

ARTICLE

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Beetles and Nothingness: Sartre, Wittgenstein,
and First-Person Authority

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Abstract

This article is inspired by two of Steven Burns's many philosophical interests — self-deception and Wittgenstein — as well as by a wariness that we share of the analytic-continental divide in contemporary philosophy. I argue here that, despite obvious differences of temperament and concern, Sartre and Wittgenstein share a scepticism about the “epistemic model” of first-person authority. This shared scepticism emerges in a striking way in their challenges to the idea that psychological phenomena should be understood on the model of objects in physical space. Wittgenstein's scepticism is more thorough-going, but emphasizing the similarity allows us to see Sartre as making an important contribution to our understanding of first-person authority, even if we are wary of the voluntarism of his approach.

Résumé

Cet essai est inspiré de deux des nombreux intérêts philosophiques de Steven Burns : l'auto-tromperie et Wittgenstein, ainsi que de la méfiance que nous partageons au sujet de la rupture analytico-continentale dans la philosophie contemporaine. Je soutiens ici que, malgré leurs différences évidentes de tempérament et de préoccupations, Sartre et Wittgenstein partagent un scepticisme relativement au « modèle épistémique » de l'autorité à la première personne. Ce scepticisme partagé s'exprime d'une façon frappante par leurs remises en cause de l'idée que les phénomènes psychologiques doivent être appréhendés sur le modèle des objets de l'espace physique. Le scepticisme de Wittgenstein est plus approfondi, mais si on souligne la similarité, on peut voir chez Sartre une contribution importante à notre compréhension de l'autorité à la première personne, même si on se méfie du volontarisme de sa démarche.

Keywords: Sartre; Wittgenstein; first-person authority; sensation; emotion; bad faith; pre-reflective consciousness

1. Introduction

I begin by examining Sartre's (1956) talk in *Being and Nothingness* of a pre-reflective, non-thetic consciousness, particularly as he applies it to the emotions of jealousy and

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sorrow. According to Sartre, I do not ordinarily *know* that I am jealous or sad; I simply *am* these emotions in the moment. I try to disentangle this idea from Sartre's voluntarism — which suggests that consciousness plays a role in producing and sustaining emotional states — by distinguishing Sartre's views about the emotions from his views about agency. The worry is difficult to eliminate completely, but Sartre's remarks on the emotions, I suggest, point toward a non-epistemic treatment of first-person authority that rejects the idea that we should treat our inner states as analogous to objects. In Section 3, I support this contention by comparing Sartre's view with Wittgenstein's (1968) remarks about pain in the *Philosophical Investigations*. I show that Wittgenstein and Sartre, perhaps surprisingly, share a critique of the related ideas that sensations are private objects and that consciousness, or the mind, is a kind of space in which such objects are located. However, while both Sartre and Wittgenstein help us to re-think this broadly "Cartesian" conception of the mind, I argue in Section 4 that the voluntarism that I tried to strip away from Sartre's treatment of the emotions in fact extends even — and even more implausibly — to his treatment of sensations.

2. Pre-Reflective Consciousness

"To know is to know that one knows, said Alain" (Sartre, 1956, pp. 12, 93; cf. p. 13). Analytic epistemologists will hear in Alain's words a formulation of the KK-thesis: "S knows that p *iff* S knows that S knows that p," which wants for defenders these days. Sartre, with equal justice, hears the regress associated with Spinoza's psycho-physical parallelism: "the idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect" (Spinoza, 1996, p. 35). And he complains that either Alain must concede that there is "a non-self-conscious reflection and final term. Or else we affirm the necessity of an infinite regress (*idea ideae ideae, etc.*), which is absurd" (Sartre, 1956, p. 12).

However, Sartre's main, and more subtle, objection is that Alain is distorting an *insight* about consciousness that would be better reformulated: "To know is to be conscious of knowing" (Sartre, 1956, p. 12), where we are to understand this consciousness as something other than knowing. To say that I must know that I know if I am to know at all, thinks Sartre, is to say that my *thetic* consciousness of something, my focused consciousness of it as an *object* that *is* some way or another, must itself be the object of a further thetic consciousness, and this leads to the dilemma encountered above. Instead, he thinks, consciousness is *pre-reflectively* and *non-thetically* aware of itself. There is, he says, an "immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself" (Sartre, 1956, p. 12) — a "non-reflective consciousness which renders ... reflection possible" (Sartre, 1956, p. 13). If I am sitting in a café, counting cigarettes, and you ask what I am doing, I need not pause and check before I can tell you. There is no need for investigation or reflection, as there would be if my relation to myself were like my relation to the unobserved properties of empirical objects in space and time.¹

¹ "Thetic" ["*thétique*"], as its relation to "thesis" ["*thèse*"] suggests, should remind us of propositional knowledge. My consciousness is thetic when it posits an object suited for such knowledge. Reflective

One of Sartre's most striking employments of this point appears in his example of the jealous voyeur:

Let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole. I am alone and on the level of a non-thetic self-consciousness. This means first of all that there is no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefore to which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them. They are in no way *known*; I *am my acts* and hence they carry in themselves their whole justification. (Sartre, 1956, p. 347)

My actions are not, in the moment, *objects* of my contemplation or observation. Only things in the world, organized for my consciousness by the project I am engaged in, have this character. Until someone catches me peering through the keyhole, "My consciousness sticks to my acts, it *is* my acts ..." (Sartre, 1956, p. 348), and even when I am caught in the act, I do not apprehend myself as an object of reflective consciousness. Rather, "I now exist as *myself* for my unreflective consciousness," which "does not apprehend the *person* directly or as *its* object" but to which I am presented insofar as I am "*an object for the Other*" (Sartre, 1956, p. 349). This awareness of myself as an object for the Other, says Sartre, is nothing other than the *shame* I feel in being looked at (Sartre, 1956, p. 350).

These evocative but difficult passages point to Sartre's attempt to circumvent the problem of other minds. If I am immediately aware of myself as an object for the Other, then it seems that I am immediately aware of the Other. I need not make (at best) a merely probable inference from my thetic consciousness of bodily behaviour to the existence of another consciousness.

However, I want to focus on a remark that Sartre makes about my motivation:

Jealousy, as the possibility which I *am*, organizes this instrumental complex [the door, the keyhole] by transcending it toward itself. But I *am* this jealousy; I do not *know* it. If I contemplated it instead of making it, then only the worldly complex in instrumentality could teach it to me. (Sartre, 1956, p. 348)

If my relation to my jealousy were one of knowledge, then I would have to acquire this knowledge much as anyone else would, by observing my behaviour in context.

Sartre suggests, by contrast, that being jealous is an *action* — it is something that I do or make. I do not simply find my jealousy lying around after turning my mind's eye inward. It is not, in the moment, an object that I detect by reflecting on myself. I create it and sustain it. Similar remarks characterize his treatment of sorrow:

consciousness [*la conscience réflexive*] attempts to turn thetic consciousness on itself but always leaves something out — its own act of reflection. (I can gaze at myself in the mirror, but I cannot gaze at myself gazing at myself in the mirror. Since at least Hegel, it has thus been commonplace in this tradition to hold that the knowing subject cannot be fully identical with the object known.) "Cognitive" [*cognitif*] here does not differ much from the notion familiar from analytic philosophers' discussions of cognitivism and non-cognitivism in ethics, aesthetics, accounts of metaphor, etc. Think "truth-apt."

One might think that surely I am the sadness in the mode of being what I am. What is the sadness, however, if not the intentional unity which comes to reassemble and animate the totality of my conduct? It is the meaning of this dull look with which I view the world, of my bowed shoulders, of my lowered head, of the listlessness in my whole body. But at the very moment when I adopt each of these attitudes, do I not know that I shall not be able to hold on to it? Let a stranger suddenly appear and I will lift up my head, I will assume a lively cheerfulness. What will remain of my sadness except that I obligingly promise it an appointment for later after the departure of the visitor? (Sartre, 1956, pp. 103–104)²

My sorrow is not an object of knowledge but a form of *conduct* that I adopt in the face of a “situation too urgent” — a kind of “magical” (Sartre, 1956, p. 104) reconstruction of reality; I must *make* myself sad and resume the attitude later when it has been interrupted.

I shall return to the voluntarism suggested by these remarks, but we might also worry in passing that the case of sadness, situated in the chapter “Patterns of Bad Faith” and following the example of the waiter who plays at being a waiter and the pupil who “exhausts himself in playing” (Sartre, 1956, p. 103) at being attentive, is meant to be an *example* of what Sartre calls “bad faith.” Human beings, according to Sartre, are a mixture of *facticity* — what we have been — and *transcendence* — what we might become (Sartre, 1956, p. 98). “[O]ne of the most basic instruments of bad faith” (Sartre, 1956, p. 99), he says, is the attempt to reduce myself to my facticity, thereby denying my transcendence, or to deny my facticity altogether and loftily identify myself with my transcendence. In both cases, he thinks, I am avoiding responsibility, either by maintaining that I can do or be no other, or by refusing to allow that my past actions reflect at all on my character.

Sadness, as Sartre describes it, may *appear* to be a form of bad faith if I think of myself as being my sadness “in the mode of being what I am” (Sartre, 1956, pp. 103–104) — that is, *essentially* — because I then deny the possibility of transcending my sorrow. On this reading, I *am* my sorrow, but, when I am in bad faith, I behave as though I am my sorrow essentially. I play on an ambiguity in “being sad,” allowing me to affirm my sadness, not merely as a contingent feature of my consciousness, but as my essential nature.

Such cases may occur, but it is implausible to think that sadness is *always* a matter of bad faith. In the midst of my grief, a moment of joy threatens to intrude on my sorrow. Someone smiles at me, or my neighbour’s dog greets me excitedly, but I tamp down the feeling because it seems like an injustice to the one I have lost, or because I fear it to be a sign that I have recovered from my loss too soon, that my feelings were shallow. There is room here for the thought that it is *appropriate* that I should feel sorrow and that it is, therefore, reasonable to be wary of such moments of joy as having the potential to distract me from my duty.

² One referee suggests that these remarks might be profitably connected with Wittgenstein’s (1922) discussion of how willing changes the limits of the world. The proposal is intriguing, but it would require an examination of Wittgenstein’s early and later treatments of willing, and I despair of finding a clear connection with his later critique of sensation and perception, on which I focus below.

However, the worry that sadness is in bad faith arises from reading too much into Sartre's example. The case of sadness is simply meant to illustrate Sartre's contention that human consciousness "is what it is not and ... is not what it is" (Sartre, 1956, p. 100) — Sartre's paradoxical way of saying that human beings are *both* their facticity and their transcendence. I may be sad, but not *essentially* sad. My sadness can always be transcended. Moreover, if the example of sorrow need not be understood as a case of bad faith, then Sartre can also make sense of the appropriateness of certain emotions, as Martin Hartmann argues. The appropriateness that Hartmann has in mind is not the appropriateness of correctly tracking some feature of the world understood independently of my emotional responses to it, but, rather, appropriateness in terms of "ethical standards that refer to a person's self-understanding" (Hartmann, 2017, p. 163). This fits my example well. The worry was whether unexpected moments of joy constituted a betrayal of the sorrow that I think I *ought* to feel. If sorrow is not a form of bad faith, Sartre can easily allow this.

The worry about voluntarism is more difficult to dispel. Even if my sorrow *can* be transcended, it need not be, and if it is not transcended, Sartre thinks, then this must be because I sustain it: "There is no inertia in consciousness" (Sartre, 1956, p. 104). The worry is reinforced by Sartre's individualism, expressed vividly in his 1946 lecture "Existentialism Is a Humanism." There, he tells us that "the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders" (Sartre, 1975, pp. 349–350).

Rejecting this androcentric individualism, Steven Burns remarks, "Persons ... are not just their *own* creations — not merely *self-made*" (Burns, 1989, p. 27), but also the creations of others. He is echoing Annette Baier's evocative suggestion that persons are always "*second* persons, who grow up with other persons" (Baier, 1985, p. 84) — the results of interactions with our caregivers and others, to whom we learn to respond when addressed as "you." "My first concept of myself," writes Baier, "is as the referent of 'you,' spoken by someone whom I will address as 'you'" (Baier, 1985, pp. 89–90). "The correct use of the second person pronoun," she continues "is the test for that grasp of the concept of a person which is essential to persons," and it is "vital for self-conscious action as well as for self-conscious thought" (Baier, 1985, p. 90).

Let me try to smooth out this individualist wrinkle because it distracts from the comparison with Wittgenstein that I want to draw below (Section 3). I sympathize with the Burns-Baier view about how we ordinarily become persons, though I think we can accept much of this story without making any claims about what is *essential* for personhood. Even with that modification, however, this account does not *automatically* offer us a critique of Sartre's treatment of the emotions, whatever it might tell us about his conception of agency and responsibility. Baier presents her view in an essay called "Cartesian Persons," and she attributes something like these insights about personhood to Descartes himself, whose *Meditations* she reads as replicating a familiar human developmental trajectory from absolute dependence on others to youthful rebellion (both in *Meditation I*) to "limited autonomy and clear acceptance of beneficial dependency" (Baier, 1985, p. 86) by *Meditation VI*. She wants to persuade us that, despite his treatment of the "I" as merely a thinking

thing, whose essence can be known apart from material things, Descartes thinks of a *person* as a “union ... of the mind with the body” (Descartes, 2013, p. 84), which is, from its inception, in relation with other such unions. We should, Baier thinks, take seriously Descartes’s otherwise surprising advice to Elisabeth of Bohemia: “... it is by availing oneself only of life and ordinary conversations, and by abstaining from meditating and studying things that exercise the imagination, that one learns to conceive the union of the soul and the body” (Descartes to Elisabeth, 28 June 1643, as cited in Atherton, 1994, p. 18).

Sartre’s focus on the importance of the Other suggests too much preoccupation with the third person and not enough with the second to capture Baier’s insights, but if Baier can pull a social rabbit out of a Cartesian hat, why should Sartre not be able to start with *Meditation II* and go on to discover that I am constituted by my relations to others?³ “Any study of human reality must begin with the *cogito*” (Sartre, 1956, p. 133), he writes, but his conclusions are explicitly intended to be anti-Cartesian: the Other’s “presence without intermediary is the necessary condition of all thought which I would attempt to form concerning myself” (Sartre, 1956, p. 362).

This may not be obvious from his treatment of sadness, which he describes as “a mode of being which concerns only myself” (Sartre, 1956, p. 103), and Sartre’s treatment of love is so agonistic that it is at first *tempting* to compare it to an atomistic war of one against one. Agonism, however, is not individualism. Whatever shortcomings we might detect in Sartrean love, it is a struggle *because* the Other is the lover’s guarantor of being. Love, according to Sartre, involves the paradoxical desire “that freedom found fact and that fact have pre-eminence over freedom” (Sartre, 1956, p. 480) — the desire to possess the Other, but in a way that preserves the freedom of the Other, without which I would be deprived of “the foundation of my being” (Sartre, 1956, p. 476). Love is agonistic, for Sartre, but it is no less social for that. Indeed, Sartre’s recognition that certain emotions are intelligible only in the context of my relation to others is an element of his plan for navigating “The Reef of Solipsism” (Sartre, 1956, p. 303): “It is shame or pride which reveals to me the Other’s look and myself at the end of that look. It is the shame or pride which makes me *live*, not *know* the situation of being looked at” (Sartre, 1956, p. 350). So, at least some emotions are constitutive of my awareness of others, even as those emotions are, in the moment at least, constitutive of myself.

Yet, the worry about voluntarism persists, and it, too, distracts from the comparison with Wittgenstein that I want to make below. Perhaps it helps if we distinguish Sartre’s treatment of the emotions from his highly individualistic, voluntaristic treatment of agency, despite his characterizing jealousy and sorrow as states that I create and sustain. Hartmann’s discussion of sadness supports this proposal. According to Hartmann, sorrow remains for Sartre a genuine *passion* — something that I undergo — not something that I induce in myself at will, as would be the case with a “false” emotion (Hartmann, 2017, p. 152) — the sort that might be induced in bad faith.

³ This rhetorical question invites a different answer from the one I intend: Baier is distinguishing the “I” from the person, whereas Sartre is not — or at least not so clearly. I leave this objection unanswered and concede that if Sartre’s project is to succeed, it must do so on its own terms, not Baier’s.

The sense in which consciousness “affects itself with sadness” (Sartre, 1956, p. 104) is the sense in which we must “open ourselves up to the possibility of sadness” (Hartmann, 2017, p. 153), which may or may not then come. I do not will the sadness, but I must make room for it.

There are cases like this, too. Sorrow may be inaccessible to me if I am preoccupied with practical matters. I may call to mind a lost family member or a broken relationship or the dog I have had to have euthanized, without affect, but when I have reached the end of my travails and cleared my thoughts of detritus, I find myself able once again to be stricken with sorrow. Steven Burns and Alice MacLachlan, commenting on J. N. Findlay’s discussion of aesthetic appreciation, say something reminiscent of this:

[O]ne does not fall asleep by making an effort to fall asleep, but one does typically prepare mind and body for rest, putting aside the dirt and clothing and troubles of the day, finding a dark and quiet place to lie down, and so on. Perhaps falling asleep is something that happens to one rather than something that one *does*, but it is not usually adventitious, unwilling, or totally passive. (Burns & MacLachlan, 2004, p. 5)

Aesthetic appreciation, on Findlay’s account, they say, involves something similar — a preparation for receptivity, and this seems to be what making oneself sad is for Sartre. “What matters in phrases such as ‘*making oneself sad*’, then, is not so much the (voluntaristic) idea that we adopt or abandon the stance of sadness at will as the (ontological) idea that in order for sadness to affect us we have to keep it alive through sadness-typical actions and attitudes” (Hartmann, 2017, p. 153).

Does such receptivity also cast light on bad faith? So much might seem to be suggested by Sartre himself: “One *puts oneself* in bad faith as one goes to sleep, and one is in bad faith as one dreams” (Sartre, 1956, p. 113). It is self-defeating to try to lie to myself (Sartre, 1956, p. 89; also see Hymers, 1989), but I may make myself receptive to the ambiguities of affirming my facticity or my transcendence, much as I may make room for sadness. However, bad faith differs from sorrow in not being a “*state (état)*” that one “undergo[es] (subit)” (Sartre, 1956, p. 89, 1943, p. 83), but something that consciousness “affects itself with” (Sartre, 1956, p. 89). So, it would seem that, *chez Sartre*, sadness is a state that I undergo, not the product of “an original intention and a project” (Sartre, 1956, p. 89). This at least mitigates the worry that Sartre’s view of the emotions is too voluntaristic.

Nonetheless — to return to Burns and MacLachlan’s (2004) analogy — one *can* fall asleep at the wheel of a car, and one can be struck, unprepared, by the beauty of the night sky or of an Edwardian streetscape. A sudden upwelling of grief that catches me by surprise in the middle of my work seems less like the result of an accommodation that I have made and much more like something that simply happens to me. The “usually” in Burns and MacLachlan’s description of falling asleep is, thus, an important qualifier, and it seems that an unfortunate *residue* of voluntarism still clings to Sartre’s treatment of the emotions.

I have begun with the emotions because I want to bring out a parallel between Sartre’s remarks on *being* jealousy and not *knowing* it and some remarks that

Wittgenstein makes about pain in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Comparing emotions and sensations may seem to be mixing apples with oranges, but the comparison is intended only to draw attention to features that are shared by all psychological vocabulary. If Sartre does not do justice to the second person, he does attempt to give us a better understanding of the *first* person by pointing toward a non-epistemic picture of first-person authority. There is, I concede, an *epistemic* residue that clings to Sartre's talk of a pre-reflective *cogito*. Nonetheless, viewed from another angle, his remarks suggest the possibility of an alternative to thinking of the mind or of consciousness as a *container* — an inner space populated by objects that we are to understand by analogy with spatio-temporal objects in physical space. This angle is afforded by an exploration of some of Wittgenstein's remarks on pain and the first person, and laying remarks from *Being and Nothingness* "side by side" (Moore, 1993, p. 106) with remarks from Wittgenstein will help to bring out a surprising resemblance between the two.⁴ What I am *tempted* to say Sartre gets right is that my emotions are not objects awaiting my discovery. This fact alone does not entail even the residual voluntarism that I have ascribed to Sartre. After all, similar things can be said about sensations like pain, which are not plausibly thought of as states for which I must make room, let alone projects that consciousness undertakes of its own accord. However, this observation is complicated by the fact that, although Sartre's own treatment of sensations bears a striking resemblance to Wittgenstein's, Sartre takes the essence of consciousness to be to negate, or "nihilate [néantiser]" (Sartre, 1956, p. 57, 1943, p. 57) and this, in turn, he interprets as freedom. This capacity to "secrete a nothingness" (Sartre, 1956, p. 60) is what leaves the residue of voluntarism, and, unfortunately, it sticks to pain, as well. If my being in pain is my being conscious of pain, if consciousness is negation, and if negation is freedom, then it seems that freedom brings pain into existence. I return to this point in Section 4.

3. Do I Know That I Am in Pain?

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein's discussion of the alleged epistemic privacy of sensations begins at §246:

In what sense are my sensations *private*? — Well, only I can know whether I am really in pain; another person can only surmise it. — In one way this is wrong, and in another nonsense. If we are using the word "to know" as it is normally used (and how else are we to use it?), then other people very often know when I am in pain. — Yes, but all the same not with the certainty with which I know it myself! — It can't be said of me at all (except perhaps as a joke) that I *know* I am in pain. What is it supposed to mean — except perhaps that I *am* in pain?

⁴ Although there are considerable literatures on *each* of Sartre and Wittgenstein, there is a considerably *smaller* literature on Sartre *and* Wittgenstein, but what interests me here approaches some of the themes of Longuenesse (2008) and, in a more general way, Wider (1987). See also Hymers (2000, pp. 166–167).

Other people cannot be said to learn of my sensations *only* from my behaviour, — for *I* cannot be said to learn of them. *I have* them.

The truth is: it makes sense to say about other people that they doubt whether I am in pain; but not to say it about myself. (Wittgenstein, 1968, §246)

We might say that I *am* my pain — I do not *know* it. There would, however, be very little initial plausibility to the suggestion that my pain is typically something that I *do* or *make* or even open myself up to.

Wittgenstein (1968) may seem to be saying that my *avowal* of pain is not a fit example of knowledge because it is an *expression* of my pain rather than an *assertion* about it, and, therefore, it lacks a truth-value. However, *Philosophical Investigations* §246 mentions no such considerations. Rather, the justification presented for saying that I do not know that I am in pain is that I do not ordinarily *learn* or *doubt* that I am in pain. When I hammer my thumb, I do not *find out* that I am in pain as I discover that I have lost my keys, and it makes no sense to doubt whether my sensation is one of pain rather than one of pleasure as I might doubt whether the key in my pocket opens my filing cabinet or my bicycle lock (cf. Hacker, 1993, pp. 28–29, 87; McGinn, 1997, p. 147; Stern, 2004, p. 173).

This is to say that self-ascriptions of pain do not get their justification — if they have any (see Wittgenstein, 1968, §289) — from satisfying some criterion for my experiencing pain or from some evidence that I might use to support an inference to my being in pain, in the way that patterns in a cloud-chamber allow us to infer the existence of subatomic particles. By contrast, my claim to know that this water bottle is made of steel or that this key opens my filing cabinet *does* rest on such evidence or criteria. So, by this standard, self-ascriptions of pain are better not thought of as knowledge-claims.⁵

Wittgenstein is not in the grip of a particular theory about propositional knowledge here. Rather, he is simply pointing to an important contrast between our talk of — and our relations to — spatio-temporal objects and our talk of, and relations to, our own sensations. The contrast is important because one of his main targets in the discussion of privacy and sensations is a view that assimilates sensations to spatio-temporal objects — a view that turns on a misleading analogy between physical space and phenomenal space and which, consequently, invites us to read into our understanding of appearances in phenomenal space properties analogous to those possessed by objects in physical space. If the analogy is a misleading one, we should not expect sensations to be like objects, and we should not expect that the kinds of knowledge-claims we can make about spatio-temporal objects will have analogues in the case of sensations.

That the analogy *is* misleading Wittgenstein began arguing as early as 1929 (see Hymers, 2017, pp. 6–12, 49–66). There are properties of physical objects that cannot intelligibly be transferred to appearances. This pen on my desk is to the right of my copy of *Being and Nothingness*, and I can say something similar about the appearance

⁵ There are, of course, other cases in which saying, “I know,” either seems ordinarily out of place or should be interpreted as an expression of certainty (Wittgenstein, 1968, §247) — e.g., “I know that I have two hands.” See Hymers (2010, pp. 174–180) and Wittgenstein (1972) for discussion.

of the pen and the book in my visual field. So, there *is* an analogy between physical space and visual space. But, while my jacket may hang from the back of my chair behind me in physical space, there is no sense to the claim that the appearance of my jacket is behind me in my visual space (Wittgenstein, 2005, p. 332). If my pen is shorter than my 17.7 cm copy of *Being and Nothingness*, then I can be assured that it is also shorter than my forearm, but I cannot make the same claim about the appearances of these things in my visual space. For one thing, my pen seen from close-to may appear larger than my forearm seen from farther away, but, as well, sameness of length in visual space is not transitive. A long series of adjacent line segments may be such that no two successive segments appear to differ in length even while the outermost segments in the series do appear to differ so (Wittgenstein, 1975, §215, 1993, p. 313, 2005, p. 325).

If I overlook such disanalogies, then the genuine analogy that allows me to say that the appearance of my pen is to the right of the appearance of my book is apt to mislead me into treating appearances as objects. Of course, perceptual appearances differ in important ways from sensations, but popular theories of perception of the time — sense-datum theories, in particular — sometimes blurred these differences.⁶ I can reasonably distinguish the book from the appearance of the book when I view it from a certain angle and in certain lighting, but failing to attend to the differences between physical space and phenomenal space can lead me in a philosophical mood to reify or objectify appearances:

The word “sense datum” really means the same as “appearance”. But the term introduces a particular way of looking at appearance. We might call it “*objectification*”. ... Suppose I say, “If this coat appeared grey, then something must have been grey”. This is objectification. We assimilate the grammar of appearance to the grammar of physical objects. (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 312)

In *Philosophical Investigations*, this worry about treating appearances and sensations as objects in a private space is most explicit in Wittgenstein’s (1968) example of the beetle in a box at §293, in which we are invited to imagine that each of us has a box containing something we call a “beetle.” However, “[n]o one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle” (Wittgenstein, 1968, §293). If the word “beetle” had a use in our imagined common language, it would not be as “the name of a thing” (Wittgenstein, 1968, §293). In fact, the thing in the box would be *irrelevant* to the meaning of “beetle.” By analogy, if sensations were objects in private, inner space, they would likewise be irrelevant to the meaning of words like “pain.” But that conclusion is absurd, so sensations are not objects in private space, and words like “pain” must have a different grammar from words like “beetle” (as it is actually used).

This concern about treating sensations and appearances as private objects underlies much of Wittgenstein’s critique of the idea of a private sensation language (see Hymers, 2017, pp. 62–67). If we have been persuaded that sensations and perceptual appearances are analogous to objects in space, then it is just a short

⁶ See, e.g., Moore (1953) and Russell (1914). Broad (1923, p. 254) is more circumspect.

step further to suppose that I can somehow point to and name my private sensations and so give a private meaning to my sensation terms (Wittgenstein, 1968, §258). A critique of the misleading analogy between physical and phenomenal space thus serves to undermine the plausibility of such private ostensive definition, along with the idea that I have knowledge of my sensations much as I have knowledge of objects in space.

Remarkably, we can find in *Being and Nothingness* a critique of the notion of “sensation” that runs nearly parallel to Wittgenstein’s critique. Sartre targets what he calls “pure sensation” (Sartre, 1956, p. 413) — “a hybrid notion between the subjective and the objective, conceived from the standpoint of the object and applied subsequently to the subject” (Sartre, 1956, p. 416). It is produced, he contends, when experimental psychologists ask their test subjects how things appear to them (Sartre, 1956, p. 411) and then illegitimately take their responses to be about inner objects. Sartre discusses his own participation as a research subject:

From time to time the experimenter asked me if the screen appeared to me more or less illuminated, if the pressure exerted on my hand seemed to me stronger or weaker, and I replied; that is, I gave objective information concerning things which appeared in the midst of my world. Sometimes an inept experimenter asked me if “my sensation of light was stronger or weaker, more or less intense.” Since I was in the midst of objects and in the process of observing these objects, his phrase would have had no meaning for me if I had not long since learned to use the expression “sensation of light” for objective light as it appeared to me in the world at a given instant. I replied therefore that the sensation of light was, for example, less intense, but I meant by this that the screen was *in my opinion* less illuminated. (Sartre, 1956, p. 411)

Like Wittgenstein, Sartre thinks that philosophical problems about sensation and perception get started when we objectify appearances, moving uncritically from speaking of the “light as it appeared to me” to my “sensation of light.” *Sensations* in Sartre’s critique are *sense-data*, appearances transformed into objects of a sort. This sort of object requires a space for its location: “an environment which is homogeneous with it,” called “*mind*” or “*consciousness*” — “a sort of internal space in which certain figures called sensations are formed on the occasion of external stimulations” (Sartre, 1956, p. 414). According to this view, “The subjective quality of the Other-as-object is purely and simply a closed box. Sensation is inside the box” (Sartre, 1956, p. 415). It “becomes a particular type of object — inert, passive, and simply lived” (Sartre, 1956, p. 414).

The misleading analogy between physical space and phenomenal space concerns sensation and perception, but it reinforces the temptation to think of the mind or consciousness in general as a special kind of space, containing not only sensations and perceptual appearances, but beliefs and desires, intentions, and emotional states, as well — a temptation that is expressed in our attraction to the metaphors of the inner and the outer.

Once we have been gulled by this misleading analogy, it is difficult to resist the further conclusion that your inner space is something to which only you have access:

“That is subjective which cannot get out of itself” (Sartre, 1956, p. 414). And this inference derives specious reinforcement from the fact that in certain respects our relations to other people’s “inner” states are like our relations to the unobserved properties of spatio-temporal objects.

Of course, it is important for my learning psychological concepts that your pain or your sorrow may at times be quite manifest to me. “Just try — in a real case — to doubt someone else’s fear or pain” (Wittgenstein, 1968, §303). But you can also sometimes conceal your pain or your emotional states from me, and, given the spatial model of consciousness, this fact *provokes* the worry that those states might always be inaccessible to me. However, it does not *justify* that worry. The possibility of your concealing your psychological states from me does not render the truth about those states forever inaccessible to me, any more than my occasional doubts about this key render its utility in opening my filing cabinet forever inaccessible to me. It just means that sometimes I may have to rely on evidence — the testimony of your friends or family, your behaviour when you think yourself unobserved — to determine your state (of which, of course, you can also inform me, if you change your mind). This is why, at §246, it is supposed to be a mistake to say that “another person can only surmise” that I am in pain.

We saw that Sartre rejects the idea that I am aware of other minds only by an inference from bodily behaviour: “the Other’s existence can not be a *probability*” (Sartre, 1956, p. 337). Wittgenstein’s rejection of the idea that another “can only surmise” that I am in pain is a rejection of the same model. For Wittgenstein (1968), bodily behaviour is not mere *evidence* of consciousness but is, rather, consciousness made manifest — it is *expressive* of consciousness: “The human body is the best picture of the human soul” (Wittgenstein, 1968, p. 178). “You look at a face and say ‘I wonder what’s going on behind that face?’ But you don’t have to say that. The external does not have to be seen as a façade behind which the mental powers are at work” (Wittgenstein, 1982, §978). As Sartre puts it, when we are concerned with the being-for-others of the body, “There is nothing *behind* the body. But the body is wholly ‘psychic’” (Sartre, 1956, p. 404).⁷

The problematic contrast between knowledge and mere surmise is just one way of trying to capture what Wittgenstein refers to as an “undoubted asymmetry” in the uses of “all words relating to personal experience” (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 215). The asymmetry attaches itself most recognizably to the distinction between first- and other-person uses of sensation vocabulary (but also other psychological terms generally). “Psychological verbs,” Wittgenstein writes in 1947, are “characterized by the fact that the third person of the present is to be identified by observation, the first person not” (Wittgenstein, 1980, §63). If I remark that a colleague must be in pain because he is grimacing, you might reasonably respond, “Are you sure? He always looks like that during your lectures.” The same question, however, would ordinarily

⁷ Racist or sexist or speciesist attitudes may blind me, in whole or in part, to what should be obvious. For clues about what Sartre and Wittgenstein might (be able to) say about such cases, we might turn respectively to Sartre (1995) and Wittgenstein’s “Remarks on Frazer’s *Golden Bough*” (Wittgenstein, 1993, pp. 119–155), but it is implausible to suppose that rejecting the idea of the mind-as-container leaves one vulnerable to criticism on this score.

be out of place if I tell you that *I* am in pain. Speakers have a default authority over such self-ascriptions, and only in special circumstances are we justified in casting doubt on them. We extend such authority to others' pronouncements about how things appear to them perceptually ("This food is too salty!"), about whether they are angry, joyful, or bored, and about what they believe. Of course, there are cases in which we suspect someone of being in error about some of these things — e.g., about not being jealous or about believing in equality — if that person's collateral behaviour belies such self-ascriptions. Self-deception and self-ignorance in these matters are possible, but we make sense of them against a background of first-person authority.

The *epistemic* interpretation of this asymmetry tries to explain it by distinguishing the *directness* with which I supposedly know what I think and feel from the *indirectness* with which others do (Wittgenstein, 1993, p. 215) — their mere surmise. In doing so, it tacitly relies on the analogy between our inner states and spatio-temporal objects (see Hyman, 2017, pp. 76–85). As a result, it is committed to the supposition that I must first recognize or identify my inner states before I can describe them — that is, it supposes that some criterion for being in pain or being sad or believing that the rain will soon stop has been satisfied. My self-ascriptions, according to this view, rely on my checking how things are with me and then reporting to others what I have found. Others are in no position to check for me because they have only indirect access to the phenomena through my reports and other behaviour. My access is "privileged" as Gilbert Ryle calls it (Ryle, 1949, p. 16), and this is the root of my first-person authority.

This interpretation of first-person authority, however, is not obligatory — as both Wittgenstein and Sartre help us to see by removing the alleged objects of knowledge. It can *seem* obligatory if we are gripped by the misleading analogy between physical space and phenomenal space and the correlative metaphors of the "inner" and the "outer," but if we can escape this picture, the possibility of seeing first-person authority in a different light becomes apparent.

If the relation in which I stand to my psychological states is not paradigmatically one of *knowledge*, then how are we to characterize self-ascriptions of those states? Sartre might be taken to suggest that the "am" in "I am jealous" (or the "*suis*" in "*Je suis jaloux*") is the "am" of identity: "I am jealous" means "I am this jealousy" ("[C]ette jalousie, je la suis" (Sartre, 1943, p. 299)), though this does not work as well for the case of pain, which in French, as in English, I *have* ("*J'ai douleur*," "*J'ai mal*"), rather than *am*. In any event, Sartre is less interested in language than is Wittgenstein, so he does not develop the point.

Wittgenstein, however, devotes considerable attention to it. In his lecture notes from the mid-1930s, he treats first-person authority as a feature of the *grammar* of our self-ascriptions of psychological predicates. It is a contingent fact about the way we speak, but one that seems natural — indeed, necessary — because we ordinarily do not feel pain in the bodies of others or see through their eyes. That we do not *ordinarily* do this, however, does not entail that we *could* not (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 49) — think of conjoined twins (Wittgenstein 1968, §253). If we did, it is hard to say what our uses of sensation- and perception-vocabulary would be like. "[I]f rule became exception and exception rule; or if both became phenomena of roughly equal frequency — this would

make our normal language-games lose their point” (Wittgenstein, 1968, §142). The grammar of these terms might be very different, but, as psychological terms are in fact used, first-person authority is a feature of their grammar.

What emerges from these considerations is a kind of expressivist treatment of the first-person, present-tense, indicative uses of psychological vocabulary. I do not have the space to explore that treatment here,⁸ and Wittgenstein’s methodological commitments (Wittgenstein, 1968, §§89–133) raise difficult questions about his own attitude toward the alternative that he investigates, but the most important thing for his purposes, I suggest, is simply that it is possible to sketch an alternative to the epistemic picture of first-person authority. This, as much as anything, is what Wittgenstein takes to be the proper task of philosophy — to help us to see rabbits where before we could see only ducks. We might think of Sartre’s discussion of jealousy as playing a similar role.

4. One Last Thing: Voluntarism Again

“But,” you may object, “is Sartre not the philosopher who tells us that ‘in order for bad faith to be possible, sincerity itself must be in bad faith’ (Sartre, 1956, p. 112)? Surely such a view is absurd! ‘There is such a thing as simply and sincerely getting on with whatever it is that you are doing’ (Burns, 1970, p. 94). And how could the view that we are always in bad faith be compatible with any kind of first-person authority?”

I have tried to mitigate the force of this objection by arguing that we should distinguish Sartre’s treatment of the emotions from his account of agency, but there is clearly a tension here. As Burns puts it, “Sartre has one tenable position — when he urges the constant *possibility* of metastability in our beliefs, hopes, intentions and self-images; and he has another and implausible one — when he insists on the permanent *necessity* of the dualism” (Burns, 1970, p. 92) of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. The problem, I suspect, is made sticky by that residue of voluntarism that we find in Sartre’s account. Let me conclude by returning to it.

I suggested that Sartre’s treatment of the emotions is less voluntaristic than it at first seems, and that any remaining voluntaristic residue can, in principle, be scraped from the insights that Sartre helps us arrive at about first-person authority by noticing that those insights can be derived as readily from thinking about sensation as from thinking about emotions. We also saw that Sartre’s treatment of sensations and perceptual appearances was strikingly similar to Wittgenstein’s, but I left untouched a further feature of his critique of the notion of pure sensation. He criticizes not only the tendency of psychologists to treat sensations and appearances as though they were special objects inhabiting consciousness, but also their thinking of those objects as “inert, passive, and simply lived” (Sartre, 1956, p. 414). Clearly, Sartre means to say more than that sensations and appearances are not objects, and the obvious contrast with something “inert, passive, and simply lived” is something sustained, interactive and created. Even in the case of sensation, there remains a residue of voluntarism.

⁸ See Hyman (2017, pp. 74–120). See also Bar-On (2004) and Hacker (1993, pp. 83–96) for alternative accounts.

We have an exegetical choice here. If sensations are not passive undergoings, we could say that Sartre is extending a voluntaristic view of consciousness even to sensations like pain so that we would have to see pain as something that we either produce in ourselves or make ourselves open to. In that case, apart from some extraordinary examples we might be able to imagine, we ought to conclude that this aspect of Sartre's view is simply implausible. Alternatively, we could say that this view is so implausible that it cannot be what Sartre intends. This would require finding some description contrary to "inert, passive, and simply lived" that does not amount to a kind of voluntarism, but if we could do this, then I think it would also allow us to scrape the remaining residue of voluntarism from Sartre's treatment of the emotions.⁹

Might we look for a satisfactory resolution of this problem in Sartre's understanding of consciousness as that "*being by which nothingness comes to things*" (Sartre, 1956, p. 57)? The hope would be to find at the basis of this nothingness "not a nihilating act, which would require in turn a foundation in Being, but an ontological characteristic of the Being required" (Sartre, 1956, p. 58). Sartre suggests that, for example, objects could never appear to us in space if it were not for the "nihilating" character of consciousness, which allows a line segment to appear to us as delimited by its end points (Sartre, 1956, p. 54). This ontological characteristic might *seem* distant from the voluntarism I want to avoid, but, in Sartre's hands, it proves to be nothing other than "*freedom*" (Sartre, 1956, p. 60). So, what seemed like a way out of voluntarism leads us right back to it. Perhaps there is a way of understanding the nihilating power of consciousness as something other than freedom, but we would have to work against Sartre's text to do so. The residue of voluntarism is sticky, indeed.

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⁹ For the emotions, there are other ways of doing this, of course, as the Baier-Burns view mentioned in Section 2 hints. For a sophisticated account, see Campbell (1997, pp. 103–134). But it is difficult to see how such considerations will help us reinterpret Sartre's remarks about sensations.

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