

Sartre and Psychoanalysis:

The Nature of Freedom & Change in Clinical Practice

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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The topic of my paper today is **Sartre and Psychoanalysis**. This is a broad topic, for Sartre had a lot to say about psychoanalysis. Given the limited time, however, I will try my best to limit my comments on this exciting subject to forty minutes or so, and leave some time for discussion.

My relationship with Sartre and psychoanalysis is both complex and deeply personal. I discovered Sartre in my teens, the perfect age, looking back, to make his acquaintance. I grew up in Cuba in the 1950s, where my father, an American entrepreneur and chemical engineer, became friends with Ernest Hemingway, among the few American expatriates living on the Island. I was fond of Hemingway, and remember his mentioning his friend, Sartre, who was about to visit Cuba with Simone de Beauvoir after Castro seized power. Hemingway thought that Sartre was a shit, the epitome of the French intellectual that Hemingway got to know when living in Paris during the 1920s. But he admired Sartre's writing, as well as his celebrity, and most of all he admired his success. Though

Sartre was not awarded the Nobel Prize for literature until after Hemingway's death, which Hemingway won in 1954, they were bonded by Hemingway's impact on French writing, especially Sartre's, and their mutual admiration. They were both non-conformists, and they each insisted that the only way to live is authentically, no matter the cost. One of the things I admired most about Hemingway was that he knew how to *live!* He loved the life he was living, and treated it as an adventure. Hemingway and Sartre were, as my Irish grandmother once suggested, a pair to draw to!

I was too young to read Sartre then, but a few years later, after my family had abandoned Cuba for their native Tennessee, I checked him out. Sartre introduced me to existential philosophy, and it became a sort of religion for me, if a secular one. This was also around the time I discovered Sigmund Freud, and I formed this surprising idea that Sartre and Freud were saying the same thing, but in different languages. In the years that followed, I managed to get through Sartre's early philosophical works, but it was the section devoted to existential psychoanalysis in *Being and Nothingness* that riveted my attention. By the time I graduated from High School, I had decided I was going to become an existential psychoanalyst – whatever that was!

Life has a funny way of throwing us a curve now and then. Without warning, Tennessee drafted me into the Army and sent me to Vietnam, in the summer of 1966. Like many of my compatriots there, I was convinced I was sent there to die. I was lucky, however, to be assigned to an intelligence unit in Saigon, and this afforded me the luxury to read in my off time. I dove into Sartre and Nietzsche. They taught me that we are always dying, that the closer we get to death, the more precious life becomes. I think Sartre in particular helped me live my death, and survive it, and for that I will always be grateful to him.

After I separated from the Army, I moved to San Francisco to study psychology. That was when I discovered R. D. Laing, the Scottish psychiatrist and existential psychoanalyst. By 1970 Laing was the most famous psychiatrist in the world, due to his bestselling books and his groundbreaking work with schizophrenia. I was soon on my way to London, having abandoned my graduate studies, in order to work with him.

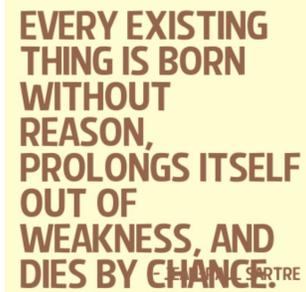
Like me, Laing was passionate about Sartre. One may even read Laing's classic, *The Divided Self*, as an integration of Sartre's philosophy and object relations theory. This was unusual. Nearly all the psychiatrists who were drawn to existential philosophy after

World War II embraced Heidegger, not Sartre. Perhaps this was because so many of them were German-speaking psychiatrists, or because they were captivated by Heidegger's impenetrable prose. Or they may have been put off by Sartre, the bad boy of existential philosophy. Perhaps worst of all, Sartre was a Frenchman!

I think what bonded me to Laing was that we had both discovered Sartre in our youth, in the throes of rebelliousness, and were each drawn to his contempt for everything *bourgeois* and conventional. This attitude is not typical of people who choose to enter the so-called mental health professions. As a class, I would characterize my colleagues as unremittingly conventional, uncommonly anxious, materialistic social climbers. I know this sounds harsh, even petty, yet some of my best friends are psychoanalysts! But this is the kind of observation that Sartre inspired, perhaps the reason why few of my colleagues gravitated to him.

What I want to talk about today, however, is Sartre's relationship with Freud, epitomized by his critique of psychoanalysis in *Being and Nothingness*. Freud, too, was a bad boy, a trouble-maker, and obsessed with sex. This was probably what drew me to him as a teenager. Sartre and Freud: *another* pair to draw to! So here I am, in the company of the three bad boys of the twentieth-century *avant-garde*: Sartre, Laing, and Freud. I was in heaven.

So what is the relation between Sartre and psychoanalysis? I suspect all of you are familiar with what he says about this in *Being and Nothingness*, so I won't summarize what he has to say about it there. Instead, I want to focus on how Sartre's thinking transformed psychoanalysis into a truly human, which is to say, inherently *personal*, way of engaging clinical practice. In order to do this I will explore three topics that are basic to understanding the therapeutic process. The first concerns Freud's conception of the *unconscious*. The second is the concept of *freedom*, and the role it plays in psychoanalysis. And third, what is the nature of *change*? How does this come about? And what, exactly, do we mean by change?



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Freud's Conception of Psychic Reality

Let's begin with Freud's concept of the unconscious, and the problems this concept continues to engender. Freud's first topography for demarcating a distinction between conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind concerned the nature of fantasy and the role it plays in neurosis. After he experimented with hypnotism Freud surmised that each person is preoccupied with two kinds of fantasies: one I am aware of and the other I am not. Freud opted to label those that I am not aware of "unconscious," because we have no reflective experience of them. These so-called unconscious fantasies have been repressed, but because they still reside "in" the unconscious they engender psychic conflict, which results in our dream life as well as our psychopathology.

Freud's first, topographical, model of the unconscious was simple: one portion of the mind is conscious and the thoughts it contains are in the forefront of awareness (or *reflective experience*), whereas another portion of the mind is unconscious and composed of fantasies that have been repressed. Freud also included a third element in this topography, the "preconscious," which contains unconscious thoughts and memories that can be recollected at will. Freud's topographical model served as a map of what he terms "psychic reality." Freud's depiction of psychic reality is contrasted with *factual reality*, which is investigated by the empirical sciences and readily available for study.

Yet, in what sense can one treat fantasies as "realities" when, after all, they are not *real*? Freud recognized that fantasies can be *experienced* as real in a similar way that objective reality is experienced. In other words, fantasies, though not literal depictions of the past, nevertheless convey meaning, and such meanings are capable of telling us more about our patients than the so-called facts of their history. By *interpreting* both fantasies and their consequent symptoms as meaningful, Freud was able to obtain truths about his patients that were otherwise hidden. His opposition between "psychic" and "external"

realities served to juxtapose an inherently *personal* reality with a more *concrete* one. This isn't to say that concrete, or objective, reality is necessarily false, but it was Freud's genius to see that the truth about one's history can be derived from the communication of otherwise innocuous reflections, by interpreting a patient's fantasies as disguised messages. The recognition that fantasies could be conceived as messages suggested there was something "concealed" in them that the patient neither recognized nor understood.

This means that fantasies serve a purpose: they disclose the intentional structure of the individual's deepest longings and aspirations. They tell us what we desire. But Freud lacked a conception of intentionality that could explain how his patients were able to convey truths they didn't "know" in a disguised and indirect manner. In other words, his patients *unconsciously intended* their symptoms and the attendant fantasies that explained them – they weren't "caused" by their unconscious. Yet, Freud seemed conflicted as to the origin of such symptoms. He never entirely abandoned the idea that they must be *caused* by some "traumatic" something or other. If not external reality, then perhaps the vicissitudes of our unconscious fantasy life?

Despite the recent development of relational analysis, which claims to approach the treatment situation from a more interpersonal perspective, contemporary psychoanalysts, with few exceptions, find it agreeable to use terms in which the *impersonal* aspect of the unconscious predominates. Analysts remain wedded to the notion that non-personal aspects of the mind account for the unconscious motives that guide us in our daily affairs, which in turn produce our psychopathology.



Sartre's Critique of the Unconscious

Whereas Freud depicted psychoanalysis as essentially a science of the *unconscious*, it is impossible to deny that it is also a science – if we can call it that – which is preoccupied with *consciousness*, if only implicitly. Terms like truth, epistemology, knowledge, understanding, and comprehension pervade every psychoanalytic paper that is devoted to the unconscious as a concept. This is also the subject matter that Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger, and Ricoeur devoted a considerable amount of their philosophical writings to: What is the nature of knowledge and what role does it serve in our everyday lives? Of all the phenomenologists, it was Sartre who took psychoanalysis the most seriously, even conceiving his own brand of “existential psychoanalysis” (1981).

In Sartre's critique of psychoanalysis (1962, pp. 48-55; 1981, pp. 153-171) he rejected Freud's topographical model for similar reasons that Freud eventually did. In the topographical model the only thing separating the system-conscious from the system-unconscious is the so-called “censor,” which, according to Freud, regulates what is permitted into consciousness and, contrariwise, what is repressed into the unconscious. This means that the censor is aware of everything, that which is conscious and unconscious alike. Yet because the ego is *unaware* of the censor, this model posits a “second consciousness” (the censor) that is both unknown and unknowable to the ego. Sartre's problem with this model is obvious: the so-called censor is the defacto “person” who is being analyzed and disclaims knowledge of all the shannanigans he employs in order to disguise what he is up to, an edition of what Sartre terms “bad faith.” Freud also had problems with the implications of a “second thinking subject,” and decided to discard this model for one that contained only one subject that *knows* anything – the conscious portion of the ego – and not one, but *three* subjects that do not know anything: the id, the superego, and the unconscious portion of the ego that employs defense mechanisms.

Freud's subsequent revision of his earlier model, however, fares little better in Sartre's opinion. The topographical model is replaced with one that is less concerned with demarcating conscious and unconscious portions of the psyche than with determining the complex nature of psychic “agency,” or subjectivity. Sartre's complaint with the new model is that it still fails to resolve the problem of *bad faith*, the problem of a “lie without a liar.” If anything, the new model gets even further away from Sartre's efforts to *personalize* the unconscious, by instituting three psychic agencies that protect the

conscious ego from any responsibility for its actions. *How would Sartre propose to remedy this situation, to account for those actions that Freud claimed the “conscious” patient is “unconscious” of devising, while holding the conscious patient responsible for performing them?*

Sartre accomplishes this by introducing two sets of critical distinctions into the prevailing psychoanalytic vocabulary. The first is a distinction between *pre-reflective* consciousness and *reflective* consciousness, and the second is between *consciousness* and *knowledge*. Sartre summarizes the basic dilemma in Freud’s conception of the unconscious with the following questions: how can the subject not know that he is possessed of a feeling or sentiment that he is in possession of? And, if the unconscious is just another word for *consciousness* (Sartre’s position), how can the subject not know what he is “conscious” of? Sartre’s thesis of “pre-reflective” consciousness is his effort to solve this riddle. Following Husserl, Sartre saw consciousness as *intentional*, which means it is always conscious *of something*. This means there is no such thing as “empty” consciousness; nor is there such a thing as a “container” or “receptacle” that houses consciousness. Instead, consciousness is always “outside” itself and “in” the things that constitute it as *consciousness-of something*. In Sartre’s (1957) words:

Intentionality is not the way in which a subject tries to make “contact” with an object that exists beside it. *Intentionality is what makes up the very subjectivity of subjects.* (pp. 48-49) [emphasis in original]

In other words, the concept of intentionality renders subjectivity as already a *theory of intersubjectivity*, since to *be* a subject is to be engaged with some thing “other” than one’s self – even if this other something is merely an idea. Sartre elaborates how this thesis would be applied to the social world in this famous passage from *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1957):

When I run after a streetcar, when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in contemplating a portrait, there is no *I* (or “ego”). There is [only] consciousness *of the streetcar-having-to-be-overtaken*, etc . . . In fact, I am then plunged into the world of objects; it is *they* which constitute the unity of my consciousness; it is *they*

which present themselves with values, with attractive and repellent qualities – but *me* – I have disappeared; I have annihilated myself [in the moment of conscious apprehension]. (pp. 48-49)

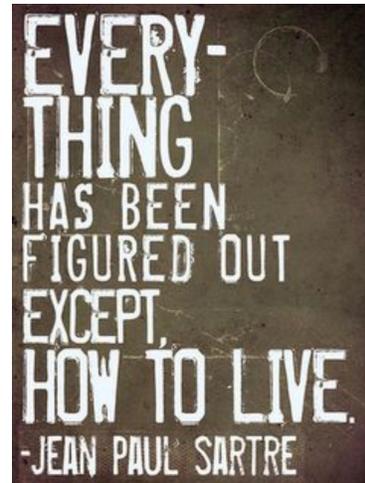
This means that when I experience a rock, a tree, a feeling of sadness, or the object of my desire in the bedroom, I experience them just where they are: beside a hill, on the meadow, in my heart, in relation to myself and my beloved. Consciousness and the object-of-consciousness are given at one stroke. These things constitute my consciousness of them just as I constitute their existence as things through the act by which I perceive them and give them a name. And because naming things is a purely human activity, these things do not exist as rocks, trees, or emotions in the absence of a human consciousness that can apprehend them through the constitutive power of language.

Yet, such acts of apprehension don't necessarily imply "knowledge" of what I am conscious of. This is because Sartre distinguishes between the *pre-reflective* apprehension of an object and our *reflective* "witnessing" of the act. Ordinarily when I am pre-reflectively conscious of a feeling, for example, I intuit the feeling of sadness and, in turn, reflectively acknowledge this feeling *as* sadness: I feel sad and experience myself as a sad person simultaneously. But I am also capable of feeling sadness, or anger, or envy without *knowing* I am sad, or angry, or envious. When this is suggested to me by my analyst I am startled by this observation. Initially, I may resist my analyst's interpretation and reject it. But I may eventually admit it because, when bringing this to my attention, I am also capable, after reflection, of recognizing this feeling *is mine*. Sartre argues that I would be incapable of recognizing thoughts or ideas that I claim no awareness of *unless I had been conscious of these feelings in the first place, on a pre-reflective level*. Though conscious, the pre-reflective isn't known; according to Sartre, it is *lived*.

In other words, what Freud labels consciousness Sartre designates "reflective consciousness" (i.e., knowing *that* I am conscious of this or that), and what Freud labels the unconscious (or preconscious) Sartre designates as that moment of pre-reflective consciousness that, due to *bad faith*, has not yielded to reflective awareness and, with that awareness, "knowledge" of it. This is why I can be conscious of something that I have no immediate knowledge of, and why I can become knowledgeable about something that I am, so to speak, "unconscious" of, but am subsequently able to recognize and

acknowledge. This implies that I can only *experience* something I have knowledge of, but not what I am pre-reflectively “conscious” of.

The difference between Sartre’s and Freud’s respective formulations isn’t that it merely substitutes Freud’s terminology with Sartre’s. On a more radical level it eliminates a need for the notion of a “second thinking subject” *behind* or beneath consciousness, and offers a way to personalize the unconscious in a manner that eluded Freud.



Sartre and Emotions

I now want to review Sartre’s critique of the emotions, and his transformation of a psychoanalysis rooted in psychology to one rooted in phenomenology. First I want to ask, what *are* emotions? There is no shortage of theories that try to tackle this problem, yet no consensus on a definition. For some emotions are distinct from cognition and judgment, while for others our feelings are central to decision-making and even determine our judgments. It’s undeniable that emotions tell us things that our cognitions often miss. Moreover, emotions are often the driving force behind our motivations, whether positive or negative. And what about the relationship between emotion and desire? Are emotions derived from desires, or are they determinant? Whatever they are, we cannot deny that we would be not be human without them.

The term, emotion dates back to 1579 when it was adapted from the French *émouvoir*, meaning “to stir up.” It was first introduced to academic circles to replace a similar term, passion. Though the two terms have often been used interchangeably, passion is typically employed when referring to sexual feelings. There is also the problem with their

respective etymology. Passion derives from the Latin *pati*, meaning to suffer or endure. One can see why the term passion began to take on different connotations than when simply feeling this or that. The French *émouvoir* appeared to solve the problem. Like the term, feeling, with which emotion is used synonymously, an emotion is of brief duration, whereas “moods” last longer. The more recent “affect,” adopted by psychoanalysis, encompasses all three.

Psychoanalysis went a long way in explaining how human behavior is not orchestrated by random events, because actions always have a motive, an intention, a specific end, even if we are ignorant of what the end is. Psychoanalysts were the first to emphasize the *significance* of psychic phenomena, that this seemingly innocent thought or emotion usually stands for something else. The child who steals from his mother’s purse is only trying to reclaim the mother’s love. A girl who faints at the sight of parsley can’t bring herself to recall a painful childhood incident when she was forced to eat vegetables. Yet, often as not, the psychoanalytic interpretation, if only surreptitiously, tends to privilege **causal** antecedents masquerading as interpretations in order to explain pathogenic behavior. History plays a crucial role in our lives, and this is just as true for people suffering from emotional disturbance. This is why I can project onto all women the quality of withholding because my mother was too depressed to comfort my needs. Each time I feel attracted to a woman, I find myself consumed with ambivalence, fear, consternation. The feelings I experience in these situations not only color my understanding of reality. To a significant degree, they determine *who I am*.

Freud’s term for that traumatic moment every child is supposed to experience is the *Oedipus* complex. What makes this complex so compelling is the sense of betrayal that occasions it, feelings that every boy or girl must eventually come to terms with. I can’t say whether Sartre was influenced by Freud’s dark assessment that love plays in our lives. Their respective views on the matter are remarkably similar, and form the basis of Sartre’s many plays and novels.

Emotions may be pleasing or painful. The pleasurable kind we don’t question until they are self-destructive, but even then we rarely oppose them. The painful variety are more invasive, and problematic. Because they elicit distress, we can bear them for only so long. Like Jason clutching the Medusa, we divert our eyes and blind our experience of them with magic, what Freud termed “defense mechanisms.” Our emotional life, always a

mystery to us, inhabits a spectrum between desire and anxiety, each feeding the other. If we are creatures of desire, and anxiety is the price we pay for them, then emotions must be entangled inside those desires in principle. Emotions are not merely barometers that tell me when my desires are satisfied or thwarted. They also possess an intelligence that aims to make my life as agreeable as possible. That's not all. My emotions shelter me from realities that are too painful to stomach. Sartre suggested that emotions are our way of magically transforming a situation we get stuck in, like a fly on a sticky-mat, that we can neither accommodate or escape. In other words, emotions provide a way of escaping situations that would otherwise drive me crazy. According to Sartre:

When the paths before us become too difficult, or when we cannot see our way, we can no longer put up with such an exacting and difficult world. All ways are barred and nevertheless we must act. So then we try to change the world; that is, to live it as though the relation between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes, but by magic. (1962, p. 63)

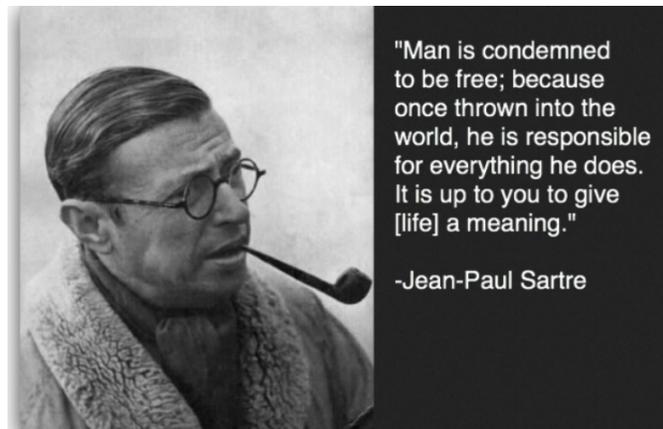
The woman who faints at the sight of her attacker does so, not because it reminds her of some previous event, but because it removes her, albeit magically, from the present situation. She no longer has to face the immediate danger she is in. But this isn't to say she willfully faints with deliberation. She is seized by the situation, a situation that makes demands on her and with which she is unable to cope. Or rather, her manner of coping is so ingenious that it is unrecognizable as such to the unwary observer. The unlikelihood of finding a solution to the problem she faces demands that she invent a solution instead. If she can't take flight in reality, she can do so emotionally, which is to say, magically. Yet an emotional response isn't just a substitute for other kinds of action, other ways of coping because it isn't effectual. It doesn't act on the world but merely changes my perception of it.

On a more basic level, the emotion is a structure of desire. It may be a way of enhancing a desire I enjoy, or a way of coping with a desire that becomes too risky. The person in danger wants to be somewhere else, so the fainting magically fulfills the wish to disappear. Similarly, if I want something I cannot have, my emotions can help remove the

desire itself, allowing me to escape from a bitter disappointment. Sartre invokes the sour grapes analogy as a common rationalization for this strategy.

I lift my hand to pluck a bunch of grapes. I cannot do so; they are beyond my reach; so I shrug my shoulders, muttering: "they are too green" and go on my way [T]his little comedy that I play under the grapes, thereby conferring this quality of being "too green" upon them, serves as a substitute for the action I cannot complete . . . I confer the required quality upon the grapes magically. (pp. 65-66)

Sartre's purpose in his early phenomenological study, *Sketch For A Theory Of The Emotions* (1962), was to show why behaviorism is incapable of explaining the phenomenon of emotions, because behaviorism is stuck in a cause-and-effect universe that cannot account for the *intentional structure* of our motives, our folly, or our madness. Psychoanalysis goes further because it is sensitive to human agency, but then ascribes our motivations to "unconscious" responses to trauma that, if we aren't careful, may be just as causal as behaviorism. At its best, what is often lacking in the psychoanalytic explanation is the personal dimension to motives, because unconscious motives are not, strictly speaking personal, so we can't take responsible for them.



Freedom and Choice

So what are therapy patients supposed to make of this? How are they supposed to effect change in their lives? Isn't this the purpose of therapy: to change our manner of being in

the world, and *improve* it? How can this happen without turning the therapeutic situation into a *technology*? The essential task of existential psychoanalysis as envisioned by Sartre is *hermeneutic*, that is, deciphering the meaning of acts in relation to a synthetic totality underpinned by an original project of being, manifested in a *fundamental choice*. But what is choice, exactly? We ordinarily speak of choice as a volitional, deliberate act that is transparent to itself. This suggests that we are always *behind* our choices, that we weigh them in our minds and, having decided upon this or that option, execute them. Sartre is even sometimes accused of adopting this model, but it isn't that simple.

Say I want to go to the cinema. Which movie do I choose to go see? I look at the options and pick this one over the other. There! I have deliberated, weighed my options, and chosen the one most desirable. Or have I? One of the things that both Freud and Sartre share in common is that neither buys this explanation. Though separated by an enormous gulf in theory, temperament, and vocation, each concluded, as did Heidegger, that choices are free, but not willful. Instead, they are *predetermined*. Something or other predisposed me into making that choice. Freud would say I did so unconsciously, whereas Sartre would argue that the choice occurred on a pre-reflective level. In both cases, it wasn't my ego or "I" that chose the action. The choice executed was rendered before the fact, beneath awareness, in my engagement with the world. The so-called *conscious* choice merely makes it official, after the fact.

In other words, I cannot get *behind* my choices, they are always one step ahead, guiding me this way or that, so the choice itself, and the reasons I make them, are a puzzle. This is why psychoanalysis, as envisioned by Freud, is always retrospective, not prophylactic. Only in behavioral psychology do we play the fiction of deliberating what we intend to do, and then execute the act. In psychoanalysis, the idea is to review *previous* actions, and to learn something about ourselves from them. The actions reviewed may be buried in our childhoods, or they may have occurred moments earlier, in the analytic session. In either case, we are not talking about an *executive* function, but a *reflective* one.

This has led some commentators to conclude that Freud's conception of the unconscious was deterministic. If we don't make our choices "consciously," which is to say, *volunteeristically*, then our choices must be made *for* us – *by* our unconscious. This implies that there is no free choice in the matter, if the choice isn't willfully executed. Psychoanalysts make this assumption because the unconscious is supposed to be

impersonal, not personal. In Freud's tri-partite structure, it isn't "me" guiding my decisions, but the id, Latin for "it." This is the crux of Sartre's problem with the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious, the problem of a lie without a liar, a thought without a thinker, an action without an actor.

What is at stake here is our notion of the self, what comprises the self, and how free the self is. For Sartre, there is no self, so to speak, no "I", not even a subject, if by subject we mean some sort of entity that, like the censor, or a god, orchestrates our lives *via* executive decision making.

Unlike Freud, Sartre roots the person, not in psychology, but in *situation*, in the world to which we belong, the world where we live and die. All of my choices derive from my engagement with that world, not in my psychology. That doesn't mean that I'm determined by that engagement. I am that engagement. I have choices in the matter, and those choices are free, but that doesn't mean I am in control of the situation. The fact that my choices are free doesn't make me Superman. Freedom doesn't make me omnipotent. It isn't a freedom to rule, but a freedom to be me, and ultimately to embrace the me that I am.

This means that my choices are ontological rather than deliberative. Sartre suggests our neuroses goes all the way back to a fundamental choice, in childhood, when we chose what our neurosis would be, on a pre-reflective level. In other words, we *intend* our psychopathology, we are not the "consequence" of this or that trauma. Contrary to psychoanalysis, nothing *caused* my condition. Rather, I *chose* to experience this or that incident as "traumatic."

Given this thesis, how is therapy even possible? If I cannot will myself to health, then how does it come about? As Kierkegaard would say, through indirection. In this context, all my conscious, knowing mind is good for is to acquaint myself with the mystery of my existence and plummet its depths, over an unpredictable amount of time. I cannot *will* myself to overcome my fear of intimacy. I cannot compel myself to love more fully, behave more compassionately, or feel more alive. Yet, all of these transitions may and often do result from the analytic endeavor. How? We don't know, exactly. All we do know is that knowing oneself has the potential to change our lives in this way, to become who we are, authentically. If we are intrepid, over time, this process of self-reflection may result in a change of perspective, and with it, a change in our selves, which is to say, our lives.

This can only happen *indirectly*, over time, *without ever knowing that we have made these changes until after having made them* – and without ever know why.

This is where authenticity comes into the picture. When I tell myself I hate the person I am, that I cannot give up my addictions, that I wish I could be more this or less of that, I am lying to myself. Because every choice I make is a free choice, and because everything that I am is a consequence of the choices I have rendered, I am always the person I wish to be. To be in conflict with myself is to pretend that something or other has “caused” or inclined me to be this way – something other than my free choice to be this way. As we all know, this is inauthenticity in its essence.

This also means that the goal of existential psychoanalysis is to *become* the person I am already, not ambivalently, but unreservedly, wholeheartedly, passionately. This is not an ethical endeavor, to make me a “better person.” I don’t know if Sartre would agree with this, but it seems to me this form of radical self-acceptance that it aspires to is an act of love. This entails falling in love with the person I am and always have been, the same person who lived this life, and suffered its folly, up to this very moment. I hope Sartre will forgive me for this, but at the end of the day, existential psychoanalysis, whatever else it aspires to, is nothing more or less than a cure through love.

September 22, 2017

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