

# ProfLotz, Phl421, Sartre, The Origin of the Negation, Session I

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1. Sartre in interview: the goal of BN is to demonstrate how one can understand human freedom *and* its being in reality without falling back onto idealism or determinist mechanism.
2. Repeat
  - a. We now have two transphenomenalities: the being of consciousness and the being of the phenomena: consciousness “is” and phenomena “are” → beyond idealism and realism
  - b. Both the in-itself and self-consciousness are *absolute*; they cannot be derived from anything else in a genetic way
  - c. We could argue that the in-itself is made *possible* by something else, but S argues that the concept of possibility belongs to consciousness and that this assumption would not solve anything, insofar as that which makes the in-itself possible itself has “to be”
  - d. Consciousness depends upon the it-self, insofar as phenomena have to “be” in order to be revealed as the “of” of consciousness
  - e. The in-itself is not sufficient, insofar as we cannot think a universe without *differentiation*; so, the in-itself (since it is *phenomenon*) needs to appear *for* someone
  - f. The for-itself can only be insofar as it is *not* in-itself, i.e., it must be a *self-relation*, i.e, a *self-negation*: *it can only be itself because it is not itself*
3. Summary
  - a. “Sartre's central claims are that nothingness belongs to the fabric of reality, and that the possibility of real nothingness is explained by the identity of consciousness with nothingness. Sartre's argument for the theory can be understood as proceeding in four stages: (1) Negation is an irreducible and necessary component and condition of cognition, but cannot be reduced to a function of judgement. (2) Negation is ontologically real: its reality is attested phenomenologically, for we discover nothingness as a concrete object of experience. (3) The reality of nothingness must be regarded as deriving from consciousness' power to negate. (4) Consideration of other theories of nothingness - those of Hegel and Heidegger - leads us to conclude that consciousness has the power to negate because *consciousness is nothingness.*” (Gardner 2009, 61)
4. Negation
  - a. If there is only the in-itself, then don't we have to assume that “non-being” cannot be located on the side of being; instead, we would need to claim that it is only “present” in judgments *about* the in-itself
  - b. THESIS: The upshot of the readings for today is that Sartre tries to show that non-being can be experienced; it is pre-linguistic and pre-judgmental; it must be located on the side of the phenomena, insofar as something can be *experienced AS* non-being; so, *although non-being needs subjectivity to be revealed, it cannot be reduced to subjectivity*
5. S argues that so far he remained abstract, since he has not yet demonstrated how consciousness and the in-itself form a totality

6. Ontological “source” of consciousness = nothingness (34)
7. Totality (34)
  - a. Heidegger: being-in-the-world
  - b. Sartre: relation between consciousness and the in-itself + cannot be reflective
  - c. So, we are looking for a totality that is transparent on the level of concrete human existence in the world
8. The questioner (35)
  - a. Questioning presupposes some pre-reflective familiarity with the relation between “man” and world
  - b. Every question presupposes some familiarity with yes and *no*
  - c. For example, “What’s wrong with the computer?” Perhaps the answer is: “It’s not plugged in.” Perhaps one of the memory chips has failed (that is, it’s not working any more). Perhaps there’s nothing wrong with the computer — it’s supposed to do that! All of these are negative replies that presuppose something negative about the computer itself. (from Spade, online)
9. Non-being (36)
  - a. The answer to the question might be negative
  - b. The questioner is in a state of not-knowing
  - c. Truth is limited by non-truth
  - d. So, he wants to say that we have some pre-linguistic “familiarity” with non-being
10. Example: money
  - a. There ARE 1300 dollars in my pocket
  - b. I expected 1500 dollars in my pocket
  - c. I judge: there *are only* 1300 dollars in my pocket
  - d. S argues that the “only” indicates the experience of “not 1500” *as the basis* of my judgement
11. Judgments
  - a. Is non-being propositional and exclusively tied to judgments *about* phenomena?
    - i. Non-being must be related to experience (intentionality), but S argues that this does not mean that non-being is “subjective” (38)
    - ii. Judgments are the result of questions, but questions can be non-linguistic
    - iii. I can question “the carburetor” because “I consider it possible that ‘there is nothing there’” (39); so, S follows that we have a “pre-judicative comprehension of non-being” (39)
12. Example: destruction
  - a. Must be related to human existence, i.e., the for-itself and transcendence (something or someone must transcend the in-itself → differentiation)
    - i. Activity
    - ii. Something else
    - iii. No longer
    - iv. Is an “objective” fact and does not come into being through intentionality; I experience the destruction as “less than before” because destruction *is* the possibility of “being gone” 40
13. Example: Pierre in the café

- a. Is the “absence” of P in the café the result of a judgment alone, or is the judgment possible because the in-itself somehow shows that P *is not* there
- b. P’s absence *is detected* by perception and searching in the café; despite the “fullness” and “positivity” of the phenomena, P *is seen as not being there*
- c. Many people are absent in the café: Wellington is not there either, but, S argues, this is based on an abstract thought, whereas the absence of P is *experienced*, i.e., belongs to intentionality (and therefore to the phenomena)
- d. Husserl in *Analyses of Passive Syntheses + Experience and Judgement*: claims something similar to S: we *perceive* that something is not there, otherwise than expected, or different than before (think of truth reversals)

14. Upshot

- a. The “not” cannot simply belong to the mind as an organizing category 43
- b. The “not-being” is like the it-self, i.e., it is a way in which the phenomena are experienced in many ways: hate, regret, prohibitions, loss, absence, fear, death
- c. S calls these experiences *negatites* (55)
- d. Transcendence must be based on the possibility of non-being (52)
- e. The for-itself is itself *negative*, insofar as it surpasses the in-itself (52)

15. What’s coming (hold your breath):

- a. Nothingness cannot somehow be generated by the in-itself (remember: being just “is;” it does not do anything)
- b. Absences, lacks, destructions, limits, etc. can only be discovered by the for-itself because the for-itself must itself be characterized by lack, i.e., by the non-being; in fact, S argues that the for-itself is the non-being
- c. So, since being cannot “differentiate” itself, the differentiation, i.e., the negation must come through something that being *is not*, which, acc to Sartre, is the for-itself
- d. Historically: S comes very close to Fichte who also claims that the being can only be negated by something (self-consciousness) that *is not*; i.e. whose essence *is the negation*

Terminology:

1. Non-being and nothingness are used interchangeably
2. Negation refers to the “activity” of the for-itself
3. Negatites: experiences of non-being, such as lack, limit, falseness, reversals, surprises, only, no longer, etc.,
4. Nihilation: something turns into nothing; i.e. to nihilate nothingness = to constitute it (“double”)