

## SARTRE'S BREAK WITH HEIDEGGER IN *L'ÊTRE ET LE NÉANT*

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Sartre's thinking in *L'être et le néant* is driven by a conceptual choice that radically breaks with the philosophical spirit of *Sein und Zeit* and, in that very gesture, problematizes it. The critical remarks through which Sartre nuances his praise of Heidegger's discoveries do not exhaustively reveal his fundamental disagreement with *Sein und Zeit*: they either remain unrelated to his break with Heidegger or merely indicate it without articulating what is ultimately at stake in the concept of the *pour-soi*. Among the first kind of Sartre's critical remarks, we find what could be called his 'negative' critique of Heidegger, which discerns the lack of some concept in the *Daseinanalytik*. This kind of critique can be found in for example those passages which interpret the absence of sexuality in *Sein und Zeit* as implying that Dasein is 'sexless' (*asexué*).<sup>1</sup> More relevant, however, is the kind of critique that we can call 'positive,' because it is directed not at what Heidegger fails to do, but rather at what he does accomplish. One example of such critique is Sartre's conclusion that Heidegger's concept of death and its role in 'resolute decision' or *Entschlossenheit* is defective because it puts consciousness in front of

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2020), 512.

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what Sartre considers to be an unrealizable task.<sup>2</sup> A similar discord is present in Sartre's attitude towards Heidegger's concept of transcendence, which is denounced as "a concept in bad faith."<sup>3</sup>

But while such remarks unambiguously indicate a divergence, they do so merely by gravitating around a more fundamental rupture that is never explicitly articulated and thus always remains in the background of *L'être et le néant*. This rupture takes center stage when we distinguish its three main moments. The first moment involves Sartre transforming Heidegger's emphasis on 'being and *time*' into 'being and *nothingness*.' The second moment occurs when that transformation effectuates a conceptual shift which inverts the relationship that Heidegger establishes between anxiety and freedom: whereas in *Sein und Zeit* anxiety is the precondition of freedom, for Sartre freedom becomes the precondition of anxiety. In the third moment, the absolute primacy of spontaneity in *L'être et le néant* ultimately serves as the cornerstone of Sartre's re-evaluation of truth, challenging the fundamental primacy that Heidegger assigns to *Geworfenheit* in *Sein und Zeit*. Against Heidegger's efforts to have truth (*alètheia*) coincide with existence through thrownness, *L'être et le néant* portrays truth as an ongoing struggle in the realization of existence through freedom: consciousness must consistently fight against truth in *mauvaise foi* or forcefully liberate it from bad faith in *bonne foi*. In their unity, these three moments constitute the primary components of Sartre's originality in relation to Heidegger's fundamental ontology. Upon this analysis, Sartre's early philosophy is not, as commonly thought, a mere continuation or variation of Heidegger's ontology, but rather represents a distinct ontology in its own right.

## 1. NICHTS / NÉANT

Although Heidegger's concept of *Nichts* is generally associated with "Was ist Metaphysik?", the inaugural lecture's thematic discussion of that concept is less elaborate and profound than what *Sein und Zeit*

<sup>2</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, part IV, chapter 1, "Liberté et la facticité: la situation."

<sup>3</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, part II, chapter 1, "Husserl, Hegel, Heidegger."

offers.<sup>4</sup> The *Daseinanalytik* limits its thematic discussion of *Nichts* to §40 and §58, but the sense of that concept cannot be derived without considering it in relation to the entirety of *Sein und Zeit*. Its main divergence with “Was ist Metaphysik?” results from the latter’s focus on *das Nichts* almost exclusively from the point of view of the ontological difference. The main goal of Heidegger’s inaugural lecture is to establish the difference between *sein* and *seiende*, with the aim of separating the two and reversing what he diagnoses as the collapse of their difference in metaphysics. The thesis of “Was ist Metaphysik?” can be summarized as the claim that being is itself not a ‘thing’ and hence cannot be understood through concepts that pertain exclusively to things. The main aim of the lecture consists in making the ontological difference gradually emerge by *shifting the sense* of “nothing” (*Nichts*) from its negative ontological determination as a privation of *seiende*, to its positive ontological determination as the presence of *sein*. A careful reading could trace the gradual transformation of that sense in the repetitive style in which the lecture is composed: each repetition of *Nichts* throughout the lecture already contains some change in its sense, as if the very form of that lecture is an application of *Wiederholung* which Heidegger developed two years earlier in his analysis of temporality in *Sein und Zeit*.<sup>5</sup> But the latter book offers something more in its analysis of *Nichts*. Lacking the obsession with metaphysics that progressively dominated his thought after 1927, Heidegger’s analysis of *Nichts* in *Sein und Zeit* is less concerned with *Sein* as such than with developing it entirely within the context of the being of *Dasein*. Consequently, *das Nichts* as a concept is operative in every *Existenzial*, even when Heidegger does not mention it explicitly. *Zeitlichkeit* itself, to the extent that it marks “the final ontological foundation of the intelligibility of the being of *Dasein*,” must be understood as the *activity* of *Nichts*. What he later calls *das Nichten des Nichts* thus becomes synonymous with *Sorge* — the sense (*Sinn*) itself of being-in-the-world, which ultimately amounts to the self-temporalizing of temporality and finds its phenomenal manifestation

<sup>4</sup> Martin Heidegger, “Was ist Metaphysik?,” in *Wegmarken*, ed. Friedrich-Willem Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1967), §74, §75.

in Dasein's task of taking up its being in the face of finitude — a task from which it tends to run away, but which nevertheless has always already marked its existence as either *flight from* or *resolution towards* its own freedom.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, whereas “Was ist Metaphysik?” primarily understands *das Nichts* in relation to metaphysics, *Sein und Zeit* instead relates it to the opposition between *Eigentlichkeit* and *Uneigentlichkeit* of Dasein's existence. Here, it is the transition from “un-” to *eigentlich* that grants *das Nichts* its central role. This transition, as is well known, occurs in multiple phases, the first of which is a stage in which Dasein — after its flight from the ontological task of ‘to be’ has been interrupted by its confrontation with its own finitude — now finds itself ‘provoked’ by the ‘inner voice’ (*Ruf des Gewissens*) to resolutely *reject* all further attempts to run away from itself. This voice provokes by ‘calling towards’ *Eigentlichkeit*, but it does so by saying *nothing*: “der Ruf ‘sagt’ *nichts*.”<sup>7</sup> The nothing spoken out by the voice is however not a total absence of speaking; its silence is rather an articulation of the nothing that *nihilates* (*nichtet*) as Dasein's being itself, the same being from which Dasein tends to run away and which it now cannot escape because that being won't stop ‘calling.’ This call ultimately forces Dasein to see what it initially refuses to see, namely that its ‘to be’ is *groundless*, which not only means that in the absence of a pre-given essence, there is no pre-existing answer to the question *how* to perform its ‘to be,’<sup>8</sup> but also, and even more so, that this ‘to be’ arises *out* of nothing and rests *in* nothing: “sein” in the “Da” means, “Grundsein für ein durch ein Nicht bestimmtes Sein — das heißt Grundsein einer Nichtigkeit.”<sup>9</sup> The importance of this claim in *Sein und Zeit* is marked by the fact that at this point Heidegger's analysis is making its last steps towards the interpretation of Dasein's being in terms of *Zeitlichkeit*. What he means with Dasein *ist Grundsein*

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §38, §62.

<sup>7</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 280.

<sup>8</sup> Rudi Visker discusses Dasein's problem of ‘how to be’ in “Intransitive Facticity,” in *The Inhuman Condition* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2005), 189-234. To him I also owe the interpretation of *Sein und Zeit* emphasizing dynamics rather than sense.

<sup>9</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 283.

*einer Nichtigkeit* is precisely that Dasein is not a noun but a verb, and its activity as a verb is *nothing* but *temporalization of time itself*, which is not a thing, but a self-surpassing that unfolds as the unity of the three temporal ekstases.<sup>10</sup> The being of the human being just *is* the running ahead of itself in the anticipation of the future, the anticipatory movement *out* of the past, while the present is nothing but the constant self-arising manifestation of that circular dynamic going from what is no-more to what is not-yet and back.<sup>11</sup>

When Sartre discusses Heidegger's concept of *Nichts*, he immediately localizes its most crucial moment in the articulation of ontological negativity. *L'être et le néant* is unambiguous about the importance it assigns to negation, but it is also precisely for that reason that Sartre's praise for Heidegger simultaneously entails a critique. Although Heidegger discovers the negativity in the nucleus of our being, Sartre observes that Heideggerian philosophy tends to describe Dasein through positive terms that mask implicit negations: "Le *Dasein* est "hors de soi, dans le monde," il est "un être des lointains," il est "souci," il est "ses propres possibilités," etc." By rephrasing these formulations negatively, Sartre manages to uncover the negation at work in Dasein's being: "le *Dasein* "n'est pas" en soi, qu'il "n'est pas" à lui-même dans une proximité immédiate et qu'il "dépassé" le monde en tant qu'il se pose lui-même comme *n'étant pas en soi* et comme *n'étant pas le monde*."<sup>12</sup> In short, Heidegger turns the *-not* into a kind of intentional correlate of transcendence, without recognizing that he has already inserted it into transcendence itself as its original structure.<sup>13</sup> He thus fails to recognize the true relationship between *Sorge* and *Nichts* by suggesting that the being of Dasein is primarily *Sorge* and only subsequently permeated by nothingness. But Sartre inverts that relationship: consciousness is *primarily* nothing (*néant*) and only on the basis of that nothingness can it be *Sorge*. Whereas Dasein's 'to be' is fundamentally *Nichts* because it is not a *seiende*, Sartre's *néant* is not 'nothing' because it is 'not 'something,' but rather because

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §65, §68.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §68.

<sup>12</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 60.

<sup>13</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 60.

it is only as *negativity* that it can be what it is and do what it does. Sartre's reproach is hence that the *Daseinanalytik's* excessive loyalty to the hyphens in the expression *in-der-Welt-sein* prevents Heidegger from thinking the ontological particularity of consciousness. That particularity consists in its pure negativity, which distinguishes consciousness ontologically from *être-en-soi* by virtue of the former's being a *-not* with regard to the latter's absolute positivity of being. The things that are not of the order of consciousness are deprived of the ability to experience a *-not*, and even this phrasing is inadequate, since to speak in terms of privation is already to introduce a 'lack' in their being. It would be more precise to say that they exist on neither side of privation. In the 'absence' of intentionality, they fully coincide with their identity and simply *are* what they are.<sup>14</sup>

Whereas Heidegger distinguishes between Dasein and 'innerworldly beings' (*innerweltlich seiende*) through Dasein's ability to be concerned with own being,<sup>15</sup> Sartre further reduces this concern to pure negativity. Indeed, there is only concern to the extent that there is negativity at work in the core of consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Only by virtue of this negativity can there be something like the hyphens of 'being-in-the-world.' One might recall Heidegger's insistence on the meaning of those hyphens: they represent the inseparability of "Da" and "sein," specifically the fact that in the case of the human being the verb *to be* unfolds as a *worldly* (*weltlich*) activity. He calls the traditional inability to 'bridge' the subject and the world a scandal because such a bridge is an *a priori* of the subject's being — and it is rather our concept of 'subjectivity' itself that obscures the world as an *a priori* from our sight.<sup>17</sup> All this is well-known. Less well-known is that Sartre relocates the role of Heidegger's hyphens to the *nihilation* of nothing itself. The German formula *das Nichts nichtet* thus no longer serves the purpose of an ontological differentiator between *sein/seiende* and *eigentlich/uneigentlich*, but rather

<sup>14</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 33-40.

<sup>15</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §3, §4.

<sup>16</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, Part I, chapter 1, §I, IV and V.

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §43c.

becomes, in its capacity of *néantisation*, the “original structure” (*structure originelle*) of transcendence itself.<sup>18</sup>

Heidegger's *in-der-Welt-sein* is co-constituted by *Verstehen*, which itself can further be unpacked as *Rede*, his translation for *logos*.<sup>19</sup> *Rede* denotes the fact that what we encounter is already phenomenally manifested ‘as’-something, it is given to us in its full intelligibility as ‘this’ or ‘that’: I see a pen and immediately encounter it *as a pen* that is given to me in full familiarity and already indicates the possibility of taking notes, buying paper, and so on. This ‘articulation’ of the hermeneutical as-structure which underlies and establishes the phenomenality of phenomena is analysed in *Sein und Zeit* as the ‘speaking out of *Rede*’ (*genitivus subjectivus*), which does not require any vocalization. Heidegger's play with concepts that are traditionally associated with ‘speaking’ and ‘thinking,’ however, completely obscures the fact that he is essentially talking about perception. This is not to say that his aim is to describe a moment of ‘looking’ at something. In fact, one can at times detect a slight hostility towards the activity of mere looking in *Sein und Zeit*, specifically in those passages that somehow associate the sense of sight with *Vorhandenheit*. Consider for instance the fact that §16 traces the ontological genesis of objective presence back to the “conspicuousness” (*Auffälligkeit*) of what is otherwise inconspicuous, or that §36 further connects this conspicuousness to the “mere looking” which occurs when *Dasein* stops working and for a moment seems to be doing nothing but looking around.<sup>20</sup> The ‘mere sight’ of something as “looking so or so” is ultimately inherent to the structure of objective presence, which Heidegger, in turn, situates at the root of metaphysics and its *Seinsvergessenheit*, the catastrophic character of which becomes central after *die Kehre*.

This entire conceptual assemblage of speaking-looking, which Heidegger ultimately installs in the nucleus of *Verstehen*, is taken up by Sartre in terms of perception, but in such manner that the hermeneutical ‘as’-structure

<sup>18</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, Part I, chapter 1, §IV, 61.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §34.

<sup>20</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 172-73.

is now performed not by any positive ontological structures such as *Rede*, but exclusively by *néantisation*. His analysis of nihilation as a condition for the appearance of a *Gestalt* thus discerns the articulation of something in terms of its hermeneutic ‘as-’structure as a process of negation. To appear ‘as something’ now means that “the being in question is *that* and nothing else.”<sup>21</sup> The nuances of this conceptual shift are demonstrated by his discussion of searching for Pierre in a café: the expectation of encountering Pierre is what structures the horizon of perception into a background for individual perceptions, all of which appear *as* something to the extent that they are *not* Pierre. In this manner, Sartre integrates *néantisation* into the structure of perception itself. In addition to enabling the appearance of what is *not* of the order of consciousness, negation also effectuates the relation of consciousness to itself: consciousness understands itself as *not* being the world,<sup>22</sup> finds itself in a constant flight *out* of itself towards the not-yet,<sup>23</sup> and because of this always remains a *not* with regard to what it was.<sup>24</sup> In this manner, Sartre creates a model of consciousness as a nothing in the middle of being, a nothing that ‘inhabits’ that being “like a worm” — *au sein même de l’être, en son coeur, comme un ver*<sup>25</sup> — suspended as it is between the no-longer and the not-yet, doomed to never coincide with itself, and hence condemned to be free.

## 2. ANGST-FREIHEIT / ANGOISSE-LIBERTÉ

In describing the haunting manner in which the voice of conscience calls *out* of nothing, *towards* nothing, and by speaking out *nothing*, Heidegger tells us that there is indeed something that *haunts* Dasein ever since its first encounter with *Angst*. The function of *Angst* in *Sein*

<sup>21</sup> Sartre, *L’être et le néant*, 47-52.

<sup>22</sup> Sartre, *L’être et le néant*, part II, chapter 1, V: “Le moi et le circuit de l’ipseité.”

<sup>23</sup> Sartre, *L’être et le néant*, part I, chapter 1, V: “L’origine du néant,” and part II, chapter 2, II: “Ontologie de la temporalité.”

<sup>24</sup> Sartre, *L’être et le néant*, part I, chapter 1, V.

<sup>25</sup> Sartre, *L’être et le néant*, 64.



*und Zeit* is that of a rupture, an interruption between what came before its manifestation and what came after. One moment the Dasein is tending to “take things lightly”<sup>26</sup> (*Leichtnehmen und Leichtmachen*) and run away from its own ontological burden of being, the other moment “beings are sinking away”<sup>27</sup> from it, and it is faced with the undeniable presence of its finitude (mortality, the fact that Dasein is existing towards death), revealed to it out of the blue and in full intensity of its shocking apparition. ‘Out of the blue’ means in this case *ex nihilo*, that is, in complete disregard towards whatever it is that Dasein was doing. Precisely this indifference of death toward Dasein’s flight *out* of its awareness of its own mortality and *into* the world, is what allows death’s presence to interrupt Dasein’s flight. Whatever it is that Dasein was doing in rendering something ‘*zuhanden*,’ and irrespective of what such rendering disclosed as significant (*bedeutsam*), the world as a horizon of significance now becomes *insignificant* (*unbedeutsam*).<sup>28</sup> To be sure, the world does not cease to be a world, but something changes: it is no longer a home, its refusal to be a distraction from one’s finitude becomes suffocating and it is this ‘lack of air’ that Heidegger describes as the *Unheimlichkeit* of the world as manifested in *Angst*.<sup>29</sup> The world is now contaminated and contains something of a refusal to distract Dasein from the task inherent to the *sein* of the “*da*.” What contaminates the world is *das Nichten des Nichts* itself, which reveals itself as always having permeated the “*da*” of *sein/Nichts* and always already having *enveloped* the world in its own nothingness, only now appearing as having been there (*Da*) all along. All of this is condensed in the *impact* of *Angst*, and as soon as that impact recedes, the *Unheimlichkeit* of being-there is extinguished by the veil of familiarity that gradually re-covers the world and re-establishes the conditions under which Dasein can once more look away from its own death.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 127-28. [My translation].

<sup>27</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 187.

<sup>28</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 186-87.

<sup>29</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 188.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §51.

But this time, this looking away is different; it has to persistently deal with the haunting voice of conscience that keeps reminding Dasein of what its *Angst* revealed: “Diese Unheimlichkeit setzt dem Dasein ständig nach.”<sup>31</sup> It ‘torments’ Dasein by not leaving it ‘in peace,’ by following it everywhere, because what it calls toward *is* everywhere; or, more precisely, it is both everywhere and nowhere in particular, everything and nothing in particular: “Nichts ist es und nirgends” and “es ist schon ‘da’ — und doch nirgends, es ist so nah, daß es beenzt und einem den Atem verschlägt — und doch nirgends.”<sup>32</sup> Even if Dasein *wants* to keep running towards what it is not — towards a *fake* conception of its own condition, or *Uneigentlichkeit* — it will still be followed by the possibility of its *actual* existential condition, the *Eigentlichkeit* of its existence.<sup>33</sup> *Angst*, in this sense, produces for the first time the possibility of choice, and this possibility haunts Dasein for so long as it refuses to choose the *true* existence (*das eigentliche Existenz*) over an untrue one. Throughout this refusal, the ‘voice of conscience’ becomes oppressive in its constant reminder of Dasein’s guilt (*Schuld*) and does not cease to remind Dasein of the *lack* that defines its being from both the interior and the exterior:<sup>34</sup> the ‘interior,’ to the extent that this being is nothing but *sein-zum-Tode*, and the ‘exterior’ in so far as this *sein-zum-Tode* is limited by the ‘possibility of impossibility,’ or death.

All of this turbulence in Dasein’s being occurs because its initial condition is not freedom, but unfreedom. Prior to the manifestation of *Angst*, every Dasein exists in *Uneigentlichkeit*. The connection with Plato’s allegory of the cave is unmistakable: our initial condition is that of imprisonment in ignorance.<sup>35</sup> Just like in the allegory, the prisoners (of *Uneigentlichkeit*) do not possess the autonomous power to liberate themselves, their ‘deliverance’ from ignorance can only be effected from the outside. Their liberation is completely beyond their control, hence

<sup>31</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 189.

<sup>32</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 186.

<sup>33</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 276-78.

<sup>34</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §58.

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed discussion of (*Un*)*Eigentlichkeit* in relation to Plato’s cave, see Rudi Visker, “Heidegger’s Cave: Being and Time on Disappearing Existentials,” in *Truth and Singularity* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1999), 23-46.

dependent upon chance. In Plato, this is evident from the fact that the first prisoner must be released by someone else, upon which it is he, the liberated prisoner, who in turn becomes 'someone else' when he returns to the cave with the intention of liberating others. In Heidegger, this double element of liberation from the outside — in the sense that is brought about by chance and does not depend for its occurrence on our autonomy — is equally present: first, we find it in the apparition of *Angst*, about which Heidegger tells us that we cannot choose for it because it simply *happens* to us. Given that we are dealing with a *Stimmung*, which is *Befindlichkeit*, its domain is not that of *Entwurf* but rather *Geworfenheit*;<sup>36</sup> this means that the only way to experience *Angst* is to be thrown in it, which happens rarely, if at all; it is for this reason that Heidegger stresses its "faktische Seltenheit."<sup>37</sup> The second moment of exteriority occurs in the calling of the voice, which in this case becomes the exterior in the interior, the 'Other in me,' who can only 'haunt' me insofar as their 'calling' will not bend to my will: I cannot silence the voice, because silence itself has become complicit in what haunts me.<sup>38</sup> Neither can I 'talk away' that silence in *Gerede*, since this talking away is already aware of what it attempts to cover up with noise.<sup>39</sup> Akin to Plato's prisoner, my activity in the entire affair goes no further than the resolution to walk toward the light once I have been released from my chains.

Heidegger thus conceptualizes *Angst* as a precondition for freedom. Dasein only attains the ability to become 'free' when *Angst* discloses the possibility of impossibility. This freedom is affirmed in the actual choice for *Eigentlichkeit*, a choice that chooses precisely to perform the 'to be' in accordance with its ontological nature, namely as *Grundsein einer Nichtigkeit*, which means that "Grund-seiend, das [Dasein] ist nie existent vor seinem Grunde, sondern je nur *aus ihm* und *als diese*."<sup>40</sup> It is at this

<sup>36</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, §29.

<sup>37</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 190.

<sup>38</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 273.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of how Dasein tends to cover up its anxiety with noise, see Rudi Visker, "Whistling in the Dark: Two Approaches to Anxiety," in *The Inhuman Condition* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2005), 59-75.

<sup>40</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 284.

point that Heidegger makes clear how the choice for *Eigentlichkeit* marks the very moment in which Dasein for the first time attains the ability to take up its own existence in its own hands: its entire activity ceases to be a movement of *Verfallen* towards the world and instead turns into an active laying out of its own freedom: “Die gemeinte Nichtigkeit gehört zum Freisein des Daseins für seine existenziellen Möglichkeiten.”<sup>41</sup> Heidegger’s qualification of this freedom as *negative* already introduces an element that will be prioritized by Sartre in his own analysis of freedom. That element is the idea that to choose one possibility means by that very move to negate all possibilities that have *not* been chosen: “Die Freiheit aber ist nur in der Wahl der einen, das heißt im Tragen des Nichtgewählthabens und Nichtauchwählenkönnens der anderen.”<sup>42</sup> In addition, since Dasein’s being is constituted as a ‘not,’ its nothingness cannot be ‘filled’ and hence persistently maintains the condition in which ‘to be’ means ‘to be this or that possibility of being,’ without ever attaining the realization of that possibility. As Heidegger writes, “Grundsein besagt demnach, des eigensten Seins von Grund auf *nie* mächtig sein.”<sup>43</sup> Herein lies the ‘engine’ of Dasein’s earlier flight from itself, as well as the reason that its ‘to be’ is initially experienced as a “burden” (*Last*):<sup>44</sup> the void that opens up in the horizon of being-there between birth and death,<sup>45</sup> and which, in the absence of solid ground, provides no reason for why to project one possibility rather than another.

It is easy to spot the similarities with Sartre, but these similarities are superficial. In fact, *L’être et le néant* completely inverts the relationship between anxiety and freedom. In Sartre, one does not ‘become free’ because one is anxious, but the other way around. One becomes anxious because one is free. What Sartre calls *conscience libre* entails an ontological freedom that is inherent to consciousness by virtue of its being a *néant*. As the things that are not of the order of consciousness are

<sup>41</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 285.

<sup>42</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 285.

<sup>43</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 284.

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 284.

<sup>45</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 373.

characterized by the absolute positivity of being, this total absence of negativity subjects them to the universal law of causality. With no negativity present in the *en-soi*, there is nothing that can escape the order of cause and effect. But by the same token consciousness completely escapes the realm of mechanics. Consciousness can be motivated, conditioned, carried away, and limited by itself, but it cannot be determined by an external cause to result in a certain effect like a pen can be determined to fall when my hand releases its grip and the laws of gravity take over.<sup>46</sup> Unlike the thing *en-soi* that must be effected by an external cause to come into being, consciousness is *sui generis*. It arises *out* of itself, *ex nihilo*, and this not once, but time and again at each instant of its continuous self-creation. It thus finds itself in a persistent *néantisation* or 'nihilation,' an event in which the *néant* that is consciousness is engaged in a continuous process of self-surpassing, with each now-instant characterized by the fleeing of consciousness *out* of what it was and towards what it not-yet is.<sup>47</sup> Consciousness thus finds itself constantly separated from what it was and from what it is yet to be. For this reason, there is nothing in the past that can lock consciousness in some way of being. By the time causality touches the body, consciousness has already surpassed the touch itself.<sup>48</sup> Even when I promise something to myself — which is a relation of consciousness to itself — the one who has promised has already slipped into the past, losing all the power condensed in the resolution through which the promise was made. In order to actually *keep* the promise, consciousness must re-affirm it, not once but with every instant of its self-surpassing.<sup>49</sup> And just like my past-self cannot lock my consciousness in place, so is my future-self equally deprived of the possibility to limit my freedom, since I am always already separated from that future by a not-yet. Consequently, consciousness at all times remains radically free, and its freedom cannot be limited by anything except itself: "L'homme n'est

<sup>46</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, Part I, Chapter 1, V: "L'origine du néant," specifically 87-92.

<sup>47</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 191-98.

<sup>48</sup> See Sartre's discussion of sadism and the sadists' failure in, *L'être et le néant*, Part III, Chapter 3, II: "Deuxième attitude envers autrui: l'indifférence, le désir, la haine, le sadisme," specifically 538-41.

<sup>49</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 78-80.

point *d'abord* pour être libre *ensuite*, mais il n'y a pas de différence entre l'être de l'homme et son 'être-libre.'"50

*Liberté* cannot be the effect of *l'angoisse*, but only its cause. To establish this, Sartre takes over Heidegger's distinction between fear and anxiety but changes its meaning. Like Heidegger, he considers fear to be always a fear of a danger coming from *within* the world, in which case something — a person, an animal, a situation — in short, some *possibility* becomes fearful when it threatens me: I stand close to the edge of the train-platform and suddenly fear falling under the arriving train.<sup>51</sup> This threat involves a moment of passivity because the possibility of falling is something that can *happen* to me and is hence not *mine*: I may slip and fall, or I may be (accidentally) pushed into peril. At this point, Sartre has already diverged from Heidegger by conceptualizing fear as a possibility that is not *mine*, a point on which Heidegger remains silent. As a possibility that is not mine but that can nevertheless happen to me, my consciousness considers itself as a passivity, an object among objects in the world. The sense of passivity involved herein cannot be separated from my relating to myself as if I were an object, which is a 'self-imposed' objectity (*objectité*) because consciousness *is not* an object but only *discloses* itself as such when it first becomes a fearing consciousness: I seem to empty my consciousness of its freedom by treating it as if it were subjected to the laws of causality. The possibility of being that I fear thus becomes an 'effect' of some 'cause.' For this reason, I will begin to act in a manner that prevents the occurrence of the effect, thereby gradually transitioning from passivity to activity. I become aware of the possibility of moving away from the edge of the platform, or I can look around to ensure there is nobody who might push me into the gap. Yet precisely in this transition to activity, all those possibilities that first seemed to be external to my being and rendered me passive in their presence, now become *my* possibilities and possible expressions of *my* freedom. But for the same reason, not only do I become *responsible* for a certain outcome — I might slip while backing away and fall

<sup>50</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 69.

<sup>51</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 75-76. For Heidegger's discussion of fear, see *Sein und Zeit*, §30.

nevertheless — there is also no reason why I should choose one possibility *over* the other. Nothing guarantees that my choice will have a certain outcome; and although my future-self as implied by a specific choice might motivate me to *make* that choice — or perhaps, on the contrary, dissuade me from it — he nevertheless cannot *force* me to do anything, since I remain separated from him by a nothing. Similarly, even if in the past I was eager to avoid falling into the gap, nothing prevents me from going against that choice, because by the time I have to make it anew, my past-I cannot force me to act in accordance with his will. In fact, I might feel a sudden and inexplicable rush to act *against* my past self's love of life and instead become incited to jump — as if there is something 'in' me that 'tempts' me to jump, not because I'm tired of life, but simply for the sake of the "I *can*." Precisely this unconditional 'I can' and the lack of any necessity that can affirm itself against it, is where I am confronted with the absolute character of my freedom. This 'absolute' nature of my freedom is what produces my *angoisse*.<sup>52</sup>

### 3. GEWORFENHEIT-WAHRHEIT / SPONTANÉITÉ-VÉRITÉ

In §44, Heidegger's conceptualization of truth as *alètheia* or 'unconcealment' establishes an equivalence between Dasein and truth. To be 'there,' or *Da-sein*, simply *is* to let beings tread into unconcealment: "Sofern das Dasein wesentlich seine Erschlossenheit ist, als erschlossenes erschließt und entdeckt, ist es wesentlich 'wahr'. Dasein ist 'in der Wahrheit'."<sup>53</sup> Within this equivalence of truth and existence, Heidegger differentiates two levels of truth. The first and most "primordial" (*ursprünglich*) level entails the fact that Dasein amounts to an 'illumination' of the *Da*, which is disclosedness or *Erschlossenheit* as such. *Geworfenheit* here attains a central role as the *factum* of manifestation and hence truth itself, the '*that it is*' of being-there, which is always already unconcealment. Heidegger thus turns disclosedness into a precondition for any

<sup>52</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 75-93.

<sup>53</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 221.

concept of truth whatsoever; what comes first is the fact that Dasein is *thrown* into being-disclosedness, while everything else is derivative. The second level on which we can speak of truth is subsequently derived from the first and involves discovering (*entdeckend-sein*, *Entdeckung*) and discoveredness (*entdeckt-sein*, *Entdecktheit*). It entails the fact that the domain of disclosedness opens up a second ontological domain, that of project, wherein Dasein exists in a *specific* manner and, in doing so, ‘uncovers’ beings as *zuhanden* for some possibility. Provided that Dasein is disclosedness by virtue of its ‘being-the-Da,’ it is always already ‘in’ truth, but this ‘being-in’ is itself mediated by (*Un*)*Eigentlichkeit*. What is discovered and disclosed, “das Entdeckte und Erschlossene,” can be subjected to distortion and concealment, “steht im Modus der Verstelltheit und Verschlossenheit,” because it is initially disclosed through the constitutive structures of *Uneigentlichkeit*, specifically “Gerede, die Neugier und die Zweideutigkeit.”<sup>54</sup> In inauthenticity, disclosedness does not disappear, but becomes *simultaneously* disclosed-concealment. The inauthentic Dasein exists simultaneously in truth and untruth: “Das Sein zum Seienden ist nicht ausgelöscht, aber entwurzelt. Das Seiende ist nicht völlig verborgen, sondern gerade entdeckt, aber zugleich verstellt; es zeigt sich — *aber im Modus des Scheins*.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, this condition, consisting in disclosedness that is also concealment, *does* discover being, but what it discovers ends up being “distorted” (*verstellt*); it appears in the mode of illusion or simulacrum.

When Heidegger’s analytic focus shifts from the level of *Erschlossenheit* to the derivative level, namely truth understood as discovering (*entdeckend-sein*) and discoveredness (*entdeckt-sein*) of beings, he relocates the emphasis from *Geworfenheit* to *Entwurf*: truth is now posited not as the disclosedness of the ‘there’ as inherent to thrownness, but rather as the project or a task. That task consists in projectually uncovering what is covered up by Dasein’s primordial, simultaneous existence in truth and untruth: “Daher muß das Dasein wesentlich das auch schon Entdeckte gegen den Schein und die Verstellung sich ausdrücklich

<sup>54</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 222.

<sup>55</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 222. [my emphasis].



zueignen und sich der Entdecktheit immer wieder versichern.”<sup>56</sup> The task to ‘uncover’ beings amounts to the fact that truth must be “wrested” from concealment, *die Wahrheit (Entdecktheit) muß dem Seienden immer erst abgerungen werden*. While the formulation of that task presupposes the distinction between ‘primordial’ and ‘derivative’ levels of truth, this distinction itself relies on the difference between thrownness and projection and the primacy of the former over the latter. The task of uncovering operates on the level of projection and is hence ‘derivative’ and subordinated to the more primordial *Geworfenheit*. This conceptual choice on Heidegger’s part repeats Plato’s decision to have the released prisoner, who has uncovered the original forms, now discover that what first appeared as a truth, namely the shadow (that which appears *im modus des Scheins*), is actually (*eigentlich*) untruth: by conceptualizing truth-as-project or *entdecken* as ‘derivative’ of the more original truth-as-thrownness or *Erschlossenheit*, Heidegger reaffirms Plato’s claim that salvation from the cave involves an interruption that comes from the outside. In this sense, Dasein’s discovering can only be authentic to the extent that it has been liberated by *Angst*, which, as already indicated in the previous section, is something that can never be produced through a project but must befall upon us like God’s mercy. *Eigentlichkeit* enables “eigentliche Erschlossenheit,” which “zeigt das Phänomen der *ursprünglichsten Wahrheit* im Modus der *Eigentlichkeit*.”<sup>57</sup> Thus, by becoming authentic in its disclosedness, Dasein attains the ability to also perform the derivative truth more authentically, that is to say, to perform its *entdecken* authentically. *Eigentlichkeit* in that sense emanates and contaminates all levels of truth that are derivative from *Erschlossenheit*. By implication, the inauthentic Dasein who had the misfortune to never experience *Angst*, is doomed to exist a distorted and illusory existence; it is condemned to be unfree.

The second sense in which Heidegger’s concept of truth is fundamentally related to thrownness, entails his ideas on the problematic role that *Vorhandenheit* has acquired by monopolizing our *Verstehen*. He suggests

<sup>56</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 222.

<sup>57</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 221. [my emphasis].

that the very phenomenon of truth as *alètheia* is itself concealed by the dominant *Seinsverständnis* that is oriented towards objective presence: “Das zunächst herrschende und noch heute nicht grundsätzlich und *ausdrücklich* überwundene Seinsverständnis des Daseins verdeckt selbst das ursprüngliche Phänomen der Wahrheit.”<sup>58</sup> Later, after *die Kehre*, this idea develops into his thesis that metaphysics is ontotheology, but in *Sein und Zeit* his analysis is confined to the notion that Dasein’s *Verstehen* is generally dominated by a fixation and orientation toward objective presence.<sup>59</sup> This fixation is not something that Dasein freely develops as a project, but rather a condition into which we are initially thrown. One of the clearest indicators of Heidegger’s position on this matter consists in the role that he ascribes to *Gerede*. Although the concept of *Gerede* is first mentioned explicitly in §35, quite deep into the book, it nevertheless already operates from the very onset of *Sein und Zeit*. We find it as early as the first page, where Heidegger laments the fact that ontology has forgotten the question of being. His point is not that ontological investigations of his time do not talk or investigate being, but rather that what they say and investigate amounts to *Gerede*: “Man sagt,” as he writes, using the indefinite third person ‘*das Man*’ that lies at the origin of concealment and inauthentic understanding, “‘Sein’ ist der allgemeinste und leerste Begriff. Als solcher widersteht er jedem Definitionsversuch. Dieser allgemeinste und daher undefinierbare Begriff bedarf auch keiner Definition. Jeder gebraucht ihn ständig und versteht auch schon, was er je damit meint.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, being is forgotten, and the reason is that everyone talks about it the way ‘one’ (*man*) does; and one already has an understanding of what is spoken, an understanding that entails the “sonnenklaren Selbverständlichkeit,” which at some point in the past was wrested from phenomena through a great effort of thought, but has now become trivial: “was ehemals in der höchsten Anstrengung des Denkens den Phänomenen abgerungen wurde, wengleich bruchstückhaft und in ersten Anläufen, ist längst

<sup>58</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 225.

<sup>59</sup> Iain Thomson provides a comprehensive discussion of this thesis in *Heidegger on Ontotheology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005).

<sup>60</sup> Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 2. All following citations refer to the same source.

trivialisert.” This trivial self-evidence, or “dogma,” is maintained by what §35 further analyzes in terms of the *durchschnittlichen Verständlichkeit*, which is the only way that *das Man* understands anything at all, namely by listening to what is *spoken* rather than what is spoken *about*. Logos or *Rede* thus becomes *Ge-rede*, the *uneigentliche* understanding of what is said and immediately understood, while concealing the *Sache selbst*, that which is *eigentlich* at stake. Yet if our understanding of being initially consists in preoccupation with illusions, it is primarily not because we bring about that *uneigentliche Seinsverständnis* through projection, but rather because we are initially thrown in it.

For Sartre, on the other hand, what first and foremost conceals or discloses truth is not an event occurring through *Geworfenheit*, but rather consciousness when it actively chooses either *for* or *against* truth. Here, the extent of Sartre's break with Heidegger's concept of truth becomes apparent when we first consider that he inverts Heidegger's hierarchy between truth-as-thrownness or *Erschlossenheit*, and truth-as-project or *Entdeckend-sein*. Sartre's analysis of bad and good faith pertains precisely to the primacy of spontaneity within *both* the domains of thrownness and projection.<sup>61</sup> With regard to what is in Heidegger the 'derivative' domain, Sartre writes that with bad faith “apparaît une vérité, une méthode de penser, un type d'être des objets; et ce monde de mauvaise foi [...] a pour caractéristique ontologique que l'être y est ce qu'il n'est pas et n'y est pas ce qu'il est.”<sup>62</sup> What consciousness discovers in *mauvaise foi*, in other words, is a simulacrum produced by the project to turn what Heidegger would call *entdeckend-sein* into a dissimulation of truth.<sup>63</sup> This transformation of *entdeckend-sein* into a potential form of dissimulation is not engendered through *Geworfenheit* — concealment on the primordial level — but rather through *spontanéité* or *liberté* that is consciousness itself. That is why, for Sartre, truth is never given, but always a matter of struggle, entailing either a struggle *against* truth in *mauvaise foi*, or a struggle *for* truth in the “conversion” from *mauvaise foi* to *bonne foi*. Whereas

<sup>61</sup> For Sartre's analysis of bad faith, see *L'être et le néant*, the second chapter of the first part.

<sup>62</sup> Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 122.

<sup>63</sup> See in particular the analysis of the woman on a first date, 105-7.

*Uneigentlichkeit* is a condition imposed by the absence of *Angst* — which only subsequently allows Dasein to *flee* from its mortality and into the world — bad faith involves a concept of *chosen* ignorance and untruth, which is primarily the *project* of fleeing from what is.<sup>64</sup>

Conversely, when we face the truth in good faith, this truth is not something that is simply given, but rather something always already taken up and established through a project. For example, Sartre writes, “Je crois que mon ami Pierre a de l’amitié pour moi. Je le crois *de bonne foi*. Je le crois et je n’en ai pas d’intuition accompagnée d’évidence, car l’objet même, par nature, ne se prête pas à l’intuition.” It is *true* that Pierre is my friend, but this truth consists in my belief. My belief might be false, but this is beside the point, since *in* believing it, I fully coincide with my belief: “Je *le crois*, c’est-à-dire que je me laisse aller à des impulsions de confiance, que je décide d’y croire et de me tenir à cette décision, que je me conduis, enfin, comme si j’en étais certain, le tout dans l’unité synthétique d’une même attitude.”<sup>65</sup> The truth of my friendship with Pierre is thus sustained by an original choice through which my freedom does not simply ‘discover’ the truth of my friendship, but actively constitutes its existence. Once constituted, the truth of my friendship with Pierre is not something that exists ‘beyond’ or ‘behind’ my belief and must be retrieved in order to transform that belief into a ‘higher’ order of certainty. Rather, the truth of my friendship is *exhausted* by my belief. Truth thus becomes a project that, just like untruth, presupposes a constant affirmation of *liberté*, or a *choix*.

<sup>64</sup> Even when ignorance is not ‘deliberately’ chosen in the face of an unpleasant truth, it still resides entirely within the realm of freedom. In principle, one can know anything, provided that the relevant knowledge has become possible. While this idea is explicitly formulated only in Sartre’s later work, *Vérité et existence* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), written in response to Heidegger’s 1930 lecture on truth (“Vom Wesen der Wahrheit,” in *GA9: Wegmarken*, ed. Friedrich-Willem Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1977), its foundation is already contained in the conjunction of concepts such as *être*, *spontanéité*, and *mauvaise foi* in *L’être et le néant*. A special case is posed by imposed ignorance, where one’s freedom is limited by the freedom of others. Sartre discusses this phenomenon in *Cahiers pour une morale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983). The only trace of such imposed ignorance in *L’être et le néant* is found in the analysis of lying, but this discussion is rather limited. Notably, imposed ignorance is the closest Sartre’s analysis comes to what Heidegger conceptualizes as the primacy of *Geworfenheit* in truth. Nevertheless, for Sartre this ignorance is not an anonymous event of *Es gibt* but rather occurs as an expression of the freedom of the other, establishing a significant departure from Heidegger. Here, too, spontaneity precedes thrownness.

<sup>65</sup> Sartre, *L’être et le néant*, 123.

The absolute priority of spontaneity within the realm of truth in Sartre inevitably transforms the sense of facticity and thrownness. Whereas Heidegger sees facticity and *Geworfenheit* as *structures* of Dasein's transcendence, Sartre's consciousness has always already transcended its situation or facticity and is separated from it by a *néant*. Even if freedom is hindered from achieving its effect or actualizing the possibility — for example, I may be imprisoned and hence factically incapacitated from warning my friend about an impending danger — the possibility itself can still be projected, albeit unsuccessfully (I will not manage to escape the confinement).<sup>66</sup> The entire question of being-in-the-world for Sartre amounts to the *factum* of transcendence, which is always a question of how to affirm our own freedom with regard to the situation. Bad faith is merely a way of denying the situation for oneself by (reflectively) positing it as what it is not *in spite* of own (pre-reflective) awareness of what it is. Thus, what Heidegger discerns as Dasein's tendency to constantly flee from itself in denial of 'what is' — what existence *truly* is — is reinterpreted by Sartre *exclusively* in projectual terms. For Sartre, consciousness is not first authentic and then free, it is rather first and foremost free, and only as such is it subsequently able to choose for authenticity (good faith) or inauthenticity (bad faith) — which now means, to choose for or against what *is*. Or, what amounts to the same thing, it is by virtue of its spontaneity that consciousness has always already chosen to exist *in* truth or *against* it. But while Sartre in this manner inverts Heidegger's primacy of *Geworfenheit* over *Entwurf*, that inversion should not be understood as simply reverting the *precedence* of one over the other — as if, for Sartre, *Erschlossenheit* would be 'rooted' in projection. It is rather that in *L'Être et le néant* there is no difference between disclosedness and spontaneity: disclosedness is the *néantisation* of consciousness, which already *is* freedom. Sartre hence installs a monism of spontaneity in both the 'primordial' and 'derivative' domains of Heidegger's concept of truth. Instead of a primacy of disclosedness over discovering, we now find them to be the same, namely *néantisation*.

<sup>66</sup> See Sartre's discussion of the situation in Part IV, chapter 1, II: "Liberté et facticité: la situation," specifically the point on "*mes entours*," 666.

KEYWORDS: consciousness, liberty, spontaneity, thrownness, anxiety, truth, untruth, authenticity.

#### SUMMARY

Sartre's thinking in *L'être et le néant* is driven by a conceptual choice that radically breaks with the philosophical spirit of *Sein und Zeit* and, in the same gesture, problematizes it. This rupture involves three moments. The first moment appears when Sartre transforms Heidegger's emphasis on 'being and *time*' into 'being and *nothingness*.' The second moment occurs when that transformation effectuates a conceptual shift which results in the *inversion* of the relationship that Heidegger establishes between anxiety and freedom: whereas in *Sein und Zeit* anxiety is the precondition of freedom, in Sartre freedom becomes the precondition of anxiety. Finally, in the third moment, the absolute primacy of spontaneity in *L'être et le néant* ultimately serves as the cornerstone for Sartre's reevaluation of truth, challenging the fundamental concept of '*Geworfenheit*' in *Sein und Zeit*. Unlike Heidegger's view where truth (*alètheia*) coincides with existence, in *L'être et le néant*, truth is portrayed as an ongoing struggle: consciousness must consistently fight against it in bad faith or forcefully liberate it from bad faith. Together, these three moments together constitute the primary components of Sartre's originality in relation to Heidegger's fundamental ontology.