously considering the chicken (for example). Only once we've done so can we commit to one or the other of the options genuinely considered. (This is why it is considerably harder to perform this task when you are selecting for a meal next month—it is a different task entirely to project a course of life that makes it possible to make a defensible commitment now to a meal you'll be enjoying in a month's time.) Finally, it is no more difficult to find the not-happening in experience too. Some time ago I had occasion to discover my husband's phone on the garage floor several hours after his morning departure. And immediately there unfolded before me numerous scenarios of what he was *not* doing at that moment in time (calling the plumber, for one thing). When we are missing loved ones, we experience their not-presence.

Experience is very rich indeed; it can provide many resources for agency. But what it does not contain—as Sartre was right in saying—is Selves. It has to be this way, as we shall be arguing, because Selves are always at least partly made; they are never wholly found; the content of the self-concept is perpetually in flux. But Selves are required for action, in some form however nascent. Because a Self is a proper and an essential part of an agent. (When still young, our behavior does not count as action because our Selves are still too under-constructed.) Moreover, the features of Self reveal the extent of freedom manifested in any given action.

Action, in summary, is mediated not only by a first-personal perspective (a subjectivity) on the scene or context in which an agent undertakes action; it is mediated also by a Self comprised by a body and a self-concept. Social psychology has been making strides in recent decades to illuminate how the self-concept, construed as a belief structure regarding one's features and abilities, and how they compare to those of others (especially in those in one's social circles), mediates and moderates behavior. And we shall explore these findings in much of

the book, endorsing the functional explanations of Self that originated in the 1970's in Claude Steele's research (known nowadays as "self-affirmation theory"): the Self is a core component of a self-esteem system, which operates at the center of a range motivation processes; and when it functions properly it helps explain ourselves *to* ourselves, in relation to the world at large, and thereby sustains a phenomenal experience of the Self as "adaptively and morally adequate" (Steele 1999, 274).

In assessing Sartre's position, then, we must say this: while his phenomenology is unerring, an interventionist conception of action is ill-suited to it. Sartre is wrong that one can take free action only when invisible to others—when (from one's perspective) not being objectified. In fact, objectification can promote agency rather than present an obstacle to it, as much of the rest of this book will endeavor to show.

From here forward the account I shall be advancing will be very much beholden to the concepts of Self and agency that developed under theoretical pressures applied by Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, although my account of agency will reach out to science (on one side) and politics (on another) rather differently than theirs did. I reiterate that my narrative here is decidedly not attempting anything like a systematic discussion of any other thinker's views. Still it is important to signal that my account resembles that of my existential forebears insofar as it provides that freedom does not reside in any form of transcendence; it is rooted in practical agency and in understanding that agency as a natural phenomenon. Freedom in my account will reside primarily in exercise of a natural capacity that humans utilize more abundantly than any other species on the planet: the capacity for judgment. In particular: judgment in relation to Self. My account will differ from what has come before, primarily in its contextualization of the exercise of freedom. Freedom, on my account, shows up *not* in the absence of a field of power,

so as to reveal an unlimited field of possibility (in Sartrean language, monstrous freedom); instead, freedom shows up only *against* the reticulations of power impinging from without—they are the ground to its figure. For freedom, as I shall be arguing, must be construed as an exercise within an already-present field of power. My account differs also in illuminating the phenomenology of the focal topic—freedom—as a function of how it appears in contexts characterized by the other topic—power. Mine will thus be clearly a bounded form of freedom, indeed defined by its boundaries. Still, freedom comes in proportion to the ability to employ concepts in the course of rational judgment. All these elements come together (in chapter 2) in a way that enables us to articulate the logic of social agency—a logic that illuminates human freedom.

We must now give some preliminary attention to developing the concepts that will distinguish our treatment of objectification from that of Sartre.

Identities

> "It is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a man among men."
> – Sartre, "Intentionality: A fundamental idea in Husserl's Phenomenology" (5)

We have many reasons to seek out Others—other subjects. First, and most obviously, because as organisms and especially as younger ones, we have many needs that Others can and are prepared to fulfill. Bonding with others thus serves us very well, and in numerous ways. But ours at this point is *not* an inquiry into *motivations* for seeking others out (whether those motivations are explicitly chosen or simply reside in our organic beings).[17] We shall approach this question of motivation more closely in chapters 7-9. Ours at this moment is instead an inquiry into the *ontology* of these encounters.

Before we embark on our analysis of real-time encounters with Others, it's important to take some notice of the many functions that these encounters play in social life. First, consider the services that persons *outside* our acquaintance can render. Someone that you might know but are not personally acquainted with can have a great of impact on your life, not merely in helping to shape your material circumstances (as for example the discoverer of electricity and the inventor of movable type, whoever they were—and that's precisely the point—have arguably shaped the circumstances of a preponderance of humanity living today), but also they can contribute to the various cultures of which you imbibe: they devise scientific theories, participate in industry and commerce, write plays, sing songs, create cuisines and works of art, propound public policies, invent and construct instruments for practical uses, and otherwise buffet us all about on a dynamic and unrelenting stream of experiences. So obviously you don't even need to know such individuals "in person" in order to be affected by them. They can make your life better or worse, make you sad or poor, deflate or delight you. All in a day's work and without knowing anything at all about you. They don't even have to be coeval with you; they can be long dead.

But persons of our acquaintance provide a service completely different: they acknowledge our existence. Our craving for such acknowledgement is, at least according to Sartre, practically limitless. And for a good reason: there are entire sides of us as persons that do not even exist without this acknowledgment. People in our acquaintance service our *needs-for-being*.

What does this mean? Consider walking into a shop in search of some small commodity. Some shops are self-service: you go to the appropriate aisle, select your product, and then take it to the clerk for payment. In some shops, you are not required to do so much as hand over

payment in person; you may simply hand over a charge card or simply share its number with an automated clerk. A great many market transactions are of this sort. Today our marketplaces are for the most part de-personalized. There is a reason that we are tolerant of this: our market beings—our identities as consumers—are generally not core to who we are. (One might even say that markets work better for this fact.) We tolerate impersonal marketplaces because consumer identities (our purchasing habits, traits and other consumer-relevant aspects of us) are generally not the objects of conscious sculpting on our parts—and that's because these identities generally don't matter so very much to us. This may not be true universally: when a person's marketplace identity matters to them—when it matters to them to be perceived as a particular type of consumer or patron, for instance someone with sophisticated taste—they will seek out brand name identifiers and participate in market loyalty programs that help them establish and maintain such identities.[18] However, to the extent that market identities are *un*important to us, we do *not* have the relevant need-for-being. To the extent that the contrary is true instead, and we do have that need, we will be motivated to seek out the interactions that establish that identity for us—we will seek out that stage of human interaction that will allow us to forge that identity for ourselves.

As human beings we are constructors of multiple self-identities that we integrate with individual style (not always fully, but that's a topic for another occasion). We cannot do this all alone. We need other people's help. That's why human relationships can be perilous. We have to put ourselves at risk to *become*, to be *objectified-as*.

The mediation of Others: Elements of Sartrean existentialism

There are stages and arenas of human interaction where needs-for-being are nearly universal. (And where, it turns out, the few departures from universality will be due to a cognitive or developmental deficit.) Consider the arena of the family. Very few people are indifferent to their family identities. Less universally, consider the school, the workplace, and the public square. These are arenas where many of us labor at creating self-identities or self-images that are important to us. Different people find different arenas more compelling. But almost everybody finds *some* arena of interaction with Others compelling.

What do Others do for us in these arenas? They perform some very important services. I will name three, reserving judgment as to whether there might (or might not) be more.

Visibility

First, Others *locate* us in those arenas where we might seek recognition. Indeed, Others help to constitute those places as arenas in the first place. When they acknowledge us there, we become "visible" in those spaces. Sometimes this visibility is painful. Sartre spoke of shame in connection with being seen by others. It is one sort of feeling that one can associate with being seen—being seen for being a particular something, perhaps something awkward or ugly.[19] But shame is not (*contra* some readings of Sartre) the only feeling one may associate with being seen as a particular something in a certain arena. Being visible at all is already an achievement, at least in some areas (Morris 2011; Honneth 2001). It has taken struggle for women to be seen as players on numerous professional stages, and the same is true for persons of color.

Standards

Besides locating us there, Others also introduce us to the *standards* of an arena. Once again, those standards are constituted by how Others proceed in that arena. By locating us in those

arenas, and introducing us to the relevant standards, Others make us eligible of evaluation in those arenas. And perhaps Others also apply those arena-specific standards to us.

Evaluation

Finally, Others also *apply* their own valuations to us, introducing us to their own self-standards. These might differ in important ways from those common to the arena. Once again, being evaluated according to the standards of a field (favorably or otherwise) is itself something of an achievement, and something that has been denied to many deserving individuals in the history of our species.

I will say more about standards later, and how common standards arise from the activities of people in an arena. For now, we can take note of the fact that human beings desperately crave being seen through the lenses created by these arena-specific standards. Because they provide us with a sense of being that we cannot otherwise have. This is a Sartrean idea that we now need to examine more closely.

Sartre's treatment of The Look is deservedly famous. In this treatment, Sartre shows how our appreciation of ourselves as beings-in-the-world depends on being seen by others. The experience of being looked upon occasions an upsurge of being, an "irruption of the self"—"I see *myself* because *somebody* sees me" (2003, 284). Thus, not only is The Look the space in which I first learn of the existence of Others (as Subjects), but it is also the space in which I begin to exist as a being-in-the-world myself, an Object. I become a being-in-the-world when I first become aware of somebody looking at me. And this has to be a two-way affair, as now we will discuss.

Objectification

> Some days I put the people in their places at the table,
> bend their legs at the knees,
> if they come with that feature,
> and fix them into the tiny wooden chairs.
>
> All afternoon they face one another,
> the man in the brown suit,
> the woman in the blue dress,
> perfectly motionless, perfectly behaved.
>
> But other days, I am the one
> who is lifted up by the ribs,
> then lowered into the dining room of a dollhouse
> to sit with the others at the long table.
>
> — Billy Collins, *Some Days*

What happens in these two-way interactions? The encounter, as we've already noted, was perceived by Sartre to be fraught with peril. But the critical thing to note, *contra* Sartre, is that the feeling of being displaced from center of experience is transitory in a number of ways; first, in the way that Sartre himself directs to our attention—that experience of objectification motivates me to objectify in return and hence to "take back" the center, but more importantly in that the experience is itself transmuted (by a kind of psychological alchemy) in a predictable way in the developmental timeline of experience. In this process, it shapes psyches—and bodies too—in a certain natural arc of human development.

Ordinary human adults embedded in ordinary social contexts have been experiencing objectification from birth – which in repeated experience ultimately adds up to an overcoming of their self-centered universe. They have repeatedly imbibed many such experiences of displacement, in the first instances as infants within the orbit of benevolent adults. In these experiences, surrounded by caretakers, ordinary human beings learn to overcome the illusion of being the very center of the universe—well, nearly all of them. For the idea that space emanates from me as center is a genuine but potent, even intoxicating illusion, that organisms the likes of

ourselves have to overcome, but is not in some cases of mental illness. Real space (if space is indeed real) is, if you will, *un*-centered; in the language of geometers, it is a manifold without a coordinate axis. The very notion of center is thus an illusion that a genuinely social being has eventually to overcome. To ordinary, social humans, once mature, the experience of being trapped in another's gaze like a fly in amber is so familiar, so bound up with everyday life and love, an inalienable dimension of our experience, that we hardly notice it as a displacement at all. This is the natural way of it. We come to see Others—all of them, including ourselves as undistinguished members of the tribe—as all potential centers. (Some of us even thrive upon the experience of being objectified: being multiply located at focal point of objectification at a certain time and place is being the "center of attention," and this is as far, logically speaking, from being "center of the universe" as a Subject can get.) So much so, that the preponderance of us view the experience of being looked upon as simply the everyday, far-from-staggering fact that there are Others "looking out from behind" those faces with whom we have made first-personal contact. We are not simply seeing eyes in these interpersonal episodes. For as Sartre is quite right to say, to see the gaze, as such, requires going behind the eyes to seeing the perspective looking out from them. In time, our view of the world does indeed become textured—containing both Objects and Subjects. In the first (the naïve) instance, The Look has the power to cause displacement, but in the mature instance, displacement is no longer warranted. Nor is it necessary, as by that time we no longer experience space as permanently centered around us. By that point, our view of the world is instead textured.

Looking upon another face is, for the ordinary adult, simply an everyday occurrence of being presented phenomenally with another perspective that's not one's own. We come to appreciate Others not merely as objects (though they are potential Objects too, and that much we

can also appreciate); we see them also as potential Subjects—or indeed as actual Subjects—in an object "format" of representation. Cognitive development leading up to this everyday experience is, as we have come to appreciate in autism, neither to be taken for granted, nor trivially theorized about.[20] "Perspective-shifting" (which we shall discuss at some length in chapter 2) eventually becomes a completely ordinary feat that typical (normal) human beings perform with ease – so practiced in it, in fact, that we eventually can no longer experience ourselves as making an effort. But understanding the phenomenology coiled tightly within its mature version still reveals a profound fact: that the capacity to appreciate the phenomenal presence of other Subjects, and thereby to appreciate oneself also as a potential Other, makes one a potential target of more than this simple form of objectification.

Now I've been speaking of encounters with other human beings as though there were a specimen of the beast that is "ordinary." This is of course to oversimplify for purposes of exposition. In truth, there is no such thing as the "ordinary" human social experience. There is an entire world of variations in human social experience. And what I've been describing is perhaps the one we should like to be "ordinary"—the one we would devoutly wish upon those we love, the one we can only hope will one day be the ordinary kind. It is "ordinary" in the most normative sense. It is what we can only hope will one day be the unqualified—the neutral—form of social experience. We must now shift attention to forms of human experience that deviate from this neutral, normal form.

Objectification is not always neutral

"If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him."
– Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew* (72)

Objectification is not always neutral. With Beauvoir, Sartre stands out from among his philosophical contemporaries as appreciating the non-neutrality. Neither, however, knew to what precisely to attribute it. Sartre spoke of the non-neutrality, especially in *Anti-Semite and Jew* and *Black Orpheus*, as a kind of "doubling" of the more neutral relationship (which he never spoke of in sufficiently neutral terms, unfortunately). Unlike Beauvoir, he never managed to make peace with the neutral kind. Still, he spoke of the phenomenology of being Jewish or being black in unerringly insightful terms (Haddour 2011). He understood that the social phenomenology of those who live marginalized must differ from that of what I have been speaking of as the "ordinary" adult. He was especially mindful of the fact that trying to see yourself through the eyes of those who think of you as less than fully human has a profoundly corrosive effect on you as an agent.

In my view Sartre did not distinguish clearly between neutral objectification (which we discussed in the last section) and this—the more objectionable sort. He did not really appreciate that the one and *only* trouble with *neutral* objectification is that there's simply not *enough* of it in certain contexts and places—those places where there is *domination* of certain groups by others. Scholars who talk about *domination* and *colonization* think of these things in terms of the exercise of power – they discuss these negative things in a form that, as Georg Simmel (1950) remarked, operates on the internal resistance of a subject, rather than merely on the subject's behaviour. That's precisely the phenomenology that Sartre describes, but all too often conflates with the neutral sort of objectification as well, even with that between friends and lovers. But that's simply an error. For the negative experiences are distinctively different, as we shall now discuss.

What is so objectionable about the negative forms of the objectification experience is only partly the fact that certain people and not others are its targets. It is also *phenomenologically* different from the neutral sort as well—as Sartre was quite right to notice. What is negative about it, as an experience, is not so much that objectification takes place—objectification occurs positively everywhere. What is so objectionable in the contexts of domination is that the victim is made complicit—a kind of partner in crime—but there is no reciprocity in it; it is a form of de-subjectification, a form of de-humanization (see also Haddour 2011).

Sartre's phenomenology of the objectionable gaze that dominates (in *Anti-Semite and Jew* and *Black Orpheus*) is brilliant. But what it illuminates (and what Sartre seems not to have appreciated) is that this form of gaze is not neutral for exactly this reason: it cannot be returned; it is asymmetrical. And that makes for an important *ontological* difference in the experience. For if, figurative speaking, people's gazes are in some sense transparent, then one should experience oneself too in the process of seeing another's gaze—the experience should be as of looking at oneself in a mirror. But when the woman, the Jew, or the Black person gazes into the face of someone who doesn't recognize her or him as a full-on Subject, they cannot see themselves reflected back. The non-neutrally objectified person cannot see themselves as potential Subjects reflected back at themselves.[21] So, rather than illuminating its recipient *fleetingly*—and so also *neutrally*—as an Object, the racist's or chauvinist's gaze illuminates the Object as a *permanent* one. Some people have experienced this gaze as a form of invisibility,[22] and rightly so. It traps one's subjectivity within a prison. It makes one feel also isolated there, completely alone.

The grammar of this negative form of objectification is different—its logical form is asymmetrical. That is why its objects feel invisible—their experience of the gaze is not transparent. And this invisibility is felt as permanent. They come away from it different from the

way they entered it. They can no longer—if they could previously—see the social world as one of equal Subjects whose activities in texturing the world is the same. For equality, as we shall see in chapter 2 especially, is premised on the ability to survive The Look in the same condition as one entered it. This is because the objectionable gaze, unlike the neutral gaze, is not a kind of mirror. So unlike the white man, the marginalized cannot find themselves in the crowd. They therefore encounter barriers to fulfilling their needs-to-be in such contexts; barriers that are nothing at all if not literally man-made, or more precisely: white-man-made.

One of the most important ideas that have emerged in recent phenomenological scholarship is that of the *anonymous gaze*,[23] which quite often results in oppressed persons in possession of corrosive self-conceptions masquerading as objective self-images, because the Subjects achieve them by seeking to gaze on themselves as though from the perspective of disinterested or impartial third parties in their particular society—parties that, as it happens, refuse to return a neutral objectifying gaze. Research on this topic has sought to identify this anonymous gaze as a possible instrument of domination—a means by which certain members of our tribe are gotten to self-police. Some of this analysis is inspired by the brilliant work of Michel Foucault (see Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983), which traces the origins of subject-hood itself to disciplinary social practices. But Sartre too understood something of this. He thus understood something of the hatred and condescension that can be conveyed in a gaze. Unfortunately, Sartre maintained there was an element of this in all forms of objectification, a contention that mars his otherwise impeccable social phenomenology.

New moves

If we are to make further strides with existential phenomenology—if the methodology is ever to render true service—we will have to refine Sartre's account of objectification. We will have to go where Sartre did not seem able to go. We have to remove the pall of negativity that has darkened and obscured the experience of neutral objectification, so as to create an independent space for heaping contempt upon the genuinely more objectionable kind. Merleau-Ponty and Beauvoir were so inclined even if they did not execute the correct distinction.[24]

In upcoming chapters I shall argue that the conditions for neutral objectification, rather than being merely neutral, actually create opportunities for exercise of real freedom. For the possibility of neutral objectification creates an arena for identity construction that would not otherwise exist. For instance, the possibility that I might be (neutrally) seen a certain way—as a this or a that—allows me to perform various qualities (the pedant, or the wit, for instance), to try them on for size, as it were. I try out personas or traits, to see if they suit—to see if I can get them to adhere to me, and whether I'd like it if they did. I might initially aspire that they should. But the aspiration is one thing, and the reality another. A trial period for many traits is just the thing we require (more on this in chapter 8).

Now if it were the case that I could not get traits to adhere, at least under the best of circumstances, then where is that freedom to-be that Sartre so eulogized? I should be condemned always to being a nothing—a state of things that seemed to agree with Sartre, but not (I should think) with many other people. It is far too empty, far too invisible (as we'll discuss at further length in chapter 2). More importantly, there is nothing in this nothingness that Sartre preferred, nothing at all that speaks to the idea of freedom. For a permanent nothing is no object of aspiration. Instead, we humans aspire to be such-and-such or so-and-so, and being seen as such-

and-such can be a confirmation that one has (freely) achieved one's aspirations. We (routinely, though not invariably) enjoy this sort of visibility, because some visibility provides the right kind of *in*visibility, the right amount of privacy, as we might say colloquially. But people vary as to how much visibility and invisibility they find comfortable. This is a trait that varies in the human population (as recently some sociologists too have argued—see Morris 2011). "In/visibility" provides, as I will be saying, appropriate levels of *de-personalization* in public contexts. Like clothing, it affords a certain amount of public modesty.

I propose we refer to the objectionable form of objectification by another name. Let us call it *cancellation*: it is the effort to reduce a Subject to another form of being by cancelling her/his subject-hood. The defining feature of such cases is that they portray the objectified as a *permanent Object*, incapable of returning an objectifying gaze. (It will be clear as we proceed that the taxon of cancellations in turn divides into a variety of species.) In the non-neutral forms of objectification, the objectifier therefore stands in a one-way relation to the objectified. In neutral objectification, by contrast, the possibility of returning an objectifying gaze is not foreclosed to the objectified. Objectification and cancellation are experiences with very different logics, very different grammars. And all of these relations are ultimately also externalized or sedimented onto our external forms, because these processes also shape bodies as well as psyches.

Hatred can take on the form of cancellation. But cancellation can also be bloodless, performed without passion. Indeed, cancellation can be constitutive of an anonymous gaze, since in the anonymous gaze there is no one to objectify in return. But hatred is not bloodless. Hatred (in the forms of chauvinism, outright misogyny, racism, and anti-Semitism, for instance) can be red hot. The cancellation in these forms of hatred is not a product of the hatred as such—for

hatred does not have to result in cancellation—but rather in the reasons for the cancellation in the first place: fear or resentment. Hatred is the sentiment that results from a combination of emotion together with a cognition that the person before me now participates in causing that which makes me react with this sentiment. Hatred is a form of *motivated cognition*—which results in cancellation. I discuss a variety of motivated cognitions in chapter 4, not all of them subject to condemnation.

Whence freedom?

Beauvoir was intimately acquainted with abusive cancellation, at least in one form. She describes, for instance, the phenomenology of accepting the label of "woman-and-not-man" as one of being penumbral and antithetical to man: the negative, the "abnormal," the deficient and therefore the "marked" case within an overarching class of which "man" is the central and normal. "Humanity is male," she writes, "and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him …. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (Beauvoir 1984 [1949], Introduction).

Beauvoir held that objectification (in one of the many varieties that I am proposing we treat under the embracing label *cancellation*) involves negative judgments about those who fall outside the so-called *normal*—those who do not enjoy the canonical or paradigmatic position in a category—and who on that basis deserve different treatment. Today feminists have been joined by scholars seeking to speak for many other groups of persons who find themselves disadvantaged by relentlessly self-perpetuating forms of oppression and discriminatory social practices. They have sought to make sense of the perpetuation of these disadvantages, and in so

doing to equip activists with useful tools for their dismantling. Much of what has been done in this area of scholarship has focused on how a given difference (in whatsoever biological or perhaps psychological dimension it happens to lie) is constructed as a basis for hot hatred or cooler discrimination. Much interesting phenomenological work has been conducted on this topic. Some of this work—orthogonal to the concerns of this book—involves how difference is experienced, and how that very experience shapes bodies and behaviours.[25] We've already taken notice of scholarship on the topic of the anonymous gaze and its emergence out of poststructuralist inquiry. The poststructuralists who have followed in Foucault's footsteps, however, decline to give much space to the ideas of freedom at all—their conceptions of the human being are insufficiently capacious. So we need to identify a different paradigm into which to integrate our analysis of freedom. We will ultimately (in the second half of the book) adopt a naturalistic framework.

There has been some doubt as to whether the recent accounts of domination so far delineated in poststructuralist writings, particularly in the spirit of Foucault and his followers, are genuinely illuminating, much less capable of providing tools of resistance to or liberation from oppression. The trouble is that these accounts depict forces of oppression as irresistible, leaving no room for an independent Subject in them.[26] The phenomenological and sociological elements in these accounts eclipse or mask the existential element. For instance, the gender norms that result in accentuating differences between male and female are depicted by Iris Marion Young (1990a, b) as an obstacle to freedom. But at least some critics claim this barrier to freedom is overstated. Diane Chisholm writes:

> Young overstresses gender when she foregrounds women's past interpellation of femininity and their negative experience of embodiment as 'typical' of all women at all

> times. She narrows the field of phenomenological inquiry to prohibitive feminine motility and experience to the exclusion of women's transformative experience, while establishing masculine motility as the idealized norm. Her focus on feminine motility and spatiality precludes analysis of how girls and women can and do embody free movement despite masculine domination. She fails to direct phenomenological inquiry to the change in women's embodied experience and situation, to their ascendance in the world, since 'Throwing Like a Girl' was first presented in 1977 (2008, 11).

So how can we keep from overstating the case against freedom? My strategy will be to show how elements that can from one angle be viewed as obstacles to freedom can be utilised from another angle as stepping stones, via acts of Self-construction, that are performed in the process of self-objectification.[27] Foucauldian insights on the Self are fundamentally incomplete, as I will be arguing, because the idea that subject-hood has its origin in disciplinary practices is ultimately false. Instead subject-hood has its origins in the facts of human cognition, and it receives its fullest expression in the capacity to render judgment.

My account will focus expressly on the means of resisting the action of a gaze—which I believe are the premier tools for resisting domination. This is the training area for freedom. The earlier that resistance can take hold, the better for the would-be victim. For if the corrosive existential experiences are imbibed early and often, domination can succeed more readily. The tools I shall be proposing for purposes of resistance are premised on the principle that the instruments of domination can be turned into ploughshares. To understand how these tools of subversion work, we need to understand the role of conceptualisation in the process of objectification. My contention will be that when we do so, we will see that the use of judgment

can be subversive, as subversive as any political ploy or instrument of war. Conceptualisation, when it is employed in the morally deplorable way that Beauvoir documented—namely, to effect domination—works to produce marginalisation by drawing attention to differences in negative ways. When this process is seen for what it is, it becomes possible to resist it. It becomes possible to embrace labels in a way that affirms the positive and refuses marginalisation, and in the process to respond with a return gaze that does not accept the negative judgment in an original gaze, or even in the anonymous gaze. Understanding how conceptualisation operates, in social and political contexts, provides us with instruments for turning the social arena into one where liberation can occur, in the very contexts in which domination currently thrives and the oppression occasioned by it has hitherto prevailed. Because social knowledge *really is* power. The truth about domination *really can* help set its victims free. Knowledge about domination is at the core of freedom from it. Because, as Toni Morrison writes, to fly one has to let go of the shit that weighs one down. You can't do that if you don't know the difference between shit and non-shit, and if you don't value each accordingly.

Nagel's question answered

Nagel's conception of the objective viewpoint is a perfect expression of Sartrean bad faith—perfect inasmuch as it treats absolutely everyone as an Object with an essence, as a thing in-itself.[28] Nagel does not seem to believe that there is any harmonizing of the apersonal perspective with any personal perspective. According to Nagel, one cannot reconcile this conception of the world with one in which there are Subjects anywhere. (As we remarked above, it is not at all clear why not. For instance, it's not clear why an un-centered view of the world should contain

no Subjects. After all, we have seen that it is possible to view the world as positively teeming with Subjects, whether that view is centered or not.)

Stephen Priest (2000) believes that Nagel is here confronting a problem that was not really even on Sartre's radar in any significant way, and construes that problem as coiled within this question: what is it for something—some *thing,* out there in the world—to be me (who is obviously not a thing but a Subject)? And this, Priest thinks, is a mystery that simply eludes Sartre (2000, 23). To the extent that Sartre may have been aware of it, he considered it insoluble[29]—and in any case ultimately unimportant for his phenomenological philosophy.

But if freedom and the first-personal (construed in terms of action that constitutes the world) are as central to Sartre as all signs indicate, how could it be that his conception of a Subject as a "nothing" does not grapple with this problem—however unsuccessful one might wish to deem Sartre's full account of the matter?

In my view, the question Priest is asking is nothing other than the question at the center of Sartre's concerns about the place of the first-personal world-making in a world of "things" (taken as already made). It is really, therefore, about the nature of agency—about the logic of action. I don't think Sartre saw a clear way with the question of freedom, in the context of the reality of social conflict that he appreciated more than most of his contemporaries. My account of the phenomenology Sartre was just on the cusp of articulating (and towards which Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty also were reaching) tells us that the Subject is a full-fledged agent *when it recognizes itself in the world*. Furthermore, the union of Subject and Object, in the self-concept, is not a *fact* constituted by features of some entities and events previously settled; it is rather a *performance;* as such it takes place in real time, when I look out onto the phenomenological field and say of something I view as "out there": "It is I." ("That woman is I;" "That Jew is I;" "That

gay may is I.") If a person can make such this pronouncement under adverse social circumstance, that person shall be exercising freedom of the highest order. As I shall argue, we humans do not act powerfully *except* in such instances.

This idea (as I shall argue) is deeply lodged in Sartre's phenomenology even if Sartre never articulated it in exactly these terms; it is core to analysis of the colonized self (as will come out later in chapter 2). Sartre in earlier work says, "It is not in some hiding-place that we will discover ourselves; it is on the road, in the town, in the midst of the crowd, a thing among things, a man among men" (1970, 5). "Everything is finally outside; everything, even including ourselves. Outside, in the world, among others" (ibid.). This is the height of anti-Cartesianism. In The Look we find him writing "I see *myself* because *somebody* sees me" (2003, 284). This is the Sartrean doctrine with which I intend to throw in my lot.

Finally freedom

Nagel believes that the apersonal view on the world is, in his words, "debilitating"—that it leads to the feeling that we are not agents at all, that we can contribute nothing *as source* to the world. The assumption seems to be that no amount of adding to a naturalistic viewpoint can improve matters vis-à-vis this aspect of it. And why? Because the apersonal viewpoint simply issues in this closure.[30] But in point of fact, no "viewpoint" can so issue, simply because viewpoints aren't propositions. How could a viewpoint issue in anything, if it is simply a real-time vessel (any-content-eligible) for phenomenological experience? The so-called "view" Nagel has in mind is misnamed—it is no "view" but instead a set of propositions about the world, which (at least according to Nagel) issue in a certain debilitating consequence ("I am not responsible for anything"). Obviously, then, Nagel is not engaging in phenomenology. And the corrective to this error, if the objective is indeed to characterize points of view, is to abandon the axiomatic

orientation (and especially the false axioms Nagel implicitly gravitates toward) in modeling the apersonal perspective.[31] Points of view are not lists of axioms that can issue in conclusions of the sort that Nagel tenders.

When we adopt instead a phenomenological approach to elucidating points of view, we will be able to achieve the following:

- harmonizing the first-personal perspective with the apersonal perspective (chapter 2);
- a conception of freedom worth wanting (chapters 2-3);
- an appreciation of the fact that Nagel's dichotomy of perspectives misses the reality of the *second*-personal perspective entirely; and, finally,
- an appreciation of the fact that it is sometimes truly impossible to integrate second-personal with first-personal perspectives (in certain episodes of cancellation).

In the impossibilities that we will uncover, we will be able to anchor an account of social conflicts that Sartre was right to insist upon (and not to paper over with platitudes about freedom), as well as an appreciation of the potential pitfalls of social alliance (chapters 7-9).

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[1] Much of contemporary elaborations and adaptations of classical existential philosophy focus the writings of Martin Heidegger or Friedrich Neitzsche. Few, if any, focus on the school founded by Sartre and Beauvoir. The aims of each school are quite different—as are the resulting edifices.
[2] Richard Moran (2012) shows that Murdoch's caricature does a disservice even to Murdoch's own position.
[3] This is for example the position taken by Christine Korsgaard (1996, 2009).
[4] Lewis (1979) seems to have held a similar view..
[5] Prosser (2015) offers a similar account of the matter.
[6] It will of course be remembered that Soren Kierkegaard (about whom we shall have occasion to remark in chapter 6) also employed this concept—and well before Sartre came along. But their conceptions are markedly different.
[7] This point is further evidence of Sartre's views as compatible with naturalism; cf. Gardner (2011) who wishes to identify a certain transcendental strain in Sartre's *oeuvre*.
[8] The line of inquiry in neurobiology was pioneered by Libet et al. (1983) and Libet (1985) and expanded by Daniel Wegner (culminating in Wegner 2002); but cf. Banks and Isham (2009).
[9] Zahavi (2014) appears to argue otherwise, but he can be read (and indeed he says explicitly) that he is defending the presence in such experiences only of a "minimal self"—a basic aspect of Self, that he sometimes refers to as the "experiential self" that he considers to be revealed in experience, and which is perhaps better thought of "adverbially." It's nevertheless unclear whether he means that self to be thought of as a dimension of some larger entity (the complete Self), itself to be construed as an object in its own right, whether the minimal self is to be construed merely as a property that is founded on something else, or whether is to be construed in some other way.
[10]There is more by way of telling in *The Transcendence of the Ego* (Sartre 1962).
[11] See Zahavi (2014, chapter 10).

[12] Cf. Sartre: “we can not perceive the world and at the same time apprehend a look fastened upon us; it must be either one or the other.” (Sartre 2012, 7310-11).
[13] Understanding indexicals requires mastering this logic of “I” and “Other”.
[14] Moreover his contemporaries—and especially Merleau-Ponty—took him to be speaking about personal relationships, at least the nature of freedom in social contexts.
[15] One might be inclined—and I confess to being so inclined myself—to say that when metaphysicians talk about freedom as, for example, the power to raise one’s arm at will, they too are engaging in bait-and-switch tactics.
[16] Cognitive scientists might now use the language of “filling in” to describe this phenomenon (see discussion in Dennett 1992). But it is really more than that: it is a completion of the *object* not the percept. It is more by way of world-making and less by way of world-perceiving. The “invisible gorilla” experiments—showing that we miss out in cognition many things that are actually available to perception—make the case in a powerful way that our experience is much less indebted to perception and much more indebted to higher-level cognitive processes.
[17] I discuss this elsewhere: see Thalos and Andreou (2009).
[18] Brand loyalty is obviously a new reality on the evolutionary stage. It tends to make markets less efficient because it stands in the way of the complete substitutability of otherwise relevantly identical goods.
[19] Kathering Morris (2011) treats this subject with sensitivity.
[20] One hypothesis that is *not* now under study is the hypothesis that autism involves some failure in, or the integration of, an object-oriented “person” module, that performs a number of functions when processing information about the social world, but is best known to cognitive scientists for its role in the processing of identifying faces—its face recognition function. (Just a thought.)
[21] Much of what Sartre says in *Black Orpheus* and *Anti-Semite and Jew* suggests this point, even though Sartre never explicitly articulates it.
[22] Morris and Haddour stress this idea of invisibility, as does Honneth (2001).
[23] See for instance Käll 2010, who presents a feminist version of this idea.
[24] As I argue in Thalos 2012b; cf also the many authors cited in Morris 2011.
[25] Feminists have for instance studied gendered practices that involve the exercise of self-discipline, such as dieting, restricting one's movement so as to avoid taking up too much space, and keeping one's body properly hairless, attired, ornamented and made up. In a landmark study of such practices, Sandra Bartky (1990, 80) observes: “it is women themselves who practice this discipline on and against their own bodies …. The woman who checks her make-up half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara run, who worries that the wind or rain may spoil her hairdo, who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at the ankle, or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely as the inmate in the Panopticon, a self-policing subject, self-committed to relentless self-surveillance. This self-surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy.” Cf. also the work of Young (1990a, b), Butler (1990) and Cudd (2006).
[26] Allen (1999, 2011) has been especially critical. She is no less critical of the Foucauldian strand of research conducted by Butler (1990 and modified in 1993) as she is of the work of feminist phenomenologists such as Young (1990a, b).
[27] This is an idea that begins to take shape in work by Merleau-Ponty (1962; 1964).
[28] No wonder it requires transcending, by the way! Transfigurations in Sartre’s sense are called for because the apersonality of the vision is so experientially bizarre to us.
[29] According to Webber (2011).
[30] Nagel might equally well have drawn this conclusion from thinking about time travel: if one considers oneself as from the point of view of the future, it seems to be that the present self has nothing whatever to contribute as source (cf. Nichols and Knobe, 2007). But surely this conclusion is not warranted by the method.
[31] This is indeed the orientation that Sartre might have regarded as an obsession with epistemology, one that insists on the “primacy of knowledge.”