

Emotions in Early Sartre: the primacy of frustration

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Abstract Sartre’s account of the emotions presupposes a conception of human nature that is never fully articulated. The paper aims to render such conception explicit and to argue that frustration occupies a foundational place in Sartre’s picture of affective existence.

Sartre; phenomenology; emotions; affectivity; frustration

1. Why phenomenology?

Phenomenology’s central insight—for some radical, for others merely bromidic—is that affectivity is not an accouterment of human existence.¹ A fit of anger is not the addition of an affective layer that affects our behavior, cognition, or perception. A sad mood is not a mere coloration of an otherwise affectively neutral existence. And contempt is not the taking up of an attitude, one which it would make no difference to us had we been unable to assume to it. Emotions, moods, sentiments, and feelings are not accidents of human existence—they are not mere “accompanying phenomena” (*Begleitphänomenen*) (Heidegger 1927/1976: 139/178; cf. Sartre 1939/2004: 12, 60).² We do not wear them or put them on. They do not happen to us. It is we who happen through them.

¹ “Phenomenology” means different things to different people. Often, it is used to denote the movement in the history of philosophy that originated with Edmund Husserl. At other times, and especially within the context of contemporary analytic philosophy of mind, the term is used to designate whatever first-personally appears to someone. In this paper, I use the term in a third (but related) sense: “phenomenology” refers to the type of examination of human existence that takes the first-personal character of experience to be fundamental to that examination (see also Dahlstrom, Elpidorou, and Hopp 2015, 1-2). Phenomenology, understood in this sense, studies the contents and structures of human experience both in order to clarify their (immanent) character and to understand how exactly such contents and structures are world-disclosing or world-constituting.

² References to the following works by Sartre will be indicated by the abbreviations (initialisms) of their English titles followed by the pagination of the English translation: *Sketch for a*

Phenomenology's insistence of the centrality of affectivity goes beyond the acceptance of the more or less undeniable fact that our everyday existence is permeated by affective experiences. Yes, we are beings for whom the world matters. Yes, we are constantly affected, moved, seduced, or taken in by the vicissitudes of ours and others' affective experiences. Yet the presence of affectivity signals more than just the presence of various phenomenal qualities and their influences. The very fact that we can be emotionally affected is significant. It is revealing, according to phenomenology, of our very own human nature. Emotions make our existence recognizably human but, at the same time, they are there because we are the type of agents who are open to such experiences. The presence of emotions (and affective phenomena in general) is the premise of a transcendental argument, one that seeks to lay bare the structure of human existence. Phenomenology is not just serious about studying affectivity. As a study of human existence, phenomenology is necessarily a study in affectivity.

It is precisely this last point that separates a phenomenological approach on affectivity from other historical and contemporary takes on affectivity. From the perspective of phenomenology, one cannot come to terms with the nature of affectivity without understanding human existence. Likewise, one cannot come to terms with human existence without understanding the nature of affectivity. Practical engagements, scientific endeavors, familial and political interactions are all predicated on the fact that we are beings who are capable of being affectively attuned to ourselves, to the world, and to others. If phenomenology is correct to assign such a role to affectivity, then philosophical accounts of affectivity that take emotions to be "a coherent and autonomous domain of philosophical inquiry, with its own phenomena to be explained, problems to be explored" (Garber 2017, 13) are, in a sense, too 'shallow.' They fail to understand affectivity for what it really is: a constitutive part of human existence, one that pervades and determines every facet of human life, including theoretical (scientific or philosophical) reasoning about affectivity itself.

Theory of the Emotions (STE), *The Transcendence of the Ego: A Sketch for a Phenomenological Description* (TE), *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination* (IPPI), and *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology* (BN). References to all other works by Sartre will be indicated by the original publication date followed by the date of the English translation. All page citations are to the English editions.

1.1. Phenomenology's promise

In the introduction to his *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions*, Sartre affirms the distinctive potential of phenomenology. He criticizes the psychology of his time and attempts to show how a phenomenological approach can overcome the limitations and difficulties of a solely empirical study of emotions and human existence. For Sartre, such a scientific approach is fundamentally limited. It can offer us extremely detailed descriptions of the antecedents, correlates, and concomitants of emotions. It can provide us with a rich account of the bodily manifestations or expressions of emotions. Yet it remains impotent in delivering the essence of emotions and thereby in delineating the nature of human existence.

Sartre's dismissiveness of psychology is a corollary of his understanding of what type of enterprise psychology is. Wrongly in my eyes, but inconsequential for present purposes, Sartre takes psychology to be a discipline that remains entirely on an empirical plane. It concerns itself with the amassment of facts about the human psyche. Importantly, such facts are, Sartre contends, (1) fragmentary, insofar as they are disconnected from each other; (2) non-significant, insofar as they are not indicative of that in virtue of which they hold (i.e., their grounds); and (3) non-essential, insofar as they can only describe accidental features of human existence. These three characteristics of the fruits of psychology render it irredeemably problematic as a science of human nature and existence.

First, Sartre maintains that facts about emotions (or indeed facts about any aspect of human psychology) are not given to the empirical researcher as a synthetic whole. Insofar as the researcher remains within the domain of science, the facts can never add up to a unified conception of human existence. As long as psychology stays faithful to its empirical method, it can never weave together a holistic picture of human existence for such a picture requires the acceptance of non-empirical claims and attitudes (STE 7, 13). What is more, the findings of psychology are holistically determined through and through: they "presuppose man and the world, and cannot take on their true meaning unless those two notions have first been elucidated" (STE 7-8). Any description of human nature is already inflected by human nature itself (STE 5, 9).

Second, facts as these are delivered by psychology are, for Sartre, non-significant. By that, he means that they are taken to signify nothing beyond themselves (STE 11). A scientific approach has to accept such facts at face value. They simply are. And they are what

they are—nothing less but importantly nothing more (STE 12). For Sartre, however, “every human fact is of its essence significant” (STE 11). Any manifestation of consciousness (emotional or otherwise) is meaningful. It points beyond itself. It is grounded in and involves human existence as such (STE 12).

Third and related, by failing to take facts about our affective lives as significant, psychology cannot deliver what is essential about them. On the contrary, a proper study of emotions requires a *transcendental* attitude; it requires that one is able to get beyond the particular facts of emotional consciousness. By its very nature, however, psychology does not inquire into the conditions of the possibility of affectivity (STE 5). It does not disclose the structures of human existence that render affectivity possible. And by failing to do, it inevitably fails to come to terms with human reality. The structures of human consciousness (or existence) in their essential character are never elucidated.

Phenomenology, Sartre contends, does not succumb to the problems of psychology. Following Husserl and Heidegger, he maintains that phenomenology is uniquely suited to interrogate affective phenomena and in doing so to “carry out an analysis of the ‘human reality’” (STE 9). Phenomenology alone can “go beyond the psychic, beyond the situation of man in the world, even to the very source of man, of the world and of the psychic” (STE 8). It can ask “what must a consciousness be, that emotions should be possible, perhaps that it should even be necessary?” (STE 11) And it can deliver, or so Sartre contends. It can show that and how emotions are “an organized form of human existence,” a “complete modification of the ‘being-in-the-world’” (STE 12, 63).

1.2. The plan

The present paper takes seriously Sartre’s endorsement of phenomenology and sets out, firstly, to explicate the Sartrean account of emotions and affectivity and, secondly, to present what Sartre’s understanding of affectivity reveals about the nature of human existence. Ultimately, this is a paper of different aims. Section 2 is a necessary note on the notions of unreflective consciousness and pre-reflective self-awareness—both of which are indispensable to Sartre and of paramount importance to the phenomenologist. Section 3 offers a brief and accessible presentation of Sartre’s account of emotions as this advanced, largely, in his *Sketch*. Section 4 is an exercise in Sartrean scholarship. It offers a detailed exploration of various themes related to Sartre’s account of emotions. It exposes and

attempts to resolve a number of both interpretative and philosophical difficulties that arise from that text. Whereas Section 3 will be of use primarily to those (lucky ones!) who have not yet been initiated in Sartre's views of emotions, Section 4 is aimed for the enthusiasts. Finally, Section 5 goes beyond the letter of Sartre's presentation of the nature emotions. The *Sketch* presupposes a view of human nature that is never fully articulated. The aim of this section is to make such a view explicit and to argue for the foundational place that frustration occupies in Sartre's picture of affective existence.

It is not possible to cover everything that Sartre has said about emotions in a single paper. Sartre's philosophical and literary productivity is extraordinary. For that reason, I shall restrict my attention primarily to his philosophical writings in the late 1930s and early 1940s—passing references will also be made to some of his literary works from that period when apposite. These are the writings that deal with the topic of affectivity most explicitly and which have proven, at least within the context of the philosophy of emotion, to be the most influential (e.g., Solomon 2006; Wollheim 1999). *Saint Genet*, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, and *The Family Idiot*, just to name three of Sartre's later works, provide indispensable insights into Sartre's more mature views about the power of circumstances (social, political, and familial) to condition human existence. Any account of Sartre's views on affectivity that purports to be complete must take them into consideration. All the same, an essay on Sartre's views on affectivity, even if it focuses on his early works, is both valuable in its own right (as a theory of affective existence) and as an introduction to Sartre's rich and variegated thought.

2. A word or two about consciousness

Within philosophy, metacognition—i.e., the thinking that we do about our own mental states and processes—can often take pride of place. It is used, for example, in attempts to settle the ontology of consciousness, to determine the limits of reason and knowledge, and even to explicate the bounds of our minds. However advanced and philosophically propitious such “inwards” attitude may appear to be, it is not commonplace. Much of our behavior takes place in the absence of such metacognition. For the most part, we act, think, feel, and perceive without being explicitly aware of our acts of thinking, feeling, and perception. In the midst of things and activities, we do not assume the perspective of an interrogating subject. The prevalence and importance of unreflective behavior is a point that

Sartre is at pains making in the *Sketch*. And it is a continuation of themes already defended in *The Transcendence of the Ego*.

It is important not to misunderstand Sartre's claim. To say that everyday conduct is for the most part unreflective is not tantamount to claiming that we often act in an unconscious manner (STE 36, 38). Our actions, thoughts, feelings, sensations, etc., are lived by us. We experience them; they are given to us in their various affective or phenomenal guises. Still, the fact that we are engaged in unreflective conduct means that while we live through such experiences, we are attracted or absorbed by the world and others, by our bodies and our thoughts and desires (STE 36). We are not explicitly aware of ourselves as being the *subjects* of our various experiences. Our consciousness is not being folded onto itself; it is not made the positional object of itself; we are not, in other words, conscious of ourselves as being conscious, as having this or that thought, this or that feeling and sensation.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that our feelings, sensations, thoughts, actions, wills and desires are not only our own but they are experienced as such. Such a dimension of *mineness* is, however, given to us not in an explicit (or thematic) manner but pre-reflectively. While ordering my coffee, for example, I am not explicitly aware of myself as uttering a phrase, giving money, or standing in front of the counter. Still, in a non-objectifying manner, I *am* aware of those experiences as being my own: I do not render them the focus of my consciousness, yet I am pre-reflectively (non-explicitly or non-thetically) aware of the fact that those experiences are mine (TE 48-9). Consciousness need not be made into the intentional object of itself in order to be aware of itself. Indeed, every act of consciousness contains a pre-reflective awareness of itself. Or as Sartre puts it, "every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself." (BN liii; see also TE 46)

3. A sketch of the *Sketch*

What goes for our everyday behavior goes for emotional experiences. Such experiences are primarily and for the most part unreflective. Hence, Sartre denies that emotional consciousness should be modeled after reflective consciousness. An emotion could involve a reflective element, when, for example, we direct our attention either to the emotion itself or to ourselves as the subject of the emotion, but most often it is not. During most emotional

episodes, we are only non-thetically (pre-reflectively) conscious of ourselves (STE 34, 36-8, 42; cf. TE 40-1, 44-9, 56).

What is more, in its typical form, emotional consciousness is not a “*state of mind*” (STE 34): it is neither a state nor is it about our minds. Emotions are not grasped or conceptualized; rather, they are lived (IPPP 68-9). They are embodied and enactive ways of interacting with worldly objects, others, and ourselves. In fear, my relationship to the world is transformed through my body: possibilities for actions are foreclosed; some items appear within reach; whereas others, the more foreboding ones, render my world a cold, inhospitable place and I wish them to disappear. During boredom, the world stands at a distance from me (Elpidorou 2015, 2017a, 2017b). It does not fulfill me; it leaves me empty. And during envy, I am pushed and pulled by the allure of objects that are not in my possession; I become resentful of someone else’s status and suddenly my possessions are drained of value. What is at stake during such emotional episodes and many others is the world—not our minds (see also Sartre 1939/1970, 5; TE 56, 58-9).

Emotions are specific ways of “apprehending [i.e., relating to and experiencing] the world” which are brought about spontaneously, and via the mediation of our bodies, by the antecedent experience of an insurmountable difficulty (STE 35). In the *Sketch*, most emotions are understood to be ways in which *we* transform our world by transforming our consciousness of it. Other emotions—e.g., the sudden emotions of horror, terror, or awe—are manifestations of a change in the manner in which we relate to the world. In either case, emotions constitute an existential transition: a move from one way of existing in the world to another.

What exactly is the change that emotions (either through our own involvement or on their own) bring about? To answer this question, we first need to consider how Sartre conceives of our everyday concerned existence. Borrowing a term from Kurt Lewin, and drawing upon Heidegger’s notion of *Zeugwelt*, Sartre calls such existence “hodological” (STE 38). It is hodological insofar as the world is perceived to contain *hodoi*, i.e., roads or pathways: worldly entities are already given to us as a part of a causal and pragmatic nexus. Or as Sartre writes, “From this point of view, the world around us [...] appears to be all furrowed with strait and narrow paths leading to such and such determinate end” (STE 39). When engaging in the world in this way, the world appears to be both instrumental and deterministic. It is instrumental because entities appear to stand in means-ends relationships.

In order to attain the ends that one desires, one first needs to secure the already prescribed means that lead to those ends. At the same time, the world appears to us to be deterministic: there is an order to the world for such-and-so means lead to such-and-so ends.

Due to its deterministic character, the world of our everyday concerned existence can be inflexible and unyielding to our needs. Not everything goes in such a world; there are rules, physical or social, that need to be followed. To achieve a desired end, we need to pursue the means that will lead to it. Each desired end, however, is to some extent difficult—its difficulty is a function of how readily accessible the means that will bring it about are to us (STE 38-9; BN 504-08). Sometimes we are capable of overcoming the difficulties that we face; we find ways to acquire the necessary means, thereby realizing our desired ends. Other times, however, our difficulties persist. We wish to attain an end but are unable to achieve the necessary means. When faced with such situations, ordinary (i.e., practical or deterministic) actions cannot resolve the experienced difficulties and our desires remain frustrated. It is precisely in such situations that emotions arise.

The onset of an emotion changes the manner in which we relate to the world. We cease to relate to the world in a pragmatic or deterministic attitude. Instead, we “live it as though the relations between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes but by magic” (STE 40). The world of emotions is magical in at least three senses. First, emotional consciousness confers, magically, onto worldly entities or situations qualities different than the ones that they were perceived to have in their instrumental guise (STE 41). “To become conscious *of* Paul as hateful, irritable, sympathetic, disturbing, attractive, repulsive, etc., is to confer on him a new quality” (IPPI 69). Juicy grapes turn into sour ones; innocuous objects become repulsive; threats are made to vanish; responsibilities and duties are overlooked or rendered irrelevant; and familiar situations become overwhelming.

Second, the world of our emotions is magical insofar as it is not pragmatic or deterministic. That is to say, the world that emotions reveal is not one ruled by causal and inflexible processes and rules (STE 60). In such a world, we are able to achieve our ends without procuring the previously necessary (practical) means, as in the case of passive fear where we are able to negate a threat (e.g., a ferocious beast running towards us) not by confronting it but by fainting and thereby forgetting it. We can also absolve ourselves of the pressing demand to acquire some difficult end by renouncing the end itself, as in the case of

passive sadness where we come to see the world as lacking in value or significance and thus we free ourselves of the responsibility of acting (STE 41). Pablo Ibbieta, the protagonist of Sartre's "The Wall," adapts a similar attitude. Imprisoned and awaiting what appears to be his unavoidable execution, he is left with no power other than the power over his own consciousness. He cannot escape death for he cannot release himself from bondage, but he can relieve himself of his anxiety and dread by coming to see his life as having little or no worth (see also Fell [1965, 17-8] for a similar point).

Third and last, emotional conduct is magical insofar as it is "not *effectual*" (STE 41). Fainting during passive fear does not make the threat disappear; it merely renders it forgotten in consciousness. And crying during active sadness does not make things better; it just temporally and cathartically relieves us of from having to deal with the cause of our sadness. Emotional consciousness does not materially change the world. Rather, by changing itself, it changes how the world is experienced and lived by us.

Emotions are functional: by changing the way in which we relate to the world, they constitute embodied and unreflective attempted solutions to pressing and insurmountable difficulties. By delivering us a world in which deterministic processes no longer hold, they aim to make the difficulties that we previously encountered, and which we could not otherwise solve, magically disappear.³ In a note for the press that summarizes the underlying philosophical ideas of the stories that comprise *The Wall*, Sartre speaks of the impossibility of escaping our existence. He writes:

Nobody is willing to look Existence in the eyes. Here are five small routes away from her – tragic or comic, five lives. . . . Those flights are stopped by a wall; to run away from Existence, still implies to exist. Existence is a whole from which man cannot

³ As I argue elsewhere (Elpidorou, 2016), it is best to understand emotions as *attempted* solutions to difficulties that are made present to us most often within a deterministic world but also sometimes within a magical world (as in the case of horror and wonder). In some cases, emotional consciousness will succeed in solving the perceived difficulties; in other cases, it will not. The claim that emotions are attempted solutions (sometimes successful, other times not) to encountered difficulties is consistent with Sartre's contention that emotions are purposeful and functional. Emotions can be invested with a purpose (or a function) even if their purpose (or function) is not met, and, indeed, even if such a purpose (or function) can never be met (see, e.g., Neander, 2017).

escape. (Quoted in Jongeneel 2009, 342)⁴

We cannot escape reality. But through our emotions we can temporarily transform it and seek relief from its frustrations. Emotions are the all-too-human temporary reprieves from the weight of our concernful (practical, praxical, and social) human existence. This then, in a nutshell, is Sartre's view of emotions.

4. Filling in the *Sketch*

The devil, of course, is in the details. Sartre's *Sketch* is succinct, to a fault. It is also radical, breaking off from the tradition in various and important ways. It is no surprise then that the *Sketch* has been both often misunderstood and the subject of many objections. In this section, my aim is to fend off potential misunderstandings of the text by expounding upon certain themes of Sartre's account that I take to be crucial for a proper grasp of his position.⁵

Purpose

Emotions are functional insofar as they serve a purpose. But they are neither prudential (or calculative) actions nor evolutionarily adapted mechanisms. They are not the former because the subject does not deliberately bring them about; even if we embody and enact them, we do not leave the unreflective plane while doing so (STE 36).⁶ They are not the latter because emotion's function is *personal* and not one that is related to reproductive fitness. Indeed, an evolutionary perspective misses, completely for Sartre, the reality of emotions. Emotions are

⁴ The last line of this quote is, of course, a line from *Nausea*. Sartre provides his own account of the meaning of that line in an entry from his *War Diaries* dated Thursday, December 7, 1939. See Sartre 1983/1999, 107.

⁵ I shall not, however, discuss the extent to which emotions involve (or are acts in) bad faith. For the similarities between Sartre's account of the emotions and bad faith, see Richmond 2010. Illuminating discussions of bad faith can be found in Bernasconi 2006, Ch. 4; Cox 2006, 101-4; Eshleman 2008a and 2008b; Manser 1987; Perna 2003; Santoni 1995 and 2008; and Webber 2009.

⁶ During an emotional episode we are not explicitly aware of the fact that consciousness has changed itself *in order to escape the perceived difficulty* (STE 52). We are unreflectively engaging with the world both before and after the onset of emotional consciousness (STE 36). Even though "a non-thetic consciousness of itself remains," such awareness is both an unavoidable consequence of the structure of consciousness and too subtle to make us recognize emotions for what they really are: namely, spontaneous and embodied attempts to overcome instrumental difficulties (STE 52). Only a "purifying reflection" may reveal to us the true nature of emotions, but such an attitude, Sartre emphasizes, "is rare" (STE 61).

neither possible nor meaningful outside the context of human (i.e., conscious and not merely animal or biological) existence.

Belief

Emotions essentially involve belief in the reality and significance of the magical world. The new qualities, relationships, and demands that have been magically conferred upon the world are taken as real and not as *projected by us*; they matter to us and we believe in them. Emotional consciousness, Sartre tells us, “*lives* the new world it has thereby constituted – lives it directly, commits itself to it, and suffers from the qualities that the concomitant behavior has outlined” (STE 51). An emotional episode is thus no “playacting” (STE 50). Or, if it is a kind of playacting, “the play,” Sartre notes, “is one that we believe in,” i.e., it is one that we do not recognize *as* play (STE 41).

Such a conclusion has an important corollary. It shows that “behaviour pure and simply is *not* emotion” (STE 48). Emotions involve, essentially and not accidentally, bodily actions and physiological changes. Yet they are much more than that. They also involve volitional and perceptual changes, and various cognitive attitudes, the most important of which is, as mentioned above, a belief in the reality and significance of the magical world (STE 50). Attitudinal theories of emotions come closest to Sartre’s claim that emotions are ways in which the world is transformed through our bodies and attitudes (Claparède 1928; Deonna & Teroni 2012, ch. 7).

Force and attraction

Emotions are both captivating and totalizing. On the one hand, emotional “consciousness,” Sartre tells us, “is caught in its own snare” (STE 52). Emotional consciousness lives in the magical world that itself constitutes and by doing so, it “tends to perpetuate that world” (STE 53). Consequently, we have little control over an *occurrent* emotion: “One cannot get out of it as one pleases; it fades away of itself, but one cannot put a stop to it” (STE 49). On the other hand, emotional consciousness has a profound and totalizing effect on our existence. Emotions are not isolated (or static) states of consciousness. They are comprehensive insofar as they transform, completely, our relationship to the world. “The onset of emotion is a complete modification of the ‘being-in-the-world.’” (STE 63; see also STE 54). That is the reason why Sartre insists of speaking of the “world” of emotions (STE

54) and likens them both to worlds of madness and to dreams.⁷ Not only are we “spell-bound” by the horrifying (STE 49), but also horror only occurs in “a world which is such that all the things existing in it are magical by nature” (STE 59; see also Elpidorou, 2016).

Action

As magical transformations of the world that seek to offer us a way out of an experienced difficulty (STE 61), emotions are not happenings or passions, even if they appear to be so to the unreflective consciousness that lives the emotional world. Instead, they are doings: “emotion is not a physiological tempest; it is a reply adapted to the situation; it is a type of conduct” (BN 445). Properly understood, for Sartre, we *make* ourselves emotional. Or stated more radically, emotions are our own choices. As such, we bear responsibility for them (Sartre 1996/2007, 29).

To call emotions “choices” is not deny that emotions are spontaneous, captivating, and even in a sense involuntary reactions to a situation. When we are confronted with a pressing and unyielding situation, we have no alternative but to emote; and when we do so, we are most often captive by our own emotional consciousness. Then in what sense are emotions free choices? Briefly, the answer is this: the onset of emotions depends on the difficulties that we encounter in our concerned existence. But such difficulties are *personal* difficulties: they are there only because we have antecedently organized our world in a manner that is already mattering to us. Through our actions and decisions, we continuously develop and commit to our projects and self-identity. We decide what ends are worth pursuing and which are not. Consequently, situations will be frustrating or difficult only to the extent that we have *freely* invested in them and are involved in our projects. “Freedom gives itself things as adverse” (BN 508). Emotions are thus choices because we have constructed our world in a way that the frustration of certain ends would inevitably lead to the rise of emotional consciousness. To put it in another way, it is we who have freely laid down the roads of our hodological world.

⁷ Sartre discusses dreams in *The Imaginary* (IPPI, 159-175). For a description of Sartre’s take on madness, one cannot do better than reading his short fictional story, “The Room” (Sartre 1939/1969). Sartre’s description of Pierre’s madness illustrates that the world of madness has certain affinities to that of emotions. For instance, madness is presented as an alternative mode of existence compared to our everyday, concerned mode of being and as permeated by magic (see pages 27-28, 33, 35-40).

Varieties of affectivity

Emotions should be contrasted with three other affective phenomena: feelings, states, and dispositions. Although Sartre does not distinguish between them in the *Sketch*, he does in other works. First, feelings are ways of encountering the world as already affectively laden. “Every feeling is feeling *about* something, which is to say it aims at its object in a certain manner and projects onto it a certain quality” (IPPI 28; see also IPPI 69). Indeed, there is no affectively neutral way of existing in the world: “All perception is accompanied by an affective reaction” (IPPI 28; see also IPPI 139). Such feelings are disclosive of the world and they can be thought of as a species of knowledge (IPPI 69). Feelings enhance the world but they do not change it: “when they disappear – as in the case of depersonalization – perception remains intact, things are not touched, and yet the world is singularly impoverished” (ibid.). But feelings are not emotions. They are not disruptive. They do not require that we give up our instrumental way of relating to the world. We can experience feelings and at the same time act in prudential ways.

In contrast to feelings, which are ways of experiencing the world, Sartre discusses states, which are objects of reflection (TE 61-8; BN 162-4): “If I hate Peter,” Sartre writes, “my hatred of Peter is a state that I can apprehend by reflection” (TE 61). To say that hate as a state is an object of reflection does not mean merely that we are able to reflect on it. This would not distinguish the *state* of hate from the feeling of repugnance or the emotion of anger. Sartre’s claim is stronger. As a state, hatred’s existence is “relative to reflective consciousness” (TE 66). It exists *because* of reflective consciousness. But that does not mean that it exists only in those moments during which we are reflecting on it. Rather, hate is constituted by reflection (TE 80-1)—it is the manner in which reflection unifies consciousness (TE 76-7)—and as such the state has both a past and a future (TE 62). The state of hate is manifested in different feelings, thoughts, and actions but it is something over and above all of them. It is not exhausted by any of them, nor even by their disjunction. He writes:

My hatred was given *in* and *by* each movement of disgust, of repugnance, and of anger, but at the same time it is *not* any of them. My hatred escapes from each of them by affirm its permanence. [...] Hatred is credit for an infinity of angry or repulsed consciousnesses in the

past and in the future. (TE 63)

Thus, for Sartre, consciousness does not discover in itself hate (or any other state for that matter). Nor is it correct to say that it is my hate that makes me feel the way I do. Instead, hate is the transcendent product of our own (reflective) consciousness (see also Barnes 1984 and Webber 2009, ch. 2). It is by reflecting on our feelings (present, past, and anticipated) that we come to the conclusion that we hate a person (TE 81).

Finally, affective dispositions are taken to be qualities of the ego—“they qualify my personality,” Sartre writes (BN 162). Just like states, they are the products of reflective consciousness. However, whereas states unify consciousness, dispositions unify states and actions. “When we have experienced hatred several times toward different persons...we unify these diverse manifestations by intending a psychic disposition for producing them” (TE 70). A disposition is taken to be “the substratum of the states”—in other words, that which can give rise to a state (or action) when it is actualized (ibid.). In *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre calls qualities “optional unities of states” and suggests that although we might think of ourselves as having such dispositions, we do not have to and perhaps it is even a mistake to think so (TE 70-1). This attitude about qualities (and dispositions) is not repeated in *Being and Nothingness* (BN 162-4). There qualities, states, and action are treated as being equally real (see also Webber 2009, 24-29).

5. Frustrating lives

Is this it?
Is this it?
Is this it?
— *The Strokes*

My project, so far, has been largely *re*constructive. I have been following Sartre closely in an attempt to present accurately and, to the extent that is possible, comprehensively his early view on emotions. In this section, I take a different approach. Instead of filling in the details of Sartre’s account, I go beyond his account by offering an interpretation of what such an account reveals about human existence. The task of this section is not reconstructive, but constructive: it builds a conception of human existence out of the *Sketch*. Although the issue

of human existence, in its various concrete and interpersonal manifestations, is explored perspicaciously and with remarkable detail and vividness in *Being and Nothingness*, there is merit in approaching this issue from the perspective of emotions: it reveals features of human existence that otherwise one might have missed.

5.1. Positive emotions: a feature, not a bug

Objections to Sartre's account of the emotions abound in the literature. Here are three common ones. First, his account is limited in various respects: it does not apply to affective phenomena other than emotions, such as moods, emotional dispositions, or sentiments (Weberman 1996); it has no room for mild emotions (Murdoch 1950); and it applies only to extreme negative or maladapted emotions (Fell 1965; Hanly 1975; Webberman 1996; Wollheim 1999). Second, his account is internally inconsistent—within the pages of the *Sketch* one finds two contradictory descriptions of emotions (Solomon 2006; Richmond 2010). Third, his distinction between an instrumental world and an emotional world runs aground basic phenomenological facts: not only is the instrumental world affectively laden but emotions can be effectual (Anders 1950; Fell 1965; Lee 1972).

I cannot deal with all of these objections here. Nor do I wish to (for some attempts to do so, see Barrett 1982; Emerick 1999). I have already offered the beginning of responses to at least two of these objections. For instance, even if Sartre does not speak of dispositions in the *Sketch*, he does so elsewhere. Furthermore, our brief discussion of feelings reveals that it is a mistake to take the instrumental world to be affectively neutral. What is more, Sartre does offer—albeit in the briefest manner—a description of two other kinds of emotions, “subtle emotions” and “weak emotions” (STE 55), and as such one could reconstruct an account of those two types of emotions.⁸ Last, the issue of whether the *Sketch* offers an inconsistent account of the emotions has been discussed elsewhere (Richmond 2010;

⁸ Both subtle and weak emotions could be construed as emotional reactions that, in opposition to the other (more extreme) emotions that Sartre considers in the *Sketch*, do not involve a magical transformation of the world (see Fell 1965, 25-8). Of course, one could argue that subtle and weak emotions are not emotions *proper*, at least not for Sartre, for during such experiences our instrumental world has not been profoundly transformed. If one accepts this view about subtle and weak emotions, then the extension of the term “emotion” should be restricted so that it *only* applies to extreme emotional reactions that transform our instrumental world into a magical one (Barrett 1982).

Hatzimoysis 2014). Indeed, I myself have offered a reading of the *Sketch* according to which there is one account of emotions that can accommodate all examples of emotions that Sartre considers, including the sudden ones of horror and awe (Elpidorou, 2016). I shall spare the reader from exposure to unnecessary repetition.

Still, there is one objection that within the context of this paper needs to be considered. At first sight, Sartre's account seems particularly ill-suited for what we might call "positive emotions." These are emotions that are not only positively valenced, but also ones that arise when things are going *well* for us, when our desires appear to be fulfilled. Sartre himself recognizes this issue in the *Sketch* but tries to undermine its severity by arguing that, despite appearances to the contrary, such emotions are not fundamentally different, at least in terms of their function and significance, from negative emotions. After distinguishing between joy-feeling (*joie-sentiment*) and joy-emotion (*joy-émotion*), Sartre claims that the latter is characterized by a type of "impatience" (STE 46). He explains:

...the joyful subject is behaving very much like a man in a state of impatience. He cannot keep still, makes innumerable plans, begins to do things which he immediately abandons etc. For in fact this joy has been called up by an apparition of the object of his desires. He has been told that he has won a considerable sum of money, or that he will shortly meet someone he loves and has not seen for a long time. But although the object is 'imminent' it is not yet there, it is not yet *his*. He is separated from it by a certain length of time. (ibid.)

In keeping with his analysis of emotions, joy, Sartre tells us, is both a response to and an attempted solution to an encountered difficulty. Joy is prompted or motivated by a frustration. We wish that our desires are fully and completely satisfied but they are not. We are made to wait, but we cannot. We want the sum of money; we want our lover; and we want them *now*. Not only that, but we also want them in a way that we can never have them, "as an instantaneous totality" (ibid). The object of desire is close but not here. And when it is here, it will not be in the form that was desired. By its very nature, our object of desire is given to us little by little and only through continuous effort. For instance, we need to wait for the sum of money to arrive. We need to pay taxes on it. We need to pay our bills and then we need to figure whether and how to spend, save, or invest it. Faced with such a

difficult and frustrating situation, we become joyful. Through its embodied and enactive manifestations, joy transforms our world magically in order “to realize the possession of the desired object as an instantaneous totality” (STE 46). In doing so, joy relieves us, temporarily, from the difficulties that we need to overcome if we wish to remain committed to a project that has been partially fulfilled. Here is Sartre’s description of the lover who experiences joy:

... a man to whom a woman has just said that she loves him may begin to dance and sing. In so doing he turns his mind away from the prudent and difficult behaviour he will have to maintain if he is to deserve this love and increase it, to gain possession of it through countless details (smiles, little attentions etc.). He turns away even from the woman herself as the living reality representative of all those delicate procedures. Those he will attend to later, he is now giving himself a rest. (STE 47)

Joy is hence a way of dwelling in the moment, soaking up all that can be soaked up, instead of facing an always-demanding reality. No wonder joy feels good.

Not many commentators on Sartre have been convinced by his description of joy. Is it really true that joy and other positive emotions are escapes from difficulties? Don’t such emotions arise precisely when things are *not* difficult to us? Furthermore, couldn’t there be instances in which a positive emotion turns us not away from the object of desire but rather towards it? I do not pretend that these are not important objections, ones to which a Sartrean view ought to attend. But my aim here is not to defend Sartre from this and other objections. I consider the example of joy not to express dissatisfaction with Sartre’s account but rather to highlight the view of human existence that underlies his account. In order to bring into focus such a view, Sartre’s description of positive emotions has to be accepted. The fact that positive emotions are reactions to frustrating situations is not a bug of Sartre’s account. It is a telling feature.

5.2. The primacy of frustration

I have emphasized, more than once that for the phenomenologist, affective phenomena are not accidental features of human existence. They are essentially constitutive of our existence (STE 61). Thus, the acceptance of any phenomenological account of emotions carries with it

a particular picture of human existence. In the case of Sartre's account, the view of human existence that we find is one characterized by frustration.

Frustration, I wish to argue, occupies a foundational place in Sartre's early thinking about affectivity. For one, frustration is the gatekeeper of our strong or extreme emotional reactions. It is on account of frustrating experiences that such emotions arise. "When the paths before us become too difficult, or when we cannot see our way" we emote (STE 39). Or as Adam Phillips notes, in a different context, "to be frustrated is to be *maddened* by having one's demand negated or avoided or tantalized" (Phillips 2013, 10; emphasis added). In an existence devoid of frustration, nothing will appear difficult or as an obstacle to us. In an existence devoid of frustration, there would be, thus, no need for (Sartre's) emotions. Frustration is not an emotional reaction like others; it is not on the same level as fear, anger, sadness, or joy. Rather, it is the ground of our emotional reactions.

Our concerned existence is frustrating. The projects to which we have committed are hard and difficult, not always yielding to our plans and desires. Our interpersonal relations are also frustrating. Love is a conflict (BN 266), Sartre tells us, and then generalizes: "Conflict is the original meaning of being-for-others" (BN 364; see also BN 429; cf. Sartre 1960/1963, 14). Our lives are frustrating. And they are so out of necessity. The *Sketch* by construing emotions as escapes from difficult and frustrating situations makes this point clear. The capacity to have emotions is a structure of human existence. But if such a structure is predicated on the antecedent existence of frustration, then our human lives, insofar as they are emotional, are frustrating. What it means to exist is to encounter frustrating situations. We strive to possess or to realize what we cannot have. We are thus doomed to experiences of frustration.

The fact that for Sartre positive emotions are responses to experienced frustrations is, I noted above, telling. What it reveals is that every fulfilled desire is always a desire that is only partially fulfilled. Even in cases in which things go well for us, they do not go *as well* as we desire them. The consequences of this observation for the nature of human existence are developed in detail in *Being and Nothingness*. There, Sartre tells us that consciousness (as the for-itself) "is perpetually determining itself not *to be* the in-itself" (BN 85). Consciousness is negatively ontologically determined by the in-itself: "it determines its being by means of a being which it is not" (BN 86). As such, consciousness (and consequently human existence) is fundamentally characterized by a lack. Sartre finds support for this idea in the very notion

of desire. A being that is what it is (i.e., a being that is never lacking) has no need for desires; it needs nothing, for it is already complete. Thus, “the existence of desire as a human fact is sufficient to prove that human reality is a lack” (BN 87). We desire because we are lacking. We do not lack because our desires are not fulfilled: “Human reality is not something which exists first in order afterwards to lack this or that; it exists first as lack” (BN 89). Or even more strongly, “The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it” (BN 90).

Sartre’s discussion of positive emotions reveals a similar picture of human existence. Even in cases where our desires are fulfilled, a lack still persists: there is something that is not only missing but that cannot be had. “Hence the constant disappointment which accompanies repletion, the famous: ‘Is this only this?’” (BN 101) That is precisely the purpose of positive emotions: to help us forget the fact that human existence is marked by a lack. Sartre’s discussion of positive emotions thus reveals that every desire—even one that is fulfilled—gives rise to a frustration.

All this might sound rather gloomy. And in, a sense, it is. Sartre was never the optimist. But there is more than what initially meets the eye. The very presence of frustration is ontologically significant for it reveals something important about our worldly and social existence. Our projects and others are frustrating precisely because they are already invested with personal meaning and significance. But not everything frustrates us. Indeed, only that which already matters to us can frustrate us. As such, frustration tracks when certain of our important desires remain unfulfilled. It informs us of when something valuable to us—i.e., something that we consider to be integral to our projects and goals—is outstanding, incomplete, or unachieved. “Only someone who gives you satisfaction can give you frustration,” Phillips writes (2013, 15). He adds: “You know someone matters to you if they can frustrate us” (ibid.). Frustration is not only the ground or precondition of our emotional reactions. It is also an indication of the basic fact that our existence is one that matters to us.

6. Coda: No exit?

Frustration, to put it simply, is something we cannot be indifferent to even if indifference can be one of our attempted solutions to it... The fact of frustration

has, that is to say, something reassuring about it. It suggests a future. (Phillips 2013, 14)

In frustration, we remain engaged with our current situation. We are engrossed by the now but only insofar as we wish to overcome it: we seek to reach a future point in time during which the difficulty that we are currently facing no longer exists. The use of instrumental means is one way of surpassing our frustrations, of solving our difficulties. If such means fail, then we turn to emotional consciousness. The onset of emotion permits us to address our difficulties in a magical manner. Frustration is not a dead-end in the road of existence. It is merely a detour: we overcome it either through prudential action or through emotional conduct.

Using Sartre's account of emotion as a clue for the nature of human existence, I have argued that our lives are frustrating. And frustrating lives are, well, frustrating: difficult and unyielding. But frustration is all too human. It reflects the fact that we have already invested in our world. It shows that the world personally matter to us. And lastly, it keeps us engaged with our situation and encountered difficulties and motivates us to go beyond them.

However, we should not be misled to think that somehow we could do without frustration. "Emotion is not an accident, it is a mode of our conscious existence." (STE 61) The same can said about frustration. Even when we overcome a frustration another will arise. And even when a desire is fulfilled, as in the case of joy, for example, our desire still remains partly frustrated, for our desires are never fully fulfilled. Frustration may carry us beyond what we have but it always leaves something out. "Human reality is a perpetual surpassing toward a coincidence with itself which is never given." (BN 89; cf. Sartre 1960/1963, 567)

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