

# Toward an Ethics of Nothingness: Sartre, Supervenience, and the Necessity of My Contingency

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José Luis Fernández  
Department of Philosophy  
Fairfield University  
1073 North Benson Road  
Fairfield, CT 06824, USA  
Email: Jfernandez1@fairfield.edu

## Abstract:

Ethics normally proceeds by establishing some kind of ground from which norms can be derived for human action. However, no such terra firma is found in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, which instead lays down a sedimentary soil consisting of a blend of nothingness and contingency. This paper aims to show how Sartre is able to build an ethical theory from this seemingly groundless mixture, and it proceeds in three sections. Section one aims to disentangle the relation between the for-itself (*pour-soi*) and the in-itself (*en-soi*) from antithetical characterizations by placing them in a state of supervenience. Section two works to explain how both the in-itself and the for-itself are not divided ontologically, but are both in the same ontological state, namely, contingency. And in section three, it is argued that Sartre's ethics reveals that because human beings share the same thrownness with Others in a world, they have to take title for such a world. Within a Sartrean ethics of nothingness, one's nothingness leads one to the shared nothingness of Others, of which one must take responsibility.

**Keywords:** Sartre, Ethics, *Being and Nothingness*, Necessity, Contingency

## Introduction

The field of ethics normally proceeds by establishing some kind of ground from which norms can be derived for human action. To name a few: Plato's ideal theory is lifted up, as it were, by climbing the ladder of reason toward the transcendent Form of the Good; Aristotle's *eudaimonist* ethics is set upon an observation of human flourishing which betrays a system of virtues driven by a distinctive human function; David Hume's moral psychology is built upon an established base of shared human sentiments and passions; Immanuel Kant's practical ethics is grounded, perhaps like no other theory, on obeying purely deontic laws of reason; G.W.F. Hegel puts forward the concept of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) through the unity of the "I" and the "We" locked in a relation of mutual recognition; and John Stuart Mill ushers a wide call to collectively promote the greatest happiness principle.

With all of these theories, what begins in a bumpy and wobbly ground is ultimately paved to support our passage to ethical destinations. However, these ethical flagstones are nowhere to

be found in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, who in *Being and Nothingness* (1984 [1956]) instead lays down a sedimentary soil consisting in a mix of nothingness and contingency. By ‘nothingness’ I mean to suggest Sartre’s sketch of a powerfully absent, yet proleptic self, i.e., a forward-looking self that is not temporally or spatially present by virtue of freedom’s ability to cancel out any fixed self-representation; by ‘contingency’ I mean Sartre’s deep seated notion of the arbitrariness of human existence, for contingency marks out those things and attributes that as much as they are, could be otherwise. Traditionally, contingency can provide no firm foundation to ethics because, by definition, conditions of chance and accident cannot give the rule to anything.<sup>1</sup> And yet Sartre discards traditional wisdom by writing in *Nausea* that “The essential thing is contingency. I mean that one cannot define existence as necessity. To exist is simply *to be there*” (Sartre 1964, 131). The temporal and spatial qualities of existence have no necessary foundations other than their temporary appearances, and this is a fleeting and inconstant condition that cannot be taken away from existence – it is its essence. We see this notion reformulated in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, wherein Sartre volleys harsh rebukes to those who would deny their own contingent existence,

I can pass judgment on those who seek to conceal from themselves the complete arbitrariness of their existence, and their total freedom. Those who conceal from themselves this total freedom, under the guise of solemnity, or by determinate excuses, I will call cowards. Others, who try to prove their existence is necessary, when man’s appearance on earth is merely contingent, I will call bastards (Sartre 2007, 49).

In the passage above, cowardice is exhibited in the willful disowning of one’s inescapable responsibility to freely make up one’s own mind, i.e., by disavowing one’s freedom; however, one’s freedom “has no essence” (Sartre 1984, 438). If human freedom has an essence, it would have to be something, and thus be based on determinate qualities, which would make it dependent, rather than independent. Instead, Sartre states that one’s freedom is characterized by nothingness: “Freedom is precisely the nothingness which *is* made-to-be at the heart of man and which forces human-reality *to make itself* instead of *to be*” (Sartre 1984, 440). However, if one’s existence is radically contingent, without rule or purpose, and one’s freedom has no essence, how does Sartre derive an ethics of nothingness to provide the groundless *ground* of one’s responsibility to others?

### **Factual Supervenience**

As with all influential contributions to ethical discourse, Sartre articulates an ethical view based on a distinctive conception of human being. This conception is complex and subtle, and thus requires a brief summary to clarify his highly technical vocabulary. Sartre understands human reality as for-itself (*pour-soi*), which is free to choose and thus defined by its nothingness, namely, the negation of what it is in-itself (*en-soi*). Being in-itself is extant concrete being; it simply *is*. Being for-itself, which we can equate with human subjectivity, is the negation of being in-itself, which we can view in objectified terms. Sartre argues that the constant negation by the for-itself

to the in-itself is an act of transcendence, for it opens up being *beyond* itself. Consequently, Sartre's idea of human being takes such being as grounded in a dialectical relation between two ways of being, as something and nothing, the definite and indefinite. The distinction of these two ways of being is anything but clear, and not without critical commentary.

Sartre's explication of the relation between being in-itself (*en soi*) and being for-itself (*pour-soi*) has been characterized (i) as antithetical and (ii) with exhibiting distinct ontological conditions. The former 'antithetical characterization' is exemplified in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's comment in *Sense and Non-Sense* that Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* "remains too exclusively antithetic...the antithesis of the for-itself and the in-itself often seem to be *alternatives* instead of being described as the living bond and communication between one term and the other" (Merleau-Ponty 1991, 72; my italics). The latter 'ontological distinction' between the in-itself and for-itself is articulated by Richard J. Bernstein, drawing from Klaus Hartmann's influential study of *Sartre's Ontology*,<sup>2</sup> in his view that for Sartre,

[T]here is a great ontological divide between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. The former is characterized by its fullness, self-identity, plenitude, and solidity. The latter, which a unity of being and nothingness, is itself essentially a lack, a deficiency, a being which lacks the fullness and positivity of being-in-itself" (Bernstein 2011, 134).

Merleau-Ponty's and Bernstein's commentaries rightly take up the seemingly confused distinction Sartre makes between being and nothingness, but I should like to use them as points of departure to examine two related lines. The first line notes how the concept of *supervenience*, that is, a relation wherein a higher-level property 'supervenes,' i.e., emerges or arises from, a lower level property. Although supervenience "is a central notion in analytic philosophy," perhaps first employed in 1952 by "R.M. Hare, who used it to characterize a relationship between moral properties and natural properties" (McLaughlin and Bennett 2018), in 1956 Sartre used the term (*surviennent*) to show that the relation between the in-itself and the for-itself is not antithetical or opposed, but rather exhibits precisely the kind of 'living bond and communication' that Merleau-Ponty does not recognize, but correctly expects.

The second line builds upon the findings of the first to argue that rather than being understood as possessing a "great ontological divide," the in-itself and for-itself share the same ontological condition; namely, *contingency*. Contingency is also tied to the notion of supervenience, for what is contingent must *depend* on some cause or attribute other than itself, and to say that something is contingent is to recognize that it is both *possibly* and *possibly-not*,<sup>3</sup> which I take to be modal attributes of both the in-itself and the for-itself.

Merleau-Ponty states that Sartre's depiction of the relation between the in-itself and for-itself is too antithetical or too directly opposed. His concerns might be attributed to the for-itself's dependence on the in-itself for its existence, thus the in-itself can be viewed as having a logically prior basis *vis-à-vis* the for-itself. However, this logical priority does not figure into any kind of

*conscious choice* between alternatives. If it did, it would have to be done by the for-itself. The kind of “alternative” fluctuation Merleau-Ponty describes is no alternative at all. How, for example, can the in-itself know itself as objectified existence, i.e., that it *is*? How can Merleau-Ponty envision a conscious choice by the in-itself to choose itself?

For example, he writes, “It is obvious [that Sartre’s] primary concern in dealing with the subject and freedom is to present them *as uninvolved in any compromise with things* and that he is putting off the study of the ‘realization’ of nothingness in being...until some other time” (Merleau-Ponty 1991, 72; my italics).<sup>4</sup> However, *pace* Merleau-Ponty, I wish to draw attention to how Sartre absolutely presents the subject and freedom as involved with ‘things’ because they are in an inescapably dependent relationship to “things;” for the transcendence of the for-itself can emerge or arise only in relation to the facticity of the in-itself. As Sartre puts it, “Every consciousness ... supports a certain relation with its own facticity” (Sartre 1984, 503). Consequently, we can say that the in-itself *supervenes* on the for-itself because the for-itself, characterized as nothing, depends on the in-itself for something to provide the content not only to consider but also to annul.

As is well known, Sartre uses the term ‘facticity’ to refer to the *situated* condition of human being,<sup>5</sup> which is ever being canceled by freedom. For example, Sartre writes, “facticity is the only reality which freedom can discover, the only one which it can nihilate by the positing of an end, the only thing in terms of which it is meaningful to posit an end” (Sartre 1984, 494). Facticity is that material which freedom shapes according to the projects it chooses to follow. Although contingent, facticity constitutes particular physical and social make ups that place human beings in relational confrontation with their world. In other words, that the situatedness of human being, the way manifold *accidental* features come together, constitute one’s facticity.

My facticity, for example, places me within a family of relations that while constitutive of my being, I could not have chosen beforehand, e.g., where I was born, where I grew up as a child, the inherited tradition of my forebears, and so on. The same goes for my physical make up, e.g. my height, complexion, hair color, health, all of which compose my facticity, just as certain aspects of my social make up *form* my given relation to the social world. This *givenness*, those aspects and traits which collectively constitute my *that is*, could easily have been otherwise, i.e., contingent. Moreover, my embedded relations in the world, as an assembly of my facts, is fluid, not static – e.g., I used to look one way, now I look different. To the extent that I am fixed by my facticity, the nature of my facticity itself is not fixed but is itself given to change.

In contradistinction to facticity, Sartre posits our “transcendence,” which overcomes our given relations to the world, and is that aspect of ourselves which allows us to always be beyond our facticity. The for-itself’s negating, its nothingness, mediates the congeries of our facticity in such ways that we can never be reduced to our factual make up, although our factual make-up is necessary not only for the existence of the for-itself, but also for the selection of its projective, intentional choices. Hence, not only is there a necessarily undissolvable interrelation between the for-itself and in-itself, but the for-itself is also in a *situation* that relies upon a view of one’s facticity

through which it shapes itself, and it is in this sense that I suggest the for-itself and in-itself are in a relational mode of supervenience.

Consequently, we can perhaps attempt to allay some of Merleau-Ponty's concerns by looking to the conclusion of 'Part Three, Chapter Three', i.e., "Concrete Relations with Others", of *Being and Nothingness*. Therein we find support for my view in Sartre's reproach of Heidegger's characterization of *Dasein* "as the existent which surpasses existents toward *their being*," instead arguing against this formulation by noting how "Heidegger passes over in silence the fact that the for-itself is not only the being which constitutes an ontology of existents but that it is also the being by whom ontic modifications supervene (*surviennent*) for the existent qua existent" (Sartre 1984, 556; my italics). The use of the word '*surviennent*' in this passage denotes to 'comes,' 'arrives' or 'emerges' *over* or *on top of* an underlying property. Sartre continues, "This perpetual possibility of acting—that is, of modifying the in-itself in its ontic materiality, in its 'flesh'—must evidently be considered as an essential characteristic of the for-itself" (Sartre 1984, 556). In other words, Sartre is saying that changes in facticity (i.e. ontic modification) and one's future projections (i.e. transcendence) are affectively mediated. Consequently, rather than seeing a supervenient relation between the in-itself and for-itself as Sartre describes, Merleau-Ponty's "alternative" comment gives the impression that Sartre's philosophy seems to oppose one aspect of being at the expense of the other, which is a classic example of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*).

My facticity situates me in relation to my world, but it ought not be understood as a foundational Archimedean point. Even though I am situated by my facticity, my distinctive situatedness is always contingent, and, hence, nonfoundational: my facticity could always have been otherwise. Recall that contingency cannot give the rule to anything. To say that something is contingent is to confess one's epistemic poverty because we can offer no rational account for our being. As Benedict de Spinoza famously argued, contingency is just a name we give to things that expose "a defect of our knowledge" (Spinoza 1974, especially, Bk I, Props. 29 & 33 and Bk II, Prop. 31). If I were to try to give a rational account for my being, I would have to state rules, principles, and laws that all went into making my existence necessary, and, as we have seen, this would mark me out as a Sartrean "bastard" (*Supra*, 10). However, I escape this offensive designation because I do not pretend to give such a rational account. Instead, I understand that my being is totally conditioned and dependent; it is totally contingent.

### **The Contingency of the For-itself**

So far, it has been shown that there is a supervenient relation between the in-itself and for-itself that can help to assuage Merleau-Ponty's concern with Sartre's philosophy. This relation suggests that the for-itself is dependent upon the in-itself for its existence and consequent selection of possible projects. We have seen how the in-itself's ontology is characterized by contingency, and one implication that we might consider is whether the for-itself, of which, in Sartre's words, "ontic modifications supervene," is similarly ontologically characterized by contingency.

Some commentators, like Richard J. Bernstein, take the in-itself and for-itself to disclose a “great ontological divide” but, here, just as with Merleau-Ponty’s worries, I want to see if these concerns can be allayed.

Recall that the for-itself is defined by its nothingness, i.e., its negation of what it is itself. The unique character of the for-itself is explained by Sartre in the following formulation:

Yet the for-itself *is*. It *is*, we may say, even if it is a being which is not what it is and which is what it is not ... it *is* as pure contingency ... It *is* in so far as there is in it something of which it is not the foundation—its presence to the world. Being apprehends itself as not being its own foundation ... A being which is not its own foundation, which qua, being, could be other than it is to the extent that it does not account for its being (Sartre 1984, 127-28).

A being that is not its own foundation is a contingent being; which is open to negation. That the for-itself *is not what it is and is what it is not* describes precisely its contingency, for what is necessary, i.e. what is and must be what is, cannot be negated and, hence, is ontologically closed. Subsequently, the contingency of the for-itself is its “presence to the world” as negation; the negation of the in-itself, with which the for-itself can never be identical.

If we return now to the contingency of the for-itself, we note that if the for-itself was identical with the in-itself, all possibility for human being would cease. The for-itself and in-itself are in a relation which presents an impossible synthesis. As we have seen, human possibility is grounded in contingency, i.e. the possibly or possibly-not. Sartre fleshes out a picture of the “pure contingency” of the for-itself in his writings on “The Body” by tying it with the notion of “perpetual contingency”:

Thus the for-itself is sustained by a perpetual contingency for which it assumes the responsibility and which it assimilates without ever being able to suppress it. This perpetual evanescent contingency of the in-itself which, without ever allowing itself to be apprehended, haunts the for-itself and reattaches it to being-in-itself—this contingency is what we shall call the *facticity* of the for-itself. It is this facticity which permits us to say that the for-itself *is*, that it exists, although we can never *realize* the facticity, and although we apprehend it through the for-itself (Sartre 1984, 408).

We can never realize the facticity of the for-itself because of its “perpetual contingency.” To say that something is perpetually contingent means that it can *always* be otherwise. Perpetual contingency evades the determinate teleological attachments of a substance metaphysics, but without having to give up notions of potentiality and possibility.

Another way of saying this is to allow for such causes as material, efficient, and formal, but with an indeterminate idea of openness with regard to finality. In this case, we might see the final cause of potential as multiple and open-ended. This would imply that there is no *actuality* in the future. In other words, if the for-itself is pure contingency, it is also pure possibility, and this would make the in-itself pure potentiality. The implication is that the for-itself is multi-proleptic,

always capable of choosing endless projects from an equally multi-potential in-itself which is always open to being transformed.

The for-itself's nothingness entails that it constantly push ahead to new possibilities into a future that it cannot predict. While the in-itself *is*, the for-itself *is not*. Through its awareness of what it is not, the for-itself becomes what it is: free to create its being. Sartre writes that freedom is the apprehension of my facticity. Because we are not fixed by facticity, which is contingent, and because we are conscious, the for-itself has no alternative but to choose: "Choice and consciousness are one and the same thing" (Sartre 1984, 595). Thus even the choice not to choose is a conscious instance of choosing: "Not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose (Sartre 1984, 481). The upshot is that there is no escape from our freedom.

Sartre's thesis of the unconditioned character of freedom, i.e., that "I am condemned to be free" (Sartre 1984, 567), does not imply that freedom has no limits. In an interesting move, Sartre argues that the phenomenon of intersubjectivity or being with Others puts a limit on my freedom. The intersubjective limits to our freedom can be explained by how choosing always takes place within a world. It is only in a world with Others that we consider our options for choice.

Choosing always implies the satisfaction of some aim or desire. Sartre states that the for-itself is always in a state of lack (Sartre 1984, 153). What the for-itself lacks (it always wants to *be* something), implies new possibilities for itself: "This missing For-itself is the Possible" (Sartre 1984, 153). Because the for-itself transcends everything it would *be*, it subsequently experiences its being as a failure:

The for-itself in its being is failure because it is transcendent. The for-itself in its being is failure because it is the foundation only of its nothingness. In truth this failure is its very being, but it has meaning only if the for-itself apprehends itself as failure *in the presence of* the being which it has failed to be" (Sartre 1984, 139).

Thus the for-itself is perpetually engaged in the task of satisfying an existential verb, i.e. its sense of lack by pursuing possibilities that would enable it *to be*.

This *haunting* lack is the reason why the for-itself is in the perpetual state of trying to *be* (Sartre 1984, 88). It wants to achieve a completion it can never quite reach, an anticipation of arrival at a destination which is perpetually delayed. But the for-itself, which *is not*, can never be completed as long as it continues to be *for-itself*. Hypothetically, should the for-itself achieve completion, it would cease being for-itself and be in-itself. Consequently, we can envision the perpetual contingency of the for-itself as a continually present form of unfulfilled promise.

The final aim of such an open-ended promise cannot be thought. If such a finality could be thought, it would negate the for-itself's freedom, i.e., if we tried to apprehend an ultimate finality as the purpose of the for-itself's negations, such an account would entail giving a necessary argument for its facticity. But, as we have seen, the for-itself is always its *not yet* precisely because of its freedom.

## The Necessity of My Contingency

The facticity of the for-itself is taken up again by Sartre when he turns to its embodiment and world-making capacity: “Being-for-itself must be wholly body and it must be wholly conscious ... The for-itself is a relation to the world. The for-itself, by denying that it is being, makes there be a world” (Sartre 1984, 404-05). The for-itself must be embodied, and Sartre posits a provocative definition of the body: “[W]e could define the body as the contingent form which is assumed by the necessity of my contingency. The body is nothing other than the for-itself” (Sartre 1984, 408). Consequently, the body, as for-itself, is my facticity:

[T]he body is the contingent form which is taken up by *the necessity of my contingency*. We can never apprehend this contingency as such in so far as our body is for us; for we are a choice, and for us, to be is to be ourselves (Sartre 1984, 432; my italics).

Sartre argues that the body is revelatory, it is a necessary medium by which things are revealed to me; I engage the world, as both passive and active, through my body.

However, the body is not just the medium with which we engage the world, it *is* our engagement with the world. Moreover, what is entailed by the necessity that we are embodied is just way to express that it is necessary that I exist contingently:

For human reality, to be is to-be-there; that is, “there in that chair,” “there at that table,” “there at the top of that mountain, with these dimensions, this orientation, *etc.*” It is ontological necessity. This point must be well understood. For this necessity appears between two contingencies: on the one hand, while it is necessary that I be in the form of being-there, still it is altogether contingent that I be, for I am not the foundation of my being; on the other hand, while it is necessary that I be engaged in this or that point of view, it is contingent that it should be precisely in this view to the exclusion of all others. This two-fold contingency which embraces a necessity we have called the facticity of the for-itself (Sartre 1984, 407-8).

Sartre argues that my relation to my body as for-itself, which is free to act in the world, follows the contingent character of facticity:

But it is the fact that the for-itself is not its own foundation, and this fact is expressed by the necessity of existing as an engaged, contingent being among other contingent beings. As the body is not distinct from the situation of the for-itself since for the for-itself, to exist and to be situated are one and the same ... The body manifests my contingency, we can say it is *only* this contingency (Sartre 1984, 408-9).

As a consequence, I am always in relation to my body, and even though my body is contingent, this relation is necessary: “The body is the necessary condition of my action: “Birth, the past, contingency, the necessity of a point of view, the factual condition for all possible action in the world—such is the body, such it is *for me*” (Sartre 1984, 431).

The necessity of my contingency, however, does not alleviate my *responsibility* in the world to which I am engaged. That contingency offers no rational ground for the existence of things *is not an excuse* for me to evade responsibility for my choices. Recall that the for-itself,

is sustained by a perpetual contingency *for which it assumes the responsibility* and which it assimilates without ever being able to suppress it ... Yet facticity does not cease to haunt the for-itself, and it is facticity which causes me to apprehend myself simultaneously as totally responsible for my being” (Sartre 1984, 408; my italics).

Sartre writes that not only is my body my facticity, but also “the Other’s body is his *facticity*” (Sartre 1984, 449). In a key passage, Sartre explains how the Other’s facticity implies its contingency, which is the same as mine:

It is this same contingency, and no other, which I presently grasp .... This body of the Other as I encounter it is the revelation as object-for-me of the contingent form assumed by the necessity of this contingency .... the pure contingency of his presence .... The Other’s body is then the facticity of transcendence transcended as *it refers to my facticity. I never apprehend the Other as body without at the same time in a non-explicit manner apprehending my body as the center of reference indicated by the Other* (Sartre 1984, 451; my italics).

The Other’s body is thereby refers us to our own factual contingencies, and from this emerges ethical commitments. There is a mutual reciprocity in the structure of my being with that of the Other: “[T]he way in which my body appears to the Other or the way in which the Other’s body appears to me amounts to the same thing ... [T]he the structures of my being-for-the-Other are identical to those of the Other’s being-for-me” (Sartre 1984, 445). The identity relation is as follows: if the Other’s facticity is the same as mine, his for-itself is just as open to future possibilities as my own. Moreover, my “mineness” cannot be recovered without reference to a mode of being with otherness that is incorrigibly social and historical. We encounter Others in a world not of our making, but of which we can each make. And it is this cohabitation and subsequent encounters with Others that necessitates my taking responsibility for my freedom and actions, which no one else, as for-itself, ought ever evade.

What this means is that our encounter with Others implies their freedom as much as it implies our own. Man is not only condemned to be free and hence must choose, but also “carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; *he is responsible for the world* and for himself as a way of being (Sartre 1984, 707; my italics). The for-itself must always project into its future possibilities, but however daunting its responsibilities, it should not lose sense of those projections taking place in a world with Others, which is also his world: “In this sense the responsibility of the for-itself is overwhelming since he is the one by whom it happens to be a world” (Sartre 1984, 707).

That the for-itself “is responsible for the world” assumes that he and Others share “a

peopled-world” (Sartre 1984, 711). The thesis that the for-itself must be responsible for the world is linked to its perpetual contingency, i.e., its own future. In its attempt to satisfy its own lacking, the for-itself realizes that “there is a future waiting to be created” (Sartre 2007, 30). In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre quotes Francis Ponge as writing: “Man is the future of man” (Sartre 2007, 29); hence, we might say that the for-itself is the future of the for-itself. Responsibility for the world entails my taking absolute responsibility for my practical choices as a consequence of my freedom (Sartre 1984, 708). My facticity, the contingency of the for-itself, and the necessity of my contingency imply no rational foundation for the world: “I am not the foundation of my being. Therefore, everything takes place *as if* I were compelled to be responsible” (Sartre 1984, 710; my italics). Sartre wants us to take the *heuristic* sense of world responsibility seriously.

We must take responsibility for our choices in the world *as if* our practical deliberations were somehow grounded, even though there is no such ground. Our facticity, for-itself and body are all contingent. However, this lack appears as an empty space in which we cannot help but be free and take responsibility for our choices even if we should try to evade such responsibility. The radical contingency of my being is a dispensation to freedom, albeit with attached accountability:

I am *abandoned* in the world ... I find myself suddenly alone and without help, engaged in a world for which I bear the whole responsibility without being able, whatever I do, to tear myself away from the responsibility for my very desire of fleeing responsibilities (Sartre 1984, 710).

Being free means having to face our abandonment by taking responsibility for such. I transcend this abandonment by presupposing my responsibility of having to choose and by taking title for my choices.

My taking responsibility for freedom takes place in a world of Others with whom we share the same contingency. Sartre’s ethics of contingency reveals that because I share the same thrownness with Others in a world, I also have no choice but to take responsibility for such a world:

The one who realizes in anguish his condition as being thrown into a responsibility which extends to his very abandonment has no longer either remorse or excuse; he is no longer anything but a freedom which perfectly reveals itself and whose being resides in this very revelation (Sartre 1984, 711).

The revelation of our freedom cannot take place without the Other, whose revelatory being refers us back to our own factual contingencies. And just as my facticity is mirrored by the Other, so too is my freedom, my nothingness. This means that not only do I have to take responsibility for my freedom, but I ought to take responsibility for Others to will their freedom as well. This is freedom in the face of the contingency we all share, and a freedom that I cannot set as a goal “without setting the freedom of others as a goal” (Sartre 2007, 49). Recall that for Sartre, freedom has no essence, it is nothingness. Hence, in an ethics of nothingness, my nothingness leads me to the nothingness of Others, of which I must take responsibility.

### Endnotes:

1. This is why Aristotle writes that there can be no science of the accidental. See (Aristotle 2001, 1026b-1027a20).
2. Klaus Hartmann, *Sartre's Ontology: A Study of Being and Nothingness in Light of Hegel's Logic* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966).
3. It should be noted that some might confuse *possibly-not* with impossible. This is a mistake. Contingency is expressed modally as (*possibly-p* and *possibly-not p*).
4. Merleau-Ponty continues, "the subject is *only* nothingness" (73).
5. Cf. Heidegger's use of facticity (*Faktizität*) to designate *Dasein's* situated thrownness, i.e., its Being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*). See (Heidegger 1962): "Whenever *Dasein* is, it is as a Fact; and the factuality of such a Fact is what we shall call *Dasein's* 'facticity'" (82).

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