

Research Paper

SAMPLE

Social Ontology of Jean-Paul Sartre

In the essay *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Jean-Paul Sartre deals with a considerable undertaking of philosophical independence for the reason that it develops a phenomenological theory of consciousness that is not only inspired by the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl but at the same time appears to be an immanent critique of the same. In this essay, Sartre expresses his critical point of view regarding Husserl's new transcendental-phenomenological concept, advocating a return to research achievements from *Logical Investigations*.

The most prominent meta criticism is the transcendental ego, which appears to be the necessary pole of subjectivism that subordinates our experience. Sartre is of the opinion that such a transcendental approach is not only needed but is ultimately even incompatible with Husserl's theory of consciousness developed in earlier writings. As a result, Sartre provides a reinterpretation of the role and status of the ego, rejecting this transcendental concept for the theory of a completely empirical transcendental ego. What exactly this criticism looks like and what Sartre implies under the term "transcendent ego" will be explained in this chapter.

The essay *The Transcendence of the Ego* was published as an expert scientific paper that did not provide the explanation of the premises from which it moves for the reason that Sartre proceeded from the assumption that the reader was already familiar with the foundations of Husserl's phenomenology. For the sake of clarity, the main premise in this paper is particularly prominent. It is a record of the data of one's own conscious experiences, which Husserl calls "Cartesian certainty" in *Logical Investigations*, demanding of his phenomenology a strictly scientific character modeled on the basis of the scientific claims of Descartes's statement, "Cogito, ergo sum." In this work, Husserl notes that conscious experiences are "evident only in their living intent, which cannot be adequately communicated with words" (Husserl, 2001).

Sartre, therefore, starts from the premise that consciousness is marked by a direct record of its own experiences, creating a methodological syncretism of the Cartesian first truth and the Husserlian "return to the very things." Methodologically, he does not question the record of his own experiences, but he examines the way in which they give us their own. The question therefore is, "Is the one we encounter in our consciousness enabled by the synthetic unity of our imaginations, or does it unite conceptions?" (Sartre, 1957).

In the late philosophy of Husserl, Sartre takes note of a problematic answer to this question since Husserl postulates a transcendental self, which he understands as the necessary condition for the possibility of cognition, skipping simply the aforementioned question. While Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* speaks of the transcendental self as of "the highest synthesis of experience," providing a depiction of it as of the greatest possible abstraction, Husserl regards it as a transcendental principle that recognizes the methodological undertaking of the epoch as the necessary condition for the synthesis of our experience.

It is not about one of the many conditions for cognition, but about a specific self to which the experience relates. Husserl does not explain it by describing the self but assumes it as a transcendental self that organizes the plurality of experiences by uniting them into consciousness. However, as it will be shown at the end of this chapter, it is not Husserl's intention: while Husserl sees in the transcendental self the necessary condition for experience, Sartre sees in it the *apropos* of the principle that constitutes consciousness. Husserl has an interest in the things that will be recorded on the level of reflection as a necessary condition for the synthetic unity of consciousness, while Sartre has an interest in the ontogenesis of consciousness and self.

Instead of being satisfied with Husserl's methodological cataloging of what reflections reveal, Sartre goes a step further, asking the question of the origin and the constitution of consciousness and self. Sartre's criticism, therefore, is simultaneously



immanent as well as the external critique of Husserl. It does not criticize Husserl exclusively within the methodological framework of transcendental phenomenology. Instead, it starts with the original idea of a particular phenomenology.

As a consequence, Sartre demonstrates a critical attitude towards the egological constellation of consciousness that we encounter in the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl, asking whether consciousness experiences require a unifying function of the transcendental self. Therefore, it is his task to make a demonstration of how conscious experiences can be organized into the overall impression that the subject raises. In the process of solving this problem, Sartre makes use of the concept of transversal intentionality that was developed by Husserl in his work *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness* for the purpose of explaining the way that awareness in the context of time constructs awareness of duration. This property is able to be illustrated by the example of a melody. That is for the reason that we can know it as a series of tones if it is possible to synthesize the past and current but also the future or expected tones. When we talk about the presence of past tones that actively shape the perception of the present moment, we are talking about retention. A series of sounds in this way becomes a continuum that we perceive as a whole that we call a melody. The end of the melody is marked by the expectation of the final tone, and this focus on the future, thereby interfering with the present, is called a protest by Husserl.

According to Prechtl's point of view, it does not work for the reason that there is so much difficulty in presenting the presence of past impressions at the present moment in everyday speech (Prechtl, 1998, p. 94). Zahavi explains this in the following way, "Let us imagine that we are listening to a triad that consists of the tones of C, D, and E. If we concentrate our attention on the last part of that discourse, which is the one that appears when the tone E rings, we find no consciousness that is solely aware of the tone E but the consciousness that is still always aware of the two previous notes, D and C. (...) These were the tones that were perceived as passed, which is the reason why we can really experience the triad in time, not just as isolated tones that are suddenly changed by one another. We can observe time items for the reason that consciousness is not captured in the present. We are not only observing the present phase of the triumph, but also its past and future phases" (Zahavi, 2010).

By means of this concept, Sartre in *The Transcendence of the Ego* comes to the following conclusion, "Self-consciousness is united specifically through the game of transversal intentionality, which is concrete and real retention of past consciousness. In this way, consciousness is constantly returning to it; who says 'consciousness' says 'total consciousness,' and this unique attribute belongs to the very consciousness, whatever, after all, its relationship with 'I' was" (Sartre, 1949). Consciousness, therefore, has no need for a transcendental ego that will unite a multitude of conscious acts. The individualization of consciousness is the property of consciousness itself; it is intentional, and also it is united by an intentional act, transcending itself. The melody is transcendent with a multitude of amorphous sounds, combining certain conscious experiences and forming a meaningful whole. This unity is given to us in the form of an overall impression of one particular melody. Some tones, therefore, are perceived in synthetic integrity so that a melody can be perceived.

Consciousness always appears to be the synthetic integrity that has already been achieved, and as already indicated, this phenomenon of consciousness is pre-personal; it does not have a need for an ego. Refuting the transcendental ego with the rationale that consciousness does not have the need for a transcendental ego that unites a multitude of conscious experiences is not only Sartre's attempt to reject superfluous concepts, developing his theory in accordance with the principle of some conceptual economy. His critique is formulated on the basis of two points, namely, on the superfluity of the transcendental ego and on its detriment. The most important part of his criticism is not based on the excess of this transcendental ego, but on its detriment to the whole conception of consciousness.



The fundamental question, therefore, is not whether it is necessary to postulate the transcendental ego, but whether such an egology is still compatible with the conception of consciousness that was developed by Husserl in the earlier writings, "Since Husserl considered the view that 'I' was synthetic and the transcendent product of consciousness, he returned in the ideas again to the classical thesis of transcendental self, which would be like in the background of any consciousness, which would be a necessary structure of that consciousness, whose rays would fall to every phenomenon that appeared in the field of attention. In this way, transcendental consciousness becomes strictly personal. Was this concept necessary? Does it seem to be compatible with Husserl's definition of consciousness?" The key notion of this critique is the transparency of consciousness, the expression that is in complete accordance with the intentional content of the directed transcendence of consciousness.

As a result, consciousness, because of its intentional structure, exhausts completely in the transcendence of itself, posing as a complete presence in the intended objects. "All of the consciousness is awareness of something," Husserl says. Consciousness is, therefore, transparent and without substance. The unity of all conscious acts does not initiate the subject of a specific transcendental structure but objects that we are aware of. A variety of conscious acts are absorbed in the intentional object, as was shown on the example of a melody that appears to be the synthetic integrity of the experienced tones; in order to make it sound in the form of a melody, a synthetic unity of past acts is needed in the form of one consciousness.

The perception of consciousness as it is approached by Sartre possesses holistic features. Whereas the acts of consciousness seem to be technical terms that are meant to signify the integrity of conscious experiences in an intentional object, we have the possibility to perceive the phenomenon such as consciousness as the highest synthesis of all these conscious acts; conscious acts are part of the theoretical model, and we are not separately conscious of them, while consciousness is exactly the way we are conscious of this plurality in the form of a conscious whole. Their relationship appears to be similar to the relationship between the tone and the melody. The latter can be broken down into tones, irrespective of the fact we are aware of them in the context of a particular melody.

What Sartre is willing to avoid is the need for a transcendental ego that would create a synthesis of conscious acts, uniting them in a transcendental unity of consciousness. Refusal of Brentano's distinction between immanent and transcendent intentional content of consciousness was followed by Husserl's Logical Investigations, and Brentano's model immanent intentional content was also criticized by Sartre. Brentano's model is experiencing difficulties because the experience is a phenomenon. One such epistemological structure of consciousness seems to be irreconcilable with the Cartesian certainty of one's own conscious experiences because it is aware of the perception of an object that appears to the subject.

According to the things that Husserl has already said, "the occurrences themselves do not appear, they are perceived" (Husserl, 2001). If the experience of some consciousness is immanent in the form of a phenomenon, it is always a necessity to postulate some additional awareness that will experience it, and since it will also act as a phenomenon, it is endless recourse. The experience is, therefore, not immanent consciousness, but consciousness fully appears as an experience. Since consciousness does not have the need for a transcendental self that is fully focused on objects and that is completely exhausted as an experience, it appears to be completely transparent; it is nothing more than presence in things that is absolutely uncontaminated by immanent content.



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