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"I think therefore I was": Sartre, Kant, and the self

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to develop a new reconstruction of Sartre's arguments against Kant's account of the unity of experience in the transcendental deduction. In the *Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre presents several arguments to show that Kant is unwarranted in moving from the claim that we can attach an 'I think' to our representations to the claim that this is made possible by a synthetic unity of apperception. While Sartre's criticism of Kant's conception of the ego is central to Sartre's existential philosophy, there is still little agreement on what Sartre's criticisms actually amount to, let alone whether these criticisms are successful. I argue that to make sense of Sartre's argument here, we must see it as relying on a distinction between two different models of what it is for something to be organized or determined. By doing so, we can see why Sartre believes consciousness does not need the 'I think' in order to be unified, but also why Sartre believes we are nonetheless led to posit this moment of unification.

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1. Introduction

In his essay on the *Transcendence of the Ego*, Vincent de Coorebyter glosses Sartre's project as "making itself a better phenomenologist than Husserl" (Coorebyter, "*Transcendence of the Ego*", 129), and it is certainly the case that the main part of the reception of Sartre's early text has devoted itself to evaluating the effectiveness of Sartre's criticisms of Husserl's transcendental ego. Nonetheless, the *Transcendence of the Ego* opens with a discussion of Kant's claim that "it must be possible for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations" (CPR, B131; TE, 1), and the text can also be read as an

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extended exploration of the status and implications of this claim.[1] While Sartre's criticism of Kant's (and Husserl's[2]) conception of the ego is central to Sartre's existential philosophy, there is still little agreement on what Sartre's criticisms actually amount to here, let alone whether these criticisms are successful. In this paper, I present a reading of Sartre's argument in this early work that sees him making a strong claim about the difference in organization of pre-reflective and reflective consciousness. The key claim will be that Sartre's position rests on arguing that pre-reflective consciousness has a processual nature, whereas reflection on consciousness shifts our understanding of consciousness into an object-oriented categorial framework. Sartre uses this distinction to show that while Kant is warranted in holding that the 'I think' must be able to accompany all of my representations, he is not warranted in infering a synthetic unity of apperception as what makes this claim possible. I will argue, then, that to make sense of Sartre's argument, we have to see it as relying on a distinction between two different models of what it is for something to be organized or determined. This reading will allow us to see why Sartre believes consciousness does not need the 'I think' in order to be unified, but also why Sartre believes we are nonetheless led to posit this moment of unification.

I want to set out my reconstruction of Sartre's argument in the following order. In Section 2, I will give a brief overview of Sartre's criticisms of Kant, and show the problems that have emerged in interpreting Sartre's position here. In Section 3, I will show how we can resolve these problems by recognizing that Sartre's argument rests on a distinction borrowed from Bergson between two forms of organization. Section 4 will then turn to Sartre's distinction between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness to show how Sartre's claim that reflection relates to a past moment of consciousness leads to the well-founded illusion that consciousness requires at least a "formal" ego (TE, 2) to be unified.

2. Interpretive issues with Sartre's position

Sartre develops three criticisms of Kant in the *Transcendence of the Ego*, each of which is centred on the arguments of Kant's transcendental deduction. The first is that Kant's *de jure* enquiry prevents any analysis of the *de facto* status of consciousness. The second is that we do not need an 'I' to make sense of the unity of consciousness. The third is that the 'I' would actually prevent consciousness from being unified. In this section, I want to run

[1]The first nine pages of TE focus on both Kant and Husserl, comparing Kant's account of the Kantian "I think" as "a condition of possibility" to Husserl's Cogito as a "defacto statement" (9). Despite the differences here, Sartre will claim that "for Kant and for Husserl, the I is a formal structure of consciousness" (16), and that because of this shared claim, Sartre's criticisms are applicable to both philosophers.

[2]Ricoeur, "Kant et Husserl", sets out nicely the convergences between Kant and Husserl. See Carr, "Kant, Husserl, and the Nonempirical Ego", for the specific differences between Kant's transcendental unity of apperception and Husserl's transcendental ego.

through the way the first two of these criticisms have been taken up by readers of Sartre before introducing the third criticism in the positive section of my reading. I want to claim here that these standard readings of Sartre's criticisms ultimately rely on either assuming obvious weaknesses in Sartre's arguments, or a poor knowledge of Kant's own position on Sartre's part, and hence these readings are unsatisfactory.

Beginning with the question of the *de facto* status of consciousness, Sartre sets out his criticism as follows:

> We have to agree with Kant when he says that "it *must be possible* for the 'I think' to accompany all my representations". But should we thereby conclude that an I inhabits *de facto* all our states of consciousness and really performs the supreme synthesis of our experience? It seems that this would be to distort Kant's philosophy. The problem of critique is a *de jure* problem: thus Kant affirms nothing about the *de facto* existence of the "I think".
>
> (TE, 2)

Here, then, Sartre seems to claim that Kant simply does not and cannot answer the question of whether an 'I think' really is responsible for the synthesis of experience, since his project is to consider a *de jure* question, rather than a *de facto* question. The natural interpretation of Sartre's *de jure-de facto* distinction would be to read it alongside Kant's own distinction between two different kinds of questions and hence two different enquiries. In the transcendental deduction Kant distinguishes between the question of fact, *quid facti*, and the question of right, *quid juris* (CPR, A84/B116). The question of fact, *quid facti*, is the empiricist question of how we come to have certain concepts. Kant distinguishes this from his own project of aiming to show by what right a given concept can be legitimately applied to experience. In the case of Sartre's criticism, we do not seem to be dealing with the question of whether a given concept can be legitimately applied, however. While both Kant's *quid facti* and *quid juris* questions concern our relation to a given concept, here the question is whether an entity itself, namely the ego, is actually given at all. Michelle Darnell instead sees Sartre as interpreting Kant's position here as a conditional. Darnell reads Sartre as arguing that as a critical philosopher, Kant is only concerned with the conditions that make experience possible, rather than with the nature of experience. As such, Kant is unable to answer questions about the de facto nature of experience that Sartre sees as central to his own phenomenological project:

> [Sartre argues that] in Kant's philosophy, transcendental conditions are necessary for the possibility of experience, one cannot confirm the occurrence of experience, therefore one does not know if the conditions for experience are or are not being met, therefore the transcendental I is merely formally posited as (possibly) present if there is experience, and its real or material existence (since Sartre believes the transcendental I is an ego, or thing) is thereby not confirmed.
>
> (Darnell, *Self in Sartre and Kant*, 28)

While this gives an explanation of Sartre's position here, it attributes to Sartre a superficial reading of Kant that takes no account of Kant's own account of empirical consciousness either in terms of empirical apperception or inner sense (CPR, A107). It is also difficult to see why Sartre's criticism poses a problem for Kant. Sartre's assertion that "if we thus agree with Kant on the *de jure* question, the de facto question is not thereby resolved" (TE, 3) seems to imply not that Kant is wrong, but that his is simply a different project to Sartre's. This, however, is difficult to square with Sartre's second criticism, which suggests a more serious issue with Kant's deduction.

The second claim Sartre makes is that the 'I think' is not needed to give unity to consciousness. Here, once again, we face difficulty interpreting what Sartre considers to be the problem with Kant's deduction. Let us turn to another formulation that Sartre employs at the opening of the *Transcendence of the Ego*:

> It must be possible for the "I think" to accompany all our representations; but are we to understand by this that the unity of our representations is, directly or indirectly, made a reality by the "I think" – or are we to understand that the representations of a consciousness must be unified and articulated in such a way that an "I think" can always be uttered in regard to them?
>
> (TE, 3)

Here, Sartre seems to suggest that the 'I think' that Kant claims must be able to accompany our representations is *itself* responsible for the unity we find within experience. If this is the case, then Sartre has fallen into the mistake Kant attributes to Descartes of conflating the analytic and synthetic unities of apperception. Kant takes the claim that "the I think must be able to accompany all my representations" (CPR, B131) to be an analytic claim that it is a minimal requirement for a representation to belong to me that I am able to assert that it is I who thinks them. It is in effect simply the claim that the diversity of representations constitutes one unified field. Now, Kant's key move in the transcendental deduction is to argue that this analytic unity presupposes a deeper process of synthesis that allows us to recognize this unity:

> That relation comes about, not simply through my accompanying each representation with consciousness, but only in so far as I *conjoin* one representation with another, and am conscious of the synthesis of them. Only in so far, therefore, as I can unite a manifold of given representations in *one consciousness*, is it possible for me to represent to myself the *identity of the consciousness in [i.e. throughout] these representations*. In other words, the *analytic* unity of apperception is possible only under the presupposition of a certain *synthetic* unity.
>
> (CPR, B133)

As such, for Kant, the "I think" is "a wholly empty representation … of which one cannot even say that it is a concept" (CPR, A346/B404). This is very different from the synthetic unity of apperception which synthesizes

representations such that we find them as unified. For Kant, the answer to Sartre's question above would be straightforward. The 'I think' is just an indicator of the unity of our representations, and hence the representations of a consciousness must indeed be unified and articulated in such a way that an 'I think' can always be uttered in regard to them. If we take Sartre's admittedly rather loose use of the 'I think' to indicate that he is conflating the analytic and synthetic moments of apperception in his reading of Kant, then following Sartre's argument becomes problematic. Here, we can see why Darnell holds that the *de jure* claim is a conditional claim. Given, as both Sartre and Kant agree, the 'I think' does not have to accompany our representations, then, if we do not recognise the distinction between the analytic and synthetic unities of apperception, the ego becomes merely a possible structure. As Darnell notes, this is a serious misunderstanding of Kant's position, since in fact, "Kant is making the claim that *all* of my representations are combined in the synthetic unity of apperception" (Darnell Darnell, *Self in Sartre and Kant*, 29) regardless of the presence of the 'I think'.

The claim that Sartre's reading of Kant conflates the analytic and synthetic moments of apperception runs through much of the literature on Sartre's argument, and tends to lead to two positions. Either we see Sartre as rejecting both the analytic and synthetic moments, in which case, Sartre risks falling back into the Humean position where the unity of the subject is thrown into doubt, or we argue that Sartre in fact is only rejecting the 'I think' as an analytic truth, in which case, Sartre's position collapses into a variant of Kant's own position. Turning to the first reading, Sartre's claim will ultimately be that rather than the unity of experience being given by the synthetic unity of apperception, as it is for Kant, the unity of experience is provided by the unity of the object. "The object is transcendent to the consciousnesses that grasp it, and it is within the object that their unity is found" (TE, 6). As such, given our representations refer to the *same* object, we can see them as forming a unity. The difficulty is that there will be a variety of perspectives on the object, not only my own, but also those of other people. The object alone is therefore not capable of picking out a set of perceptions which are *mine*. In effect, then, we find here a variation on the problems of individuation generated by Hume's rejection of the substantial self (on this point in relation to Kant, see Butchvarov, *Being qua Being*; Webber, "Sartre's Critique of Husserl", 160[3]; and Scanlon, "Consciousness, the streetcar,

[3]Webber's position here is that there are two possible readings of the *Transcendence of the Ego* and other early texts. We can see Sartre "either as making a claim about the structures of conscious experience or as going beyond the structures of experience to analyse structures of mind-independent reality" (Webber, "Sartre's Critique of Husserl", 159). Webber argues that since "a transcendental argument can be formulated that identifies the transcendental subject as a factually necessary condition of the perspectival coherence and limitation of my experience", and "[Sartre in TE] knowingly or otherwise, ignores the obvious transcendental argument for the transcendental ego" (Webber, "Sartre's Transcendental Phenomenology", 288), Sartre must be presenting a model of the former kind,

and the ego'', who make the same point but in relation to Husserl's use of the transcendental ego). Turning to the second reading, we can note that the claim that the 'I think' need not accompany our representations is one that Kant himself holds. Kant's claim, rather, is that our ability to be able to assert 'I think' of a field of diverse representations is a way of consciously verifying their unity. As such, we could read Sartre as not in fundamental disagreement with Kant here in rejecting the 'I think', and not touching on the question of the transcendental unity of apperception. A number of philosophers raise the possibility of a compatibility here (Apostolopoulos, ''Sartre, Kant, and the Spontaneity of Mind''; Baiasu, ''Transcendental Unity of Apperception''; Baiasu, ''Sartre and the Transcendental Tradition''; Darnell, *Self in Sartre and Kant*, 69–70; Priest, *The Subject in Question*, 40–41; Webber, ''Sartre's Critique of Husserl''). We can note that other aspects of Kant's system, such as inner sense (Darnell, *Self in Sartre and Kant*, 25–26) and his conception of spontaneity (Apostolopoulos, ''Sartre, Kant, and the Spontaneity of Mind''; Longuenesse, *I, Me, Mine*, 48) have been used to provide Kantian analogues to several of Sartre's other claims, such as the characterization of the ego as a transcendent object, and the non-object-like nature of consciousness.

3. Sartre's critique of the 'I think'

The readings of Sartre offered above rest on the claim that Sartre's reading of Kant is inadequate, but as Flajoliet, *La première philosophie de Sartre*, shows,

restricting his analysis to "phenomenological psychology". Webber takes this limitation to phenomenological psychology to explain why "*The Transcendence of the Ego*, fails to address the question of why these particular experiences are bundled together as mine. We have seen that Sartre does not even consider in that work the transcendental argument that a transcendental ego is required to explain this" (Webber, "Sartre's Transcendental Phenomenology", 295). I take my paper to show contra Webber that there *is* a plausible case that Sartre addresses the transcendental argument in TE, and that the kind of Kantian transcendental move Webber suggests Sartre ignores is one of the main targets of Sartre's essay. Given Webber takes the absence of consideration of transcendental arguments to lead to a reading of TE as phenomenological psychology, further support for my account comes from Coorebyter's alternative realist reading of TE alongside IHP, which was written at the same time (Coorebyter "Introduction et notes", 10–11). Coorebyter writes in this regard that 'Sartre's position of principle [in TE] is of the realist type in the current sense of the term: he intends to restore the rights of perception, to establish the objectivity of the uncorrected grasp of the world, to demonstrate, as *Nausea* says, that 'things are entirely what they appear – and behind them … there is nothing'" (Coorebyter, "Introduction et notes", 17–18). Such a reading requires us to hold that TE must indeed be concerned with the question of the unity of consciousness, including questions about the transcendental ego, as my paper demonstrates is the case: "The strictly ek-static, surface-to-surface relationship between naked consciousness and naked things is only supported by the absence of any ego, transcendental or psychic, capable of interposing itself between them or of leading back to some interiority. But how, without the Ego or other transcendental framework, can a consciousness unify its diversity or maintain an ipseity? … Sartre must answer these questions raised by Descartes, Kant and French reflexive philosophy, and which Merleau-Ponty will also face in his *Phenomenology of Perception*. But it is precisely because it responds to them, because it resolves certain difficulties and draws several consequences from the purification of intentional consciousness, that *The Transcendence of the Ego* goes far beyond a discussion with Husserl on the problem of the pure self" (Coorebyter, "Introduction et notes", 11).

Sartre was in fact well-versed in the details of Kant's *First Critique*. If we are to accept there is something of value in Sartre's criticisms of Kant, then, we will have to find another basis for these criticisms. I want to argue instead that Sartre's critique of Kant rests on the question of how we understand the organization of experience. Sartre's claim will be that we need to move away from understanding organization by analogy with judgement if we are to understand how consciousness relates to its object. This shows itself particularly in moving away from the model of synthesis as the active organization of a field of discrete, passive representations.[4] Seeing the question here as being about the nature of organization of experience has several advantages over the readings of Sartre given above. First, it allows us to see why Sartre sees his criticisms as applying equally to Kant and Husserl, even though they have very different accounts of the nature of the ego. Second, given Kant explicitly models the analytic and synthetic unities of apperception on judgement, then we can at least see why Sartre might be loose in moving between the two, if his claim is that it is this model of judgement itself which is the issue in Kant's account. In this section, I examine the first part of Sartre's response to Kant, which is his claim that the unity of consciousness is made possible by the object. In setting out Sartre's position here, I will take up his claim that there are two different ways of understanding structure which need to be distinguished to understand the unity of consciousness. In the section that follows, I will move on to the question of reflective consciousness where we will see how Sartre's *de facto*/*de jure* criticism works. There, as we will see, Sartre will claim that in representing consciousness to itself, we necessarily transpose one of those models into the other, which generates the illusion that experience is made possible by an I, whether formal or material.

As we have seen above, Sartre's claim here is that "the object is transcendent to the consciousnesses that grasp it, and it is within the object that their unity is found" (TE, 6). A relation to an object on its own is not enough to explain the unity of consciousness, however, since, if representations of (or perspectives on) the object are seen as discrete, then it seems impossible on the strength of those perspectives alone to determine which are mine and which are not. Here, then, we seem to have a parallel situation to Kant's claim that at least a formal subject, such as the transcendental unity of apperception, is necessary to ensure that a set of representations are attributed to the same 'I think'. On the account I want to argue for, it is the idea that the material to be

[4]Dicker glosses representation as "Kant's most general term for the contents of consciousness" (Dicker, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, 91), which includes both perceptions and cognitive contents. The important point to note here is that for Kant, thought operates by synthesizing representations together into unities, where synthesis is understood as an active process that relates together a manifold passive atomic representations. As such, synthesis is "that which properly collects the elements for cognitions and unifies them into a certain content" (CPR, A77-8/B103).

synthesized is a field of discrete representations that Sartre takes issue with here, and it is this that provides the basis for his criticisms of Kant's move from the analytic to the synthetic unity of apperception. It is by failing to recognize this criticism of discrete representations that we find ourselves in the interpretive difficulties highlighted in Section 2. Given the mutual implication of a field of discrete, passive representations and an active synthetic subject, then in moving away from the former, Sartre is able to also reject the latter. To understand Sartre's position here, we need to turn to his account of what he considers to be a transcendental illusion when it comes to our thinking, namely that we interpret the structure of thought in terms of space. The claim I want to make here is that Kant falls prey to what Sartre calls the "illusion of immanence" (IPPI, 5).

Sartre defines the illusion of immanence as the claim that the mind is something like a container for representations that either correspond or do not correspond to the external world. We see "consciousness as a place peopled with small imitations and these imitations were the images" (IPPI, 6). On the one hand, the illusion of immanence can be seen against the backdrop of Sartre's endorsement of Husserl's account of consciousness as intentional. Here, Sartre can be seen as taking up the idea that consciousness is a relation to its object. As Sartre puts it,

> [w]hen I perceive a chair, it would be absurd to say that the chair is in my perception. My perception is, in accordance with the terminology that we have adopted, a certain consciousness and the chair is the object of that consciousness.
>
> (IPPI, 6-7)

A consequence of this is that our relation to the object is not necessarily simply one of a knowledge relation, as it would be if thinking of an object entailed comparing our mental image of it to the object itself.

> Knowledge, or pure 'representation', is only one of the possible forms of my consciousness 'of' this tree; I can also love it, fear it, hate it, and this surpassing of consciousness by itself that is called 'intentionality' finds itself again in fear, hatred, and love.
>
> (IHP, 5)

This move to an intentional account of consciousness is fundamental to Sartre's position, but is not alone enough to escape from the model of organization Sartre is criticizing. Husserl posits a transcendental ego for similar reasons to Kant's introduction of the transcendental unity of apperception (Levy "Intentionality, Consciousness, and the Ego"), and Sartre argues that Husserl himself is a "dupe of the illusion of immanence" (IPPI, 59).

There is a second aspect to the illusion of immanence, which emerges from Sartre's claim that "without any doubt, the origin of this illusion must be sought in our habit of thinking in space and in terms of space" (IPPI, 5). Sartre here develops Henri Bergson's claim that we tend to understand the nature of consciousness on the model of a space containing representations.

By this, he means that we tend to understand the content of consciousness as a set of distinct states which, since they are self-sufficient, require an extra element of a different nature to hold them together. If we think of the act of representing the tolls of a bell, for instance, "[most people] range the successive sounds in an ideal space and then fancy that they are counting them in pure duration" (Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 86). Here, the unity is given by the moment outside of the elements themselves. In effect, we say that a set of representations or ideas are related because they are in the same 'mental space'. Bergson's claim is that rather than a discrete multiplicity of elements, as we find here, what we actually experience as consciousness is what he calls an 'interpenetrative multiplicity', where the states of consciousness are not discrete and are thus unified without the need for a medium within which they reside. There is here in fact a more general claim about organization that underlies his alternative description of counting the tolls of the bell:

> Whilst I am writing these lines, the hour strikes on a neighbouring clock, but my inattentive ear does not perceive it until several strokes have made themselves heard. Hence I have not counted them; and yet I only have to turn my attention backwards to count up the four strokes which have already sounded and add them to those which I hear. If, then, I question myself on what has just taken place, I perceive that the first four sounds had struck my ear and even affected my consciousness, but that the sensations produced by each one of them, instead of being set side by side, had melted into one another in such a way as to give the whole a peculiar quality, to make a kind of musical phrase out of it. In order, then, to estimate retrospectively the number of strokes sounded, I tried to reconstruct this phrase in thought: my imagination made one stroke, then two, then three, and as long as it did not reach the exact number four, my feeling, when consulted, answered that the total effect was qualitatively different.
>
> (Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 127)

Leaving aside the specifics of Bergson's account of consciousness, Sartre will take up a derivative account of how representations are organized. In the *Imaginary*, Sartre contrasts this structure of relations understood in terms of a spatial metaphor with an alternative account of structure which he takes to provide a better model of consciousness:

> The consciousness appears to itself as creative, but without positing as object this creative character. It is thanks to this vague and fugitive quality that the image consciousness is not given as a piece of wood that floats on the sea, but as a wave among the waves. It feels itself to be consciousness through and through and homogeneous with the other consciousnesses that have preceded it and with which it is synthetically united.
>
> (IPPI, 14)

Here, Sartre makes a distinction between two ways of conceiving of unity. The first involves seeing unity as made up of disconnected elements, in which case we need a further element in order to provide a space to relate them together. Sartre makes two further claims about this model of organization. First, it takes

the elements that make up perception as atomic elements. Second, this framework of analysis is an a priori imposition on the structure of consciousness. Here, then, representations or moments of consciousness are being seen simply as a collection of elements held together by being in the same medium, as pieces of flotsam inhere in the same ocean, or properties inhere in a substance. The alternative model of organization is that of a wave amongst waves. In this case, there are no atomic elements, but rather waves are instead modifications of the surface of the sea itself.[5] As such, there is no need for a medium within which to hold together the elements themselves. We can note further that the relation between these two ways of understanding organization is such that we can always represent a structure of the second type in terms of the first. That is, we can always reify the waves in this case into discrete elements, in which case, we are forced to conceive of the sea once again as a container that allows them to be represented as a group.

Sartre's critique of Kant rests on this distinction between two different accounts of organization. When we look at Kant's claim that "the 'I think' must be able to accompany all of my representations", Sartre claims that the "I think" is here simply "a collection of representations" (TE, 51). Since the representations are presented as discrete elements that have no inherent connection to each other, we require a further element, the 'I think', to give us the framework within which to see them as a collection. Here, then, we find an account of representations as essentially free-standing elements that require a separate moment to tie them together – the flotsam united by floating on the same sea. It is for this reason that Sartre argues that the presence of an I would actually prevent us from being able to properly explain the unity of consciousness. "If it existed, it would violently separate consciousness from itself, it would divide it, slicing through each consciousness like an opaque blade. The transcendental I is the death of consciousness" (TE, 7). The claim here, then, is that introducing the 'I' forces us to draw a separation in between the medium and the elements that are brought together

[5]Sartre's metaphor here is itself a spatial metaphor, since waves also have a depth beneath the surface of the water. Sartre's explicit rejection of thinking of consciousness in terms of space implies that it is not a spatial characteristic that is the aim of the metaphor (given metaphors will always rely on some shared and some differing characteristics). The contrast with the flotsam makes it clear that it is the two different manners of organization that is at issue, one where the elements are related by a separate medium (the flotsam and the sea), and one where the elements are not discrete elements within another but are themselves continuous modifications of one surface. It may help to compare Sartre's position here to Spinoza's claim that individuals are modifications of a single substance, and in fact, Sartre himself likens consciousness to Spinoza's substance at TE, 7. We can also see a parallel here with the manner in which for a non-Euclidean spatial manifold, the space itself has a curvature to it, so the surface of the sea could be represented as a two-dimensional non-homogeneous space rather than needing to be represented within a homogeneous three-dimensional space. Sartre's point here would be that the wave is a modification of the structure of the space of the surface, whereas the model here in terms of depth as an extra dimension sees the wave as a structure *within* a homogeneous space. Just as we can move from non-homogeneous space with an intrinsic structure to a homogeneous space as a container for structure, we can always choose to conceptualise the waves on the model of the flotsam.

in that medium. As such, the presence of the 'I' in fact forces us to conceive of consciousness on the model of a discrete multiplicity rather than the interpenetrative multiplicity of consciousness.[6]

If the unity of consciousness is given by its relation to a transcendent object, then we would expect that this account of the unity of consciousness will also involve a different conception of the object as well, since the object will no longer be understood as the abstract correlate of a field of discrete representations. For Kant, the object is simply that which allows us to relate together representations in a rule-governed manner. As such, it is an 'object = x' that serves as a point of unification for the synthetic unity of apperception. Sartre does not talk about this conception itself, but he presents a very similar conception that he attributes to Husserl:

> Doubtless, this tree, this table are synthetic complexes and every quality is linked to every other quality. But it is linked to it *insofar as it belongs to the same object X*. What is logically prior are the unilateral relations by which each quality belongs (directly or indirectly) to that X as a predicate belongs to a subject. Consequently, an analysis is always possible. This conception is highly debatable.
>
> (TE, 29)

Here, then, we find that what makes possible an analysis of an object in terms of predicates is that the predicates are clearly defined apart from their relation to the object. This makes an analysis possible, but since the predicates are understood independently of their relation to this particular object they require a kind of medium to bind them to the other properties that make up the object (the object X). Such an account of analysis is prefigured by Kant's account of a categorial understanding of the object. Kant notes in the transcendental ideal, for instance, that we have to consider objects as "thoroughly determined", by which he means "not only that of every given pair of opposed predicates, but also of every pair of possible predicates, one of them must always apply to it" (CPR, A573/B601). Here, then, the transcendental object = x provides a support for properties that make our conceptual analysis of the object possible.

In fact, Sartre argues that just as the waves cannot be understood apart from the structure of the ocean, the analysis of the object in terms of predicates is only possible on the basis of an abstraction which distorts the nature of the object under consideration:

[6]Williford also notes this rejection of "property-dependent individuation (via spatio-temporal properties in particular)", but argues that once we accept it, "there is really very little that we can say" (Williford, "Pre-reflective self-consciousness", 202). I believe the introduction of Bergson's account of organization gives us a richer reading of unity and individuation in Sartre's account. It also gives allows us to explain why Sartre believes that the transcendental ego actually makes the unity of experience impossible.

> The unity stems in this case from the absolute indissolubility of elements which cannot be conceived of as separate, except by abstraction. The subject of the predicate will here be the concrete totality, and the predicate will be a quality abstractly separated from the totality and gaining its full meaning only when it is linked back to the totality.
>
> (TE, 30)

Here, then, the situation that Kant begins with, where we have a series of discrete representations, is for Sartre an abstraction from what we are really confronted with, which is an interpenetrating multiplicity of properties that unfold in time. Just as waves are modifications of a continuous surface, so here properties cannot be abstracted without changing their nature.

The final point I want to make in this section is that the move away from passive elements also entails a move away from seeing consciousness itself as operating in terms of active categories of synthesis. Here, Sartre introduces the term 'spontaneity' in distinction to *both* the active and the passive. Sartre introduces spontaneity with the claim that:

> transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity. It determines itself to exist at every instant, without us being able to conceive of anything *before it*. Thus every instant of our conscious lives reveals to us a creation *ex nihilo*. Not a new *arrangement* but a new existence.
>
> (TE, 46)

Sartre introduces spontaneity in his discussion of our attempts to escape freedom, but we can note that his account once again rests on the distinction between two different kinds of organization. Making a judgement involves synthesizing given representations into a unity. Here, then, we have a sharp distinction between the passive givens and the active process of synthesis. For spontaneous consciousness, however, there is no distinction between an active principle of unity and the given. Rather, the object presents its own unfolding:

> A phenomenological description of spontaneity would indeed show that spontaneity renders impossible any distinction between action and passion, and any conception of an autonomy of the will. These notions only have a meaning on the level where all activity is given as emanating from a passivity that it transcends.
>
> (TE, 48)

Once again, we find an allusion to Bergson here. In a discrete multiplicity, synthesis involves establishing relations between given representations. In this case, as Sartre suggests, synthesis simply presents different arrangements of pre-existing elements, with no real creation possible. Once we see the elements as not separable, then we no longer have rearrangement. Rather, as Sartre suggests, the indivisibility implies that each moment of unfolding in time is the emergence of a form that is a radically new creation. Bergson devotes considerable time to analysing this distinction between

rearrangement and creativity, and Sartre's distinction between rearrangement and creation above is a reworking of this Bergsonian claim[7]:

> Where the elements pre-exist, the synthesis that will be made is virtually given, being only one of the possible arrangements. This arrangement a superhuman intellect could have perceived in advance among all the possible ones that surround it. We hold, on the contrary, that in the domain of life the elements have no real and separate existence. They are manifold mental views of an indivisible process. And for that reason there is radical contingency in progress, incommensurability between what goes before and what follows in short, duration.
> (Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 34)

Sartre's claim above can be restated as being that rather than synthesis being an active principle applied to a passive intuition of time, time itself may be spontaneously synthetic.[8] Rather than a rearrangement of elements into a form, we have here a genuine process of creation, since each moment, by including the whole of the past, presents a form that has never existed prior to its coming into being.[9] Since it is this unfolding of the object in time that determines the nature of the unity of consciousness itself, consciousness also has to be understood in terms of this model of spontaneity, rather than the categorial model of the active and passive of Kant.

4. Sartre's critique of *de jure* enquiry

We can now return to the other criticism Sartre raises of Kant's philosophy, that as a *de jure* enquiry, Kant is not able to give an account of the nature of consciousness. The difficulty in reading Sartre here is that he seems to both argue that Kant has fallen into error, but also hold that Kant's project is simply different from his own. How are we to interpret Sartre's claim here? Once again, the relation of organization to the structure of consciousness is key. Let's return once again to Sartre's opening questions on the

[7]Flynn, *Kant and Sartre*, 64, recognises this Bergsonian aspect of spontaneity but only in passing.

[8]Apostolopoulos, "Sartre, Kant, and the Spontaneity of Mind", argues that we can see Sartre's notion of spontaneity as rooted in Kant's account of spontaneity here. In the transcendental deduction, for instance, Kant notes that I have a non-cognisable, and non-object-like sense of ourselves as being "an intelligence" (CPR, B158), that is, as the source of a process of synthesis. While this may well be an inspiration for Sartre's account here, Kant's account is ultimately dependant on the model of categorial synthesis that Sartre rejects as the source of unity for consciousness. While Apostolopoulos is right that Kant here presents this as a non-objective consciousness, insofar as this consciousness is an awareness of an egoic process of synthesis, this is not what Sartre is talking about here. Sartre nonetheless suggests that there is a transcendental illusion such that we tend to interpret this consciousness through the prism of the ego, citing approvingly Rimbaud's claim that "I is another" (*Collected Works, Selected Letters*, 371), Sartre writes: "The context proves that he merely meant that the spontaneity of consciousnesses cannot emanate from the I, it *goes towards* the I, it meets it, it allows it to be glimpsed under its limpid thickness but it is given above all as an *individuated* and *impersonal* spontaneity" (TE, 46). The key difference here is that while spontaneity for Kant is the registration of a process of active synthesis above and beyond the elements synthesised, for Sartre spontaneity falls outside of both of these categories.

[9]Sartre makes this clear with his claim that "to speak of 'a consciousness' is to speak of the whole of consciousness, and this singular property belongs to consciousness itself" (TE, 7).

'I think'. After recognizing that Kant accepts that the 'I think' must be able to accompany our representations, but that it does not have to do so, Sartre asks the following question:

> Let us suppose, furthermore, that a certain representation *A* passes from a certain state in which the "I think" does not accompany it to a state in which the "I think" does accompany it; will this representation thereby undergo a modification of structure, or will it remain basically unchanged?
>
> (TE, 3)

For Kant, the presence of the 'I think' does not change the nature of our representations, since it is simply an indicator that our representations form a unity. Sartre's claim is that there is a shift here, and once again it is in the nature of the *representations* which compose the unity.[10] This change in structure is related to the role time plays in organizing representations. At the conclusion of *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre makes the following claim:

> It is, in fact, not necessary for the object to precede the subject for spiritual pseudo-values to vanish and ethics to rediscover its bases in reality. It is sufficient for the me to be contemporary with the World and for the subject-object duality, which is purely logical, to disappear definitively from philosophical preoccupations.
>
> (TE, 51)

Leaving aside the reference to ethics, we can note that Sartre here develops an opposition between subject-object structure and contemporaneity. The important point here for Sartre is that reflection always involves a relation between consciousnesses given at different temporal moments. When Sartre introduces his account of reflection, it is in terms of memory; for example, "if, for instance, I wish to remember a certain landscape I saw from the train, yesterday, it is possible to bring back the memory of that landscape as such, but I can also remember that I saw that landscape" (TE, 9).[11] As Sartre will put it in *Being and Nothingness*, "The past is substance. In this sense the Cartesian cogito ought to be formulated rather: 'I think; therefore I was'" (B&N, 119). What is the importance of this relationship to the past here? It is once again worth returning to Sartre's text on the *Imaginary*. In this text Sartre analyses the different ways in which we can relate to an object depending on whether, for instance, the object we relate to is present or absent. In

[10] Apostolopoulos, "Sartre, Kant, and the Spontaneity of Mind", writes that "Sartre answers [his question about whether the I think changes the contents of consciousness] in the negative" (8), but Sartre states several times that, for instance, "an unreflected thought undergoes a radical modification when it becomes reflected" (TE, 11).

[11] Sartre does develop a distinction between pure and impure reflection (See Coorebyter "*The Transcendence of the Ego*"; Webber, "Sartre's Critique of Husserl", 9–13; Williford, "Sartrean reflection", for attempts to make sense of it). Here, we will limit our discussion to impure reflection, since it is this form that Sartre takes Kant to employ.

perceptual consciousness, we relate to an object given in time, as in the analysis in the previous section, and we relate to it as an existing thing. We find that not only are phenomena perceived as unities, but we also perceive them unfolding in time. Sartre is clear that these phenomena are essentially temporal, and that we need to "learn" objects, and to "[make] a tour of objects, [to wait], as Bergson said, until the 'sugar dissolves'" (IPPI, 8). The object of perception therefore needs to unfold in its own time just as in Bergson's referenced example, we need to wait for sugar to dissolve when making sugar water, and as we saw above, this unfolding is also a source of the unity of the object.

As Sartre notes, we can always apply the 'I think' to an experience, but in the process, we reflect on an experience that is already past.[12] Now Sartre claims that our relation to objects that are not present, such as past acts of consciousness, is governed by the imagination. While in perception, the object is held together by its process of temporal unfolding, in imagination, the object is given outside of this temporal process:

> This is also why the world of images is a world where nothing happens. I can easily, at my liking, move such-and-such an object as imaged, turn a cube, make a plant grow, make a horse run, there will be never the smallest time-lag between the object and the consciousness. Not a second of surprise: the object that is moving is not alive, it never precedes the intention. But neither is it inert, passive, 'worked' from the outside, like a marionette: the consciousness never precedes the object, the intention reveals itself at the same time as it realizes itself, in and by its realization.
>
> (IPPI, 11)

With an imaginative object, for instance, we can run mentally through its development instantaneously if we choose to, without any consideration of the actual duration of the processes involved. Since the imagination presents the object outside of its temporal development, then the unity of the object can no longer be given by its temporal unfolding. "The object, in the image, is presented as having to be apprehended in a multiplicity of synthetic acts" (IPPI, 10). These two different modes of relation parallel the two different multiplicities I presented in the previous section. Perceptual objects have a continuous overflowing quality that allows them to serve as a source of unity for consciousness. Here, the representations are not individuated without a process of abstraction that changes their nature. When we relate to past objects, however, including a past moment of consciousness, the object no longer naturally unfolds. "In perception, knowledge is formed slowly; in the image, knowledge is immediate" (IPPI, 9). We instead have a number of

[12]Sartre does also acknowledge a more grammatical use of the 'I' we use when, for instance, we answer a question about what we are doing absent-mindedly, and hence without entering a reflective attitude.

definite determinations that need to be united by the engagement of the subject:

> When it is said that an object cannot exist without a definite individuality, it is necessary to understand by this "without maintaining an infinity of determinate relations with the infinity of other objects".
>
> But in the image, on the other hand, there is a kind of essential poverty. The different elements of an image maintain no relations with the rest of the world and maintain only two or three relations between themselves.
>
> (IPPI, 9)

In this case, then, when we imagine, we see a series of discrete moments that then require us to posit the active engagement of the subject to tie them together. In reflection, then, given it is a relation to a past moment, the fact that consciousness refers to an object not present (a previous act of consciousness) means that it is forced to reconstitute the relation of the previous consciousness to its objects in different terms to perception. Since the temporal aspect of unity we find in the perceived object is absent, reflection on past consciousness forces us to understand the previous moment as made up of discrete elements, and this in turn pushes us towards understanding that consciousness in terms of an active categorial synthesis, which in turn leads us to posit a synthesizing subject as the source of that unity.

We can see this account playing out in the somewhat cryptic claims Sartre makes about the relation of reading to the object read. Sartre gives the following pre-reflective account of reading:

> Consider, on the contrary, a moment in which I ignore that I exist: [for example,] one in which I am so absorbed [in reading] that, when someone pulls me away from it, I will wonder where I am. Although my reading may entail consciousness (of) my reading, the consciousness (of) my reading cannot posit itself as consciousness of the book in front of me.
>
> (SCSK, 40)

Here, the object itself, the book, is not given as an object to me since the book is given through the activity of consciousness' engagement with it. The book is understood through its process of unfolding. Here, Sartre claims both that (i) there is not yet a subject-object division because we are dealing with a consciousness engaged with the world and (ii) that what unifies consciousness is the process of unfolding (the consciousness of reading) rather than the object considered aside from its temporal determinations (the book). In the *Imaginary*, Sartre provides the flipside of this account, arguing that just as a passive relation to an object is impossible for pre-reflective consciousness, since reflective consciousness removes the moment of temporality, an active relation is impossible for reflective consciousness:

> If I give myself in image the page of a book, I am in the attitude of the reader, I look at the printed lines. But I do not read. And, at bottom, I am not even looking, because I already know what is written.
>
> (IPPI, 10)

How does this relate to the *de facto*/*de jure* criticism Sartre makes of Kant? In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre reiterates the need for this distinction between two different modes of consciousness, arguing that if we see knowledge as operative simply in terms of a discrete multiplicity, then, since knowledge will involve a relation between a knower and known, and since we also want to hold that to know is to know that one knows, we fall into a regress:

> It does not seem possible for us to accept this interpretation of the consciousness of consciousness. The reduction of consciousness to knowledge in fact involves our introducing into consciousness the subject-object dualism which is typical of knowledge. But if we accept the law of the knower-known dyad, then a third term will be necessary in order for the knower to become known in turn, and we will be faced with this dilemma: Either we stop at any one term of the series-the known, the knower known, the knower known by the knower, etc. In this case the totality of the phenomenon falls into the unknown; that is, we always bump up against a non-self-conscious reflection and a final term. Or else we affirm the necessity of an infinite regress (*idea ideae ideae*, etc.), which is absurd.
>
> (B&N, lii)

Sartre's resolution to this paradox is the claim that what makes knowledge possible is a mode of consciousness that does not have the structure of knowledge. "We find that there is no subject-object distinction in this consciousness" (SCSK, 41). As Sartre makes clear, this pre-reflective consciousness is aware of itself, but does not have the relation of a discrete multiplicity of knower known. Rather, it presents a tacit awareness that is aware of itself, but not as an object, thus avoiding the paradoxical structure of knowledge. This consciousness is simply consciousness of its object.

In *Self-Consciousness and Self-Knowledge*, Sartre argues that this problem "converges" on the claim that "the being of knowledge is distinct from knowledge" (SCSK, 39). Taking this formulation seriously, we can understand why Sartre both sees the *de jure* criticism as showing an error in Kant's model while also accepting the value of Kant's *de jure* enquiry. Kant rules out the question of the nature of consciousness since his concern in the *Critique* is to show that synthetic a priori judgements can legitimately be applied to experience. As such, Kant begins from the position of the 'I think', precisely because it is from this position that the object becomes amenable to a certain kind of analysis. Sartre's claim is not then that Kant is only concerned with a certain hypothetical kind of experience, but rather that he already begins at one remove from the *de facto* nature of consciousness as pre-reflective. As we saw above, it is always possible to move from a pre-reflective structure of consciousness to a reflective structure of consciousness.

> In other words, I can always perform any kind of act of remembering in the personal mode, and the I immediately appears. This is the *de facto* guarantee of the *de jure* affirmation in Kant. It thus appears that there is not a single one of my consciousnesses that I do not grasp as endowed with an I.
>
> (TE, 10)

As such, insofar as Kant begins from the presence of the 'I think', he rules out a *de facto* analysis of consciousness. What is lost, then, is an account of the spontaneity of consciousness, "a phenomenon of being that we can no longer describe with our ordinary categories" (SCSK, 45). Insofar as the object must also be understood in non-categorial terms in order for it to be the source of the unity of consciousness, then the kind of categorial analysis that Kant proposes is illegitimate at this level. Nonetheless, since reflection changes the way we understand the organization of the object, we *can* make reflective claims about the nature of objects that are valid. In effect, then, Kant's project relates to what Leibniz would call "well-founded phenomena" (*Philosophical Essays,* 199). The claims we make about objects presuppose a reflective perspective that effectively misrepresents the object's durational nature, a nature that because it is not composed of discrete representations is not open to analysis, but insofar as we remain on this reflective plane, the distortion in our relation to the object, which we effectively treat as a completed thing outside of time, will be matched by the distortion by reflection of the object itself. Both our knowledge claims and the object we relate them to are effectively understood in the past tense, where we think in terms of categorial synthesis and a subject-object divide. Nonetheless, Kant's argument fails because the unity of experience is not given by the transcendental unity of apperception. The reflective subject-object divide rather relies on our prereflective contemporaneity with the world, and hence on the kind of non-categorial pre-reflective consciousness we looked at above.

In the *Critique*, Kant claims that Descartes makes an error of reasoning called a paralogism in moving from the inference that 'I think, therefore, I am', to the claim that I am a thinking substance. This mistake essentially results from the application of categories of thought that we can use legitimately within a circumscribed domain to know the world beyond that domain. Kant's claim is that the category of substance is really just a rule for synthesizing a manifold given in time into a unity, and hence can only be applied to what is given to us in time. Descartes' mistake is to take this category that is used to organize something given in time, and apply it to the *cogito*, which is not an object given in time. He is guilty of attempting to apply a determination outside of its proper sphere of application, by not using it as a form of synthesizing intuitions, which leads him into error. Kant's claims here are rather a paralogism of his own, resting on a failure to analyse the nature of pre-reflective consciousness, which Sartre takes to be "necessary as a condition of possibility for all theories of consciousness and reflection" (SCSK, 61).

5. Conclusion

Looking back on his early work, Sartre described his aim as "to give a philosophical foundation to realism" (SpS, 104), framed by the question of "how to give to man both his autonomy and his reality amongst real objects, while avoiding idealism, and without falling into a mechanistic materialism?" (SpS, 104). As Coorebyter notes, in the *Transcendence of the Ego*, "we are not yet in the doctrinal horizon of *Being and Nothingness,* in the dramatic opposition between the inert mass of the in-itself and the irreducible ontological deficiency of the for-itself" (Coorebyter, "Introduction et notes", 29). Rather, the *Transcendence of the Ego* offers an engagement with the world not governed by lack, but understood in its plenitude. It is in this context, I argue, that Sartre takes up a certain Bergsonian account of the object understood in terms of temporal process as a way of navigating this path between idealism and a mechanistic materialism. Given this difference from the later work, what then is the relation to Kant and the German idealist tradition? After Kant, Hölderlin, "Judgement and Being", argued that if we are to understand the ground of the difference between the subject and object that Kant presupposes without repeating it, we need a foundation that is not characterized in these terms, namely a field of undifferentiated being, present before the "*ur-teilung*" ["judgement", literally "originary division"] that makes subject and object possible. Gardner, "Sartre, Schelling, and Onto-Theology", shows that this move, particularly in Schelling's thought, provides a useful model for understanding how the for-itself of Sartre's later philosophy emerges from the in-itself. In the *Transcendence of the Ego*, we do not have the double movement of *Being and Nothingness*, with the ontological priority of being-in-itself, and the priority of meaning-giving for the for-self that drives Sartre's account of the human condition. Rather, here we have a movement from the contemporaneity of pre-reflective consciousness and its object to the reflective "subject-object duality" (TE, 51) which emerges through judgement, or categorial synthesis. Here, then, we do not have a movement from indifference to determination, but between two different accounts of structure: the processual, continuous structure of perception, and the atemporal, categorial structure of imagination. This points to a limitation that is present in Kant's work itself, namely that Kant assumes that to be determined is to be determined in terms of judgement and as an object, with the alternative being indeterminacy. As Apostolopoulos, "Sartre, Kant, and the Spontaneity of Mind", has noted, Sartre can be seen at points as developing a criticism along the lines of Kant's paralogism, and I would argue that this is also a good characterization of Sartre's position here. While Kant's paralogism involves applying categorial determinations beyond the circumscribed domain of experience, and hence assuming even non-spatio-temporal

entities such as Descartes' *cogito* can be understood in terms of the category of substance, Sartre's claim is that the paralogism occurs within experience itself. Sartre's position in the early work can be seen as recasting Kant's argument, seeing the paralogism as operating within the phenomenal, between categorial and non-categorial forms of organization, rather than between the phenomenal and noumenal as we find in Kant's formulation.

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