

# Existential aspect of Being: Interpreting J. P. Sartre's Philosophy

Ivan V. Kuzin, Alexander A. Driker & Eugene A. Makovetsky  
Saint Petersburg State University, Russia

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## Abstract

The article discusses rationalistic and existential approaches to the problem of existence. The comparison of Sartre's pre-reflective cogito and Descartes' reflective cogito makes it possible to define how Sartre's thought moves from the thing to consciousness and from consciousness to the thing. At the same time, in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre does not only define the existence of the thing in its passivity—which in many respects corresponds to Descartes' philosophy, but also as an open orientation towards consciousness, the latter concept not being fully developed by him. This statement may be regarded as a hidden component of Sartre's key thesis about the role of the Other in the verification of our existence. The most important factor in understanding this is the concept of the look. Detailed analysis of Sartre's theses in *Being and Nothingness* enables us to demonstrate that the concept of the look makes it possible to consider the identity of being-in-itself and being-for-itself (consciousness).

**Keywords:** Sartre, rationalism, existentialism, thing, being, the look, existence, nothingness, consciousness, the Other

## 1. Introduction

E. Husserl said that being of the object is such “that it is cognisable in itself” (“daß es in seinem Wesen liegt, erkennbar zu sein”). (Ingarden 1992: 176) This statement is important if we are to accept the fact that the possibility of looking at the object correlates with being of the object itself. I can see the object due to the fact that my look at the object is supported by the object itself; thus it possesses something that matches exactly the look as such and makes it possible for the look to focus on that object. The object itself possesses something like the look, but it is ‘something like the look’ rather than the look itself if we traditionally interpret it as an anthropomorphic category:

“...A material thing is not an experience; it is the essence of an absolutely different kind of being, and not ‘a real constituent’ of consciousness, of an experience” (“Also ein materielles Ding ist kein Erlebnes, es ist ein Seiendes von total anderer Seinsart und ist kein ‘reales Bestandteil’ des Bewußtseins, des Erlebnisses”). (Ingarden 1992: 178)

The idea of pre-reflective cogito introduced by Sartre as early as *The Transcendence of the Ego* demonstrates how his attitude to the thing changed: from treating it as something passive, which was characteristic of classical rationalism, to its direct *focus* on consciousness. This change was due to the concept of intentionality, developed by Husserl's phenomenology and transformed by Sartre. Within this framework, it is not only consciousness that is endowed with intentionality but also things themselves, though the latter possess intentionality in a hidden inactive form. This article is an attempt to demonstrate that the notion of the look is a fundamental and *basic* of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, that may explain both *a particular being* and *being in general*.

## 2. Method

Our strategy is textual analysis: we will take disputable and not immediately clear elements of Sartre's discourse in his *Being and Nothingness* and reveal implicit ideas that enrich and elaborate the generally accepted paradigmatic concept of the French philosopher. This is the nature of philosophical rationality, which is different from scientific rationality. Therefore, the suggested approach is a kind of textual analysis that aims to find certain hidden, intuitive assumptions in the text that are not rationally expressed and included, but, nevertheless, convey certain alternative movements of the author's thought that are no less existentially important than explicitly stated ideas. Thereby, we acknowledge the possibility of another perspective based on certain aspects that we identify in the text.

This approach is justified since Sartre as any true philosopher, deliberately or unintentionally, tends to mystify and create paradoxes. This becomes obvious in an apparently contradictory indication that, on the one hand, consciousness is insignificant and impersonal, and, on the other hand, inexorably associated with the human being in quite a personal way through the experiencing and the perception of being. The latter can be confirmed by repeated examples from Sartre's discourse where seemingly impersonal consciousness definitely presents itself in existentially experienced human experience. The most striking example is the detailed characteristic of the essence of the look.

## 3. Results

Sartre's understanding of the factualness of existence is revealed as existence, which is confirmed through consciousness, though not through its reflection apprehending itself as in Descartes' philosophy, but through its natural focus on something revealed, factually and objectively given, i.e. on being-in-itself. To gradually approach the task at hand we are going to touch upon the following aspects:

- a. The *difference* between existent and consciousness should be regarded as an external and perceived aspect of being.
- b. Within the same framework it appears possible to interpret *mutual independence* of being and consciousness as the *basis for their unity*.
- c. As a result, we suggest that we should treat this idea as an extended concept of the look, a certain universal combining both being-in-itself and being-for-itself while presenting itself as a whole in the form of Otherness.

## 4. Discussion

### a. Illusion of difference

#### 4.1. *The problematics of intersubjectivity*

The problematics of intersubjectivity may lie in more abysmal layers than the surface level of human interaction. In our view, the attempt to identify Sartre's look only with the human (as we see in the chapter titled *The Look*), means a certain simplification of those insights and ideas that manifest themselves in the course of careful analysis and contemplation on *Being and Nothingness*. The same happens in the case of a commonplace reference to the fact that Sartre's

“attempt to reconcile the two ('in-itself' and 'for-itself' – I.K., A.D., E.M.) brings him up against a contradiction which reveals the mutually exclusive nature of the categories”. (Martin 1998: 125)

For example, Sartre associates the state of shame only with the human being, which corresponds to a traditional notion that we do not feel ashamed in the presence of things. At the surface level, in his attempt to observe the problem settings, Sartre does not dare to ascribe such an experience to the at-hand existent. The obviousness of this distinction makes the attempt to present being-for-itself as a fundamental characteristic of being-in-itself quite doubtful since the presence of the latter does not create an inter-subjective situation. “Shame is the revelation of the Other not in the way in which a consciousness reveals an object but in the way in which one moment of consciousness implies on the side another moment as its motivation”. (Sartre 1957: 272-273)

Nevertheless, “shame... is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging”. (Sartre 1957: 261) What is of great importance here is the reference to the human being's perception of his objectiveness (being-in-itself), which comes from his perception of the Other's freedom that is responsible for objectification. It is traditionally believed that no objectification can arise from objects co-existing with me, but this is, indeed, an existential illusion, which occurs due to the presence of a more active principle (being of another consciousness) than being of the object. The Other's consciousness may transform me into an object, though, after all, I am not one myself, and I will perceive myself as an object, though I possess the intention of the subject: “Thus the Me-as-object-for-myself is a Me which is not Me; that is, which does not have the characteristics of consciousness”. (Sartre 1957: 273) But that as well may mean that any object contains a ‘petrified’ consciousness, though we agree that “the fact of being-looked-at can not... depend on the object which manifests the look”. (Sartre 1957: 276)

#### **4.2. About problem of equivalence of being and thinking**

J.P. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* can be categorised among those philosophical texts that touch upon a classical problem of equivalence of being and thinking. Through the prism of individual passages of Sartre's text (found already at its very beginning, in the *Introduction*, which is justifiably regarded as “the most difficult part of his book” (Catalano 1985: 17)), we would like to demonstrate what induces us to make such a rather ambiguous statement.

Such ambiguity is, by and large, inherent to Sartre's discourse when, for example, he uses Descartes' framework to doubt Descartes' own fundamental principles in defining the essence of existence, or applies a Hegelian dialectical method to achieve a result, which is different from Hegel's one. We can see that formal dialectical transition from the thing to consciousness is, on the one hand, not alien to Hegel's dialectics, which, indeed, is exploited in various ways throughout the narration, but, on the other hand, is significantly different from those conclusions found in Hegel's philosophy. It is necessary to understand if the dialectical course shaped by Sartre does not just simply follow the path paved by Hegel's dialectics (some authors deal with this problem differently than proposed here. See e.g. Verstraeten 1995; Simont 1998: 32-36; Fry 1988: 39-53; Hackel 2011: 343). Sartre's dialectics results in a paradox, which is confirmed and multiplied every now and then, while Hegel's dialectics leads to synthesis that eliminated paradoxicality and inconsistencies. However, if it is so, it is at that point that we have certain doubts concerning the statement that the philosophy in *Being and Nothingness* is about the equivalence between being and thinking, although Sartre initially was interested in the promise of

phenomenology to “somehow resolve the inner tension of this double ontology of ‘*in-itself*’ and ‘*for-itself*’”. (Safranski 1998: 346)

To start the discussion in this direction, we can address the first difficulty connected with Sartre’s consideration of such notions as ‘phenomenon’, ‘existent’, ‘appearance’, and ‘object’. Here, we have to deal with the possibility of transition from these notions to the definition of the essence of being and consciousness, and of the human existence as a pure possibility (for more information about various aspects of this difficulty, see Salzmann 2000: 17-70; Kremer-Marietti 2005: 24-38). It is generally understood that there is no commonality between the perpetual human self-identification (human self-consciousness that is open to an endless host of possibilities and relegated in its effort to such self-identification) and observed statics and inertia of the existence of the thing. It is already on page 3 that Sartre introduces quite a classical distinction between consciousness and the existent, which he will keep to throughout his work. This is achieved through his reference to the difference between the infinite and the finite, as a result of which, when left to himself, the human begins to be understood as freedom, i.e. as a creature who does not perceive a finite image of himself (himself as an object), but who is self-aware of his infinity, which the existent lacks. (See Sartre 1957: xlvii-xlviii)

However, when we address ourselves to other threads of Sartre’s discourse, we have some good grounds to doubt the strictness of such a distinction. In particular, if we remember his famous analysis of the essence of the look (see Sartre 1957: 252-302), we may come to a conclusion that the finite image (objectiveness) of a subject who is self-aware of his own infinity is still possible due to its interaction with the existential look of another subject found *outside*. Experiencing oneself as an object when being looked at by the Other may, as it were, be fixed and appear only from this one side, i.e. one may remain an object for this Other. But this object (being-in-itself) will contain the Look, which is not detected by the Other, i.e. the object will remain just an object, but it will be characterised by a hidden Look. Here we may refer ourselves to the argument expressed in this respect by the French scholar J.M. Mouillie, according to whom transparency and darkness are identified in terms of both being-in-itself and being-for-itself, but these at first sight confusing contradictory metaphors are by no means accidental, since it is through them that an attempt is made to overcome dualistic and abstract categories of ontology for the sake of introducing them into a immediate existential oneness in a situation. (See Mouillie 2000: 41-61)

The look from outside and the look from inside is the same look that thereby becomes *versatile*, i.e. *the all-seeing eye* is experienced by the subject *simultaneously* as something given from outside and from inside, due to which it can be easily ascribed to the existent (being-in-itself) as well. This experience by the subject structure that Sartre refers to as ‘transcendence in immanence’ can be interpreted as returning *my own look at the thing back to myself* (the one looking at this thing) (see discussion concerning this conceptually difficult structure in the following research paper: Flajoliet 2008: 547-572, 699-762, 794-798). However, it is not its reflection at this thing, but rather *the look that the thing itself casts at me*. The thing as ‘a part of the fullness of being’ is by virtue of its visibility endowed with the ability of metaphysical vision, which is not a convention, a result of anthropomorphic transfer of the subject’s characteristics onto things, but a perceptible *look of a seeing and visible thing*. This does not only reveal departure of Sartre’s existential project from Husserl’s phenomenological definition of how the consciousness relates to the thing seen by it, but also from what is seemingly a principal viewpoint of Sartre himself, who conceptually distinguishes between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. This viewpoint is set out, for example, in the description of the situation of the look: “...The

bush, the farmhouse are not the look; they only represent the eye, for the eye is not at first apprehended as a sensible organ of vision but as the support for the look". (Sartre 1957: 258)

### 4.3. Heidegger and Sartre

The validity of the above mentioned interpretation is confirmed in later interviews with Sartre himself that dealt with the problem of affiliation of all existing things with *being-for-itself* (consciousness). For this reason, we are not quite ready to agree with Hazel Barnes (see Barnes 1992: 15) who believed that these concepts of Sartre were not very carefully thought through by him. Indeed, at this given historic point in philosophy such a characteristic did not seem an eccentricity or an oddity.

This idea was also expressed by Heidegger, whose philosophy influenced Sartre's views. In 1938, M. Heidegger wrote:

"The being does not first acquire Being by nature of human looking upon it, in the sense of a presentation of subjective perception. Rather, the human is the one who is looked upon by beings – the one who is gathered by self-opening beings into presence with them. To be looked at by beings, to be included and maintained and thus supported by their openness, to be driven about by their conflict and marked by their dividedness – that is the essence of humanity in the great age of Greece". (Heidegger 2009: 219)

A bit later, in 1943, in his lectures on Heraklit, he employed the same approach in relation to nature:

"...We cannot say – as some may easily conclude – that Heraklit puts into φύσις any 'personal' and at large human 'experiences' ... as if endowing nature with certain human attitude... While defending this quite a common concept, we act as if everything that is characterised by benevolence and readiness to give were the subject's property who has a preferential right to this... while, in reality, such a situation has existed for only three centuries..." ("Auch dürfen wir nicht, was jemandem leicht einfallen könnte, ...vermerken, Heraklit lege... in die φύσις "persönliche" und überhaupt menschliche "Erlebnisse" hinein..., ...als werde... ein menschliches Verhalten in die "Natur" hinein gedeutet... Wir tun bei dieser weithin üblichen Argumentation so, als sei all solches, was die Art der Gunst und des Gewährens habe, Vorrecht und Eigentum des "Subjekts", ...während ...<dies> doch gerade erste drei Jahrhunderte alt ist..."). (Heidegger 1994: 130)

It is no mere chance that we mention Heidegger here, for he acknowledged that the language should be changed as the character of philosophising changes, while the concept of *Being and Nothingness* came into collision with Sartre's attempt to preserve terminology which is characteristic of classical rationalism. Indeed, Sartre's existentialism presented a new strategy of philosophising, which internally nullified the attempt to rigidly keep to the concepts from the previous tradition and their meanings (for the analysis of Sartre's adherence to the Cartesian tradition and his departure from it, see Joannis 1997: 45-75; Moran 2000: 356-363; Flajoliet 2008: 173-182; McCulloch 1994: 84-98).

Being-in-itself and being-for-itself are declared mutually belonging spheres of being where their difference from each other was established: *being-in-itself* is a reality, or "full positivity" (Sartre 1957: 6), while *being-for-itself* is consciousness, or nothingness. However, despite the fact that being "could not exist without the for-itself, ...neither could the for-itself exist without it" (Sartre 1957: 91), as soon as we begin analysing them in themselves without taking into account

their interconnection, the difference between them disappears and we get a possibility to understand them simultaneously as *nothingness*. Such conceptualisation of the main existentialia of Sartre's ontology will only formally resemble the Hegelian, somewhat cataphatic, dialectics that initially treats being and nothingness as identical notions. For Sartre, "the passage in fact from the one to the other and their reuniting can not be effected" (Sartre 1957: 623), therefore, such dialectics will be closer to the apophatic theology of the One, and we would call it apophatic dialectics. Contradictions that we identify in this case do not serve to reproach Sartre for his failure to thoroughly think through his own concepts. On the contrary, his analytical approach leads to the acknowledgement of an existentially imbued thought: we will never be able to learn (notably, to know) "what being and nothingness are, or in what way they are linked" (Descombes 1980: 54), whereas content analysis of the notions of 'being' and 'non-being' lets us confirm this once again. As noted by J.M. Mouillie (see Mouillie 2000: 27-41), the motif of ignorance in Sartre's philosophy does not mean not knowing something cognisable, but rather self-contradictory knowledge of something uncognisable that is inherently inseparable from human being.

#### **4.4. Being and pre-reflective consciousness**

According to Sartre, the existence (thing) does not conceal any absolute being (essence), that can be conceived through some dialectical movement, for "being is being of them (qualities. – I.K., A.D., E.M.) all equally". (Sartre 1957: xlix) Being acts as discovery of the thing, and it is only in this sense that it becomes the foundation or condition of its exposure. It does not occur outside the phenomenon (the existent) but is its totally actualised existence. It is existence rather than essence of the phenomenon: "There is an indivisible, indissoluble being – definitely not a substance..., but a being which is existence through and through". (Sartre 1957: lv) Therefore, the attempt to raise being to the rank of a certain phenomenon that just receives a privileged status among other phenomena (being of phenomena) has no chance to success since, as a result of this, such being/phenomenon will have to find its being/condition, and so on, indefinitely.

The temptation to declare being as a phenomenon comes from its inevitable givenness to us in our speech when we speak about it, therefore, in order to avoid persistent fallaciousness of such a concept, Sartre has to specially point out its fundamental non-phenomenality, its transphenomenality. That said, this will not mean alienation of being from the phenomenon (the existent). The French philosopher points out that we all have inherent intuition of the phenomenon of existence, which is linked to the visibleness of being of the phenomenon given here and now (see further discussion on the fact that being of the phenomenon is an invisible condition of its revelation in Cabestan 2004: 335-365). This intuition correlates with a rather obscure (in relation to the mind) notion of 'the call of being'. It is at this point that we for the first time discover fertile soil for establishing radical differences ("...Sartre's view of knowledge and consciousness is radically different" (Catalano 1985: 4)) between Descartes and Sartre who introduce the notion of 'existence' into their philosophical concepts. When being is declared as something that is not given immediately as a phenomenon, intuitive fixation of the phenomenon of being proves to be non-being, for its givenness, as aforesaid, is transphenomenal, while only the phenomenal can possess being. It is this interpretation on non-being as contrasted to the attempts to study being as a phenomenon that becomes the condition of revelation of the phenomenon (the existent). Here we find a dialectical explanation of arising inconsistency between two of Sartre's concepts: 1) "being is simply the condition of all revelation" and 2) "not considering being as the condition of revelation". (Sartre 1957: xlix) In the original this thought is expressed more clearly. It says "not being" rather than "not considering being": "L'être est

simplement la condition de tout dévoilement..." and "En considérant non l'être comme condition du dévoilement...". (Sartre 1943: 15)

In the same way as it is impossible to define being as a phenomenon, consciousness also cannot be defined in terms of phenomenology, for consciousness does not present itself in the way the existent does. In this sense, both being and consciousness turn out to be mutually belonging spheres: "Doubtless the for-itself is a nihilation, but as a nihilation it is; and it is in a priory unity with the in-itself". (Sartre 1957: 621) Although it will not definitely lead towards "a 'reconciliation' of Freedom and 'the Thing', ...it can at least serve as a protection and an escape into another dimension". (Spiegelberg 1960: 465) The first thing one can say about this dimension is that its essence lies beyond the opposition of cognisable and cognising. Consciousness, just as the being, just exists. It does not regard itself as an object, which characterises reflection. (Sartre 1957: lii) It is not identical to consciousness. It is "an immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself" (Sartre 1957: liii), which makes it possible to characterise cogito as something pre-reflective. Another fundamental statement that "consciousness is the knowing being in his capacity as being and not as being known" (Sartre 1957: li) is worth analysing in view of a number of Descartes' concepts. (See Descartes 1985a: 415-419; Descartes 1985b: 50-62, 285-301 – meditation 6 and his answer to Gassendi's objections to the sixth meditation)

As a result, we will see that since in the act of positing the object consciousness does not become an object, but is non-thetically posited as consciousness itself, it is "non-reflective consciousness... that renders the reflection possible" (Sartre 1957: liii), i.e. "pre-reflective cogito.. is the condition of the Cartesian cogito". (Sartre 1957: liii) Pre-reflective consciousness is a flow which comprises *the very existence* of multiple acts of consciousness, and it is this existence that makes it possible for these acts to be seen in their unity rather than separately. The conclusion that "every conscious existence exists as consciousness of existing" (Sartre 1957: liv) appears as a result of re-thinking the Cartesian postulate about thinking existence, i.e. though existence is not distinguishable from consciousness of existence, it is not defined in terms of consciousness, as it happened in Descartes' philosophy. For Sartre, "the subject cannot be recognised if its existence is proven only within the experience of Cogito" ("comme sujet, il ne peut être connu, son existence étant seulement éprouvée dans l'expérience du Cogito"). (Joannis 1997: 29) Thus, the difference between Sartre's and Descartes' cogito is as follows: *in the view of the former*, it is pre-reflective, it is experience itself, "the subject of the most concrete of experiences" (Sartre 1957: lvi); this experience is fundamentally linked with perception, with seeing (percipiens) of the visible (percipi) – with subjectivity (first being) rather than with a transcendental subject. *In the case with the latter*, it is reflective, and includes a cognition procedure (through methodological acts of doubt) of movement towards the evident that is revealed as a universal transcendental subject.

## **b. Unity of being and consciousness**

### **4.5. Emptiness of consciousness**

As stated above, in classical rationalism the cognising subject constructed being into the object of cognition logically, while for Sartre being never becomes an object, since it is existence in the first place rather than something cognised. It is this primary givenness of being that makes it possible to treat it as the absolute, for through its existence it presents itself as an independent '*subject*' of experience (Sartre 1957: lvi) rather than something relative, passive, or totally dependent on the cognising subject. Such subjectness of being is not connected with the idea of substantiality (essence) underlying the existence, but is an immediate visible givenness and obviousness.

However, in its self-perception, consciousness also possesses the same independent subjective givenness and obviousness. Though, unlike being, consciousness does not have any ‘density’, and is “total emptiness (since the entire world is outside it)”. (Sartre 1957: lvi) It should be noted here that emptiness (non-being) of the being of consciousness is reflected in the outward existence and own non-positing. There is nothing in consciousness, and there can be nothing in it (like qualities of things) apart from its existence, i.e. apart from itself, therefore it is this emptiness that lets it appear as the absolute. “Consciousness is not a thing, not an entity, not a substance”. (Barnes 1992: 14) However, it is *not passive* emptiness as an opposite extreme of being-in-itself, for in this case it would be the positive being of emptiness and hence would be “indistinguishable from being-in-itself, but... the for-itself is the negation of being” (Cox 2006: 8), which gives it some traits of activity. While things always have a non-transparent endless horizon of content (qualities), consciousness – being existence that posits the world beyond itself – is *everything* at the same time. In this respect, alongside being itself, consciousness can be applied the category of the absolute, which is interpreted as “the first being to whom all other appearances appear, the absolute in relation to which every phenomenon is relative”. (Sartre 1957: lviii) Subjectivity as the first being (percipiens) which serves the basis for cognition separates being from the phenomenon in order to discover being as being rather than a phenomenon (visibility). It should be borne in mind that Sartre rejects Kantian definition of the phenomenon, and in his interpretation of this term follows Husserlian tradition that “being does not hide itself”. (Catalano 1985: 21)

The cognising subject (consciousness) serves for itself as an existence revealing to itself without positing itself as an object that is visibly given in its essence and existence. Due to this ‘knowing’ itself from inside, and dealing with its own ‘obviousness’ of an existing entity which is not immediately visible and not objectively attested, the subject is able to perceive its revelation to itself irrespective of anything else. Unlike the Cartesian interpretation of the existence of consciousness, Sartre does not define the absoluteness of being of consciousness in terms of phenomenology, i.e. consciousness is not a phenomenon among other phenomena, it is *pre-phenomenal*.

Furthermore, the temporal category ‘before’ (‘pre’) may be introduced solely based on the connectedness of consciousness with the phenomenal world. Since the precedence of this or that state of things is revealed only in this bundle, it is totally meaningless to discuss the supposed existence of this world before the existence of consciousness since Sartre “places ontological plane into the for-itself context” (“Sartre situe le plan ontologique dans la perspective du pour-soi”) (Kremer-Marietti 2005: 36). Temporal categories (before, now, after) prove irrelevant without linking consciousness to the phenomenal sphere, both in relation to this sphere itself, and in relation to the consciousness as such. Reference to something “‘before’ consciousness one can conceive only of a plenum of being of which no element can refer to an absent consciousness”. (Sartre 1957: lv) Alongside this, however paradoxically it may seem, it is important to keep in mind an essential aspect of such absolute being: consciousness is not defined as the totality but rather as the “contingency of the being”. (See Sartre 1957: lvi, fn.) Conceptually, that means that *absence* can be testified only by consciousness itself, without which the “plenum of being” is filled with the relation without any difference. In this case we deal with certain simultaneity, with co-existence of being and dormant consciousness, which suddenly awakens in being, and in it is this juxtaposition that they are mutually refined and revealed. However, alongside with consciousness, being is induced with *nothingness*, therefore, we may say that “consciousness is prior to nothingness”. (Sartre 1957: lvi) Sartre refers to this consciousness as non-thetical.

#### 4.6. *Being of the existent*

Non-thetical consciousness is that it escapes cognition while being its foundation. The act of consciousness's apprehending itself is not the act of cognition, but rather *a structural discovery of being* (see Sartre 1957: lvii) – to be = to be. If consciousness is a transphenomenal being, pure immanence and activity, then the existent (*percipi*) cannot be consciousness, since “it is a transcendent limit” (Sartre 1957: lvii), i.e. passive being. This marginality of the existent reveals *the structure of the phenomenon* (the existent) – its relativity (reference of the existent to the perceiving consciousness) and inactivity. Moreover, as a result of such interrelation between consciousness and the existent, consciousness itself does not become relative since it acts as an entity that posits (*synthesizes*) this world.

However, the world exists independently of consciousness due to the fact that consciousness encounters being of the existent as something *accidentally* (*spontaneously*) met, while the existent itself does not meet it at all, for its being is a *constant* relatedness with another existent. Self-sufficiency of the existence of the existent is emphasised by the fact that a pre-phenomenal consciousness lies beyond relations of the existent, and ontologically “cannot *act* upon anything”. (Sartre 1957: lix) When analysing the essence of the absoluteness of human freedom, it is dramatically important to take into consideration this aspect established by Sartre. This helps to avoid various interpretations based on superficial textbook statement of the key notion of Sartre's philosophy that undoubtedly profane it, though it is obvious that such interpretations are somewhat inevitable: similar destiny have repeatedly befallen philosophical ideas in the history of different cultures. However, if we keep to the spirit and the letter of the French philosopher's concept, the absolute freedom will present itself as a deep *engaged* responsibility for everything existent in this world, which clears Sartre from all alleged accusations that his ideas are a factual theoretical condition of creating an “ideology masking a logic of control and domination from which the only exit is the blind and terroristic hope for a violent apocalypse”. (LaCapra 1978: 119) Therefore, despite the fact that the existent as a perceiving entity (*percipi*) is associated with inactivity, it is not a result of the synthetic activity of consciousness. Through its manifestations, the existent points to its *own* being and being of consciousness cognising it, and through its own being it determines the basis for the relation, which does not let us treat it as pure inactivity totally dependent on constitutive and synthesising being (consciousness).

In *Being and Nothingness*, relativity and inactivity are presented as ways of being rather than being itself (Sartre 1957: lx), i.e. being of the phenomenon can be understood neither through perception nor through notions that might be applied only to the ways of being. Inapplicability of any distinctness (statement, effectiveness, inactivity, activity etc.) to being is conditioned by the totality of being, which is free of the smallest flaw or fault, where there are not any limits, and there is only “self-consistency” that is characterised with a vivid and understandable metaphor – “it is glued to itself”. (Sartre 1957: lxv) Inactivity and activity are “*human notions*” (Sartre 1957: lxiv) that are not at all applied to being itself since being is uncreatable, and just exists in itself (“*being is itself*” (Sartre 1957: lxiv)). For this reason “the transphenomenal being of consciousness can not provide a basis for the transphenomenal being of the phenomenon”. (Sartre 1957: lx) At the same time, Sartre points out that consciousness “can be established only in the face of something revealed, immanence can be defined only within the apprehension of a transcendent” (Sartre 1957: lxii), i.e. one of fundamental characteristics of consciousness is its focus on being (objective) which is revealed but not created by consciousness.

#### 4.7.c. The Look as Universal

Thus, Sartre refers to the *being that is what it is* as *being-in-itself*. The being that always proves to be *something it is not* and *not something it is* called *being-for-itself*. Being-for-itself should always become what it is. Being of the phenomenon (being-in-itself) is characterised with entirety and plenum, and this is what makes it totally different from being of consciousness (*being-for-itself*), which is characterised with nothingness and emptiness. In this context, *being-for-itself* is non-being, which nonetheless exists, but differently than *being-in-itself*. Being for non-being (*being-for-itself*) means that non-being “possesses this being” (Cox 2006: 8), and as a result, its difference from being of the phenomenon (being-in-itself) divides being into two spheres: 1) pre-reflective (non-thetical) cogito; and 2) being of the phenomenon. There emerges an ontological need to find a way out from this apparently discovered situation when these two spheres form a closed loop (notably beyond idealistic or realistic treatment of these issues). Sartre directed his attention to the fact that Descartes justifiably refused to separate “the two terms of a relation in order to try to join them together again later”. (Sartre 1957: 3) However, having faced this problem, Descartes came to a conclusion that the unity of the thinking substance and the extended substance is achieved in *imagination*. Sartre was not content with such a conclusion, therefore he does not base his ontological proof on reflective cogito, but rather on “pre-reflective being of the percipients” (Sartre 1957: lx), when consciousness acts as a discovering intuition of transphenomenal being, whose main characteristic feature is its self-sufficiency. It is being in itself existing beyond consciousness. Here, one should note a very curious correlation of this ontological statement with the rethinking of social and political phenomena that occurred within the framework of postmodern discourse. Take, for example, the following statement:

“Social identities and nations were never really coherent imagined communities; ...cultures are always already partial and hybrid formations. This social fact is the basis on which a subversive political project can be conducted to destroy the binary structure of power and identity”. (Hardt & Negri 2000: 144)

Sartre's construct is remarkable for the fact that it endows the circular definition of being-in-itself with a synthetic rather than analytical nature. This is due to the fact that being lacks attitude to itself and is non-transparent for itself, as a result of which this indistinguishable synthesis with itself “knows no otherness” (Sartre 1957: lxvi), no time, and nothing else but itself. Conceptually, this indistinguishableness makes being beyond itself. Pushing it to the limits, it is what one can know and say nothing about since any speech means distinction, therefore, in this way it is a kind of nothingness, as stated above. Therefore, although the meaning of being of the existent is in its immediate revelation, the only basis for the revelation of the existent is consciousness. It is only in consciousness that the existent gains its meaning as a revelation without becoming thereon either consciousness or being itself, which it signifies with its revelation. Unlike the existent, being does not become explicit through notions and categories, but only through the description of the meaning of being of the existent that reveals itself in consciousness. A description of multiple immediate realities (man, world, relations) outlines the way to understand their underlying unity, which is being itself. Moreover, it is important to remember Sartre's remark that it is not *being* of the existent that reveals itself (being itself is elusive), but the *phenomenon* of being. (Sartre 1957: lxii-lxiii)

## 5. Conclusion

Taking into account the fundamental relatedness of being and consciousness and their mutual revelation arising due to it, we may well say about the world as it is presented in *Being and Nothingness* that there is a *look in any existent*. If any existent is a 'look', this *look is the eidos of the eye*, which reveals itself to man. Every 'eye' strives to gain and discover in itself its eidos as a revealed actuality. This resembles the monadistic vision of the universal found in Leibniz's philosophy, according to which a monad, like Sartre's consciousness, while pining in its indistinct state, has the potential for self-growth, and as a result of this it leaves its syncopical being. Along with the growing clarity and distinction of perception and comprehension, the monad itself reveals with greater clarity, distinction, and diversity the contours of the world which is given not as a homogeneous broth-like bulk, but rather as a unity of monads that can be distinguished in it. Together with the monad's establishing and formation, the world also begins to transform and reveal itself in all its diversity. However, for Sartre, escaping from the totality (entirety) of being is connected with negation, in and through which everything is defined. Negating consciousness (nothingness) separates from itself everything that is not itself, thereby defining everything. Negation becomes assertion: "*nothing is human reality itself as the radical negation by means of which the world is revealed*". (Sartre 1957: 181)

All this leads to a conclusion that if there are no differences in being, being becomes a kind of nothingness, i.e. in the absence of outside perception of being, and solely from inside its entirety and totality (homogeneity), it is nothingness, though '*a kind of*' nothingness. However, for the totality of being-in-itself, consciousness also acts as nothingness since in the act of distinguishing from this totality, consciousness negates being.

This will mean that without their interconnectedness, both being-in-itself ('material' existence) and being-for-itself (consciousness) become '*a kind of*' nothingness. It is only their interaction, the meeting of the looks that mutually confirms their existence and reveals their being as distinguishable from each other. Thus, the possible identity of being-in-itself and being-for-itself is revealed through the experience of the look:

a kind of look *from being-in-itself* (existence) at being-for-itself (consciousness) sees consciousness as something destroying existence due to which consciousness becomes nothingness. However, being-for-itself still exists, which is confirmed by the interaction of revealed looks. Here we use '*a kind of*' since in our traditional understanding there is yet no look in being-in-itself.

a kind of look *from being-for-itself* (consciousness) at being-in-itself before consciousness distinguishes from being. Here we use '*a kind of*' since before the moment consciousness distinguishes itself there is no look to fix anything, it is still dormant. For such a look being-in-itself will be seen as a kind of (here we use '*a kind of*' since being still exists) nothingness, for if consciousness has not distinguished itself yet, there is no position fixing existence, hence there is, as it were, no existence. But even before it distinguishes itself from the totality of being, being-for-itself is looped on itself and, therefore, becomes some kind of being-in-itself, and in this way also a kind of nothingness.

Being-for-itself recognises its own being as the look and reveals it when meeting the look of the Other who is capable of seeing it both as a thing and as being-in-itself because "the Other as freedom is the foundation of my being-in-itself". (Sartre 1957: 363) However, it is this fact that allows for the assumption that being-in-itself also possesses the look.

*Obviousness of existence is given in the encounter with the Other*, and in the first place it is represented with the help of the look. *My existence* is not confirmed through the act of self-reflection, but rather *finds* me as something inescapable and, hence, is perceived by me as something perfectly obvious – through the look of the Other, who can be treated here as impersonal consciousness. The Other becomes the proof of *existence* – another consciousness that is “born *supported* by a being which is not itself. This is what we call the ontological proof”. (Sartre 1957: lxi) But the other person is a recorder of otherness as such which encompasses everything and through which everything exists.

Despite the reliability of scientific data that at birth a baby cannot see clearly, it is its mother's look that substantiates, establishes, and confirms its existence when it comes into this world. Any existent appears through the look of the Other, and to do so, it does not have to be a thinking creature. The look of the Other creates the existence of a thing, the look of the other gives being to me, and every of our looks means giving being to this other even if this something existed long before man appeared as a species since “no meaning exists independent of it” (“parce qu'aucune valeur n'existe indépendamment de lui” (Salzmann 2000: 38)). The argument that once there was no man or no other living creature in the Universe and, hence, there was no consciousness or look focusing on whatever existed at that time does not invalidate anything, and in no way affects the essence of Sartre's metaphysics of the look. Today, strange as it may seem, any piece of our knowledge about those foregone times is that very look through which everything that has ever existed receives its being.

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I. V. Kuzin is Associate Professor, Department of Social Philosophy and Philosophy of History, Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia.

A. A. Drikkar is Professor, Department of Museum Management and Historical Monuments Preservation, Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia.

E. A. Makovetsky is Associate Professor, Department of Museum Management and Historical Monuments Preservation, Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia.

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