

ideal forms
 imperfect
 manifest
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INTRODUCTION

The Pursuit of Being

I. THE PHENOMENON

MODERN thought has realized considerable progress by reducing the existent to the series of appearances which manifest it. Its aim was to overcome a certain number of dualisms which have embarrassed philosophy and to replace them by the monism of the phenomenon. Has the attempt been successful?

In the first place we certainly thus get rid of that dualism which in the existent opposes interior to exterior. There is no longer an exterior for the existent if one means by that a superficial covering which hides from sight the true nature of the object. And this true nature in turn, if it is to be the secret reality of the thing, which one can have a presentiment of or which one can suppose but can never reach because it is the "interior" of the object under consideration—this nature no longer exists. The appearances which manifest the existent are neither interior nor exterior; they are all equal, they all refer to other appearances, and none of them is privileged. Force, for example, is not a metaphysical conatus of an unknown kind which hides behind its effects (accelerations, deviations, etc.); it is the totality of these effects. Similarly an electric current does not have a secret reverse side; it is nothing but the totality of the physical-chemical actions which manifest it (electrolysis, the incandescence of

*The phenomenon
 is the reality*

a carbon filament, the displacement of the needle of a galvanometer, etc.). No one of these actions alone is sufficient to reveal it. But no action indicates anything which is *behind itself*; it indicates only itself and the total series.

The obvious conclusion is that the dualism of being and appearance is no longer entitled to any legal status within philosophy. The appearance refers to the total series of appearances and not to a hidden reality which would drain to itself all the *being* of the existent. And the appearance for its part is not an inconsistent manifestation of this being. To the extent that men had believed in noumenal realities, they have presented appearance as a pure negative. It was "that which is not being"; it had no other being than that of illusion and error. But even this being was borrowed, it was itself a pretense, and philosophers met with the greatest difficulty in maintaining cohesion and existence in the appearance so that it should not itself be reabsorbed in the depth of non-phenomenal being. But if we once get away from what Nietzsche called "the illusion of worlds-behind-the-scene," and if we no longer believe in the being-behind-the-appearance, then the appearance becomes full positivity; its essence is an "appearing" which is no longer opposed to being but on the contrary is the measure of it. For the being of an existent is exactly what it *appears*. Thus we arrive at the idea of the *phenomenon* such as we can find, for example, in the "phenomenology" of Husserl or of Heidegger—the phenomenon or the relative-absolute. Relative the phenomenon remains, for "to appear" supposes in essence somebody to whom to appear. But it does not have the double relativity of Kant's *Erscheinung*. It does not point over its shoulder to a true being which would be, for it, absolute. What it is, it is absolutely, for it reveals itself as it is. The phenomenon can be studied and described as such, for it is *absolutely indicative of itself*.

The duality of potency and act falls by the same stroke. The act is everything. Behind the act there is neither potency nor "hexis"¹ nor virtue. We shall refuse, for example, to understand by "genius"—in the sense in which we say that Proust "had genius" or that he "was" a genius—a particular capacity to produce certain works, which was not exhausted exactly in producing them. The genius of Proust is neither the work considered in isolation nor the subjective ability to

¹ Tr. From Greek *ἕξις*. Sartre seems to have ignored the rough breathing and writes "exis."

produce it; it is the work considered as the totality of the manifestations of the person.

That is why we can equally well reject the dualism of appearance and essence. The appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it *is* the essence. The essence of an existent is no longer a property sunk in the cavity of this existent; it is the manifest law which presides over the succession of its appearances, it is the principle of the series. To the nominalism of Poincaré, defining a physical reality (an electric current, for example) as the *sum* of its various manifestations, Duhem rightly opposed his own theory, which makes of the concept the *synthetic unity* of these manifestations. To be sure phenomenology is anything but a nominalism. But essence, as the principle of the series, is definitely only the concatenation of appearances; that is, itself an appearance. This explains how it is possible to have an intuition of *essences* (the *Wesensschau* of Husserl, for example). The phenomenal being manifests itself; it manifests its essence as well as its existence, and it is nothing but the well connected series of its manifestations.

Does this mean that by reducing the existent to its manifestations we have succeeded in overcoming *all* dualisms? It seems rather that we have converted them all into a new dualism: that of finite and infinite. Yet the existent in fact can not be reduced to a *finite* series of manifestations since each one of them is a relation to a subject constantly changing. Although an *object* may disclose itself only through a single *Abschattung*, the sole fact of there being a subject implies the possibility of multiplying the points of view on that *Abschattung*. This suffices to multiply to infinity the *Abschattung* under consideration. Furthermore if the series of appearances were *finite*, that would mean that the first appearances do not have the possibility of *reappearing*, which is absurd, or that they can be all given at once, which is still more absurd. Let us understand indeed that our theory of the phenomenon has replaced the *reality* of the thing by the *objectivity* of the phenomenon and that it has based this on an appeal to infinity. The reality of that cup is that it is there and that it is *not me*. We shall interpret this by saying that the series of its appearances is bound by a principle which does not depend on my whim. But the appearance, reduced to itself and without reference to the series of which it is a part, could be only an intuitive and subjective pleni-

tude, the manner in which the subject is affected. If the phenomenon is to reveal itself as *transcendent*, it is necessary that the subject himself transcend the appearance toward the total series of which it is a member. He must seize *Red* through his impression of red. By *Red* is meant the principle of the series—the electric current through the electrolysis, etc. But if the transcendence of the object is based on the necessity of causing the appearance to be always transcended, the result is that on principle an object posits the series of its appearances as infinite. Thus the appearance, which is *finite*, indicates itself in its finitude, but at the same time in order to be grasped as an appearance-of-that-which-appears, it requires that it be surpassed toward infinity.

This new opposition, the "finite and the infinite," or better, "the infinite in the finite," replaces the dualism of being and appearance. What appears in fact is only an *aspect* of the object, and the object is altogether *in* that aspect and altogether outside of it. It is altogether *within*, in that it manifests itself *in* that aspect; it shows itself as the structure of the appearance, which is at the same time the principle of the series. It is altogether outside, for the series itself will never appear nor can it appear. Thus the outside is opposed in a new way to the inside, and the being-which-does-not-appear, to the appearance. Similarly a certain "potency" returns to inhabit the phenomenon and confer on it its very transcendence—a potency to be developed in a series of real or possible appearances. The genius of Proust, even when reduced to the works produced, is no less equivalent to the infinity of possible points of view which one can take on that work and which we will call the "inexhaustibility" of Proust's work. But is not this inexhaustibility which implies a transcendence and a reference to the infinite—is this not an "hexis" at the exact moment when one apprehends it on the object? The essence finally is radically severed from the individual appearance which manifests it, since on principle it is that which must be able to be manifested by an infinite series of individual manifestations.

In thus replacing a variety of oppositions by a single dualism on which they all are based, have we gained or lost? This we shall soon see. For the moment, the first consequence of the "theory of the phenomenon" is that the appearance does not refer to being as Kant's phenomenon refers to the noumenon. Since there is nothing behind the appearance, and

since it indicates only itself (and the total series of appearances), it can not be *supported* by any being other than its own. The appearance can not be the thin film of nothingness which separates the being-of-the-subject from absolute-being. If the essence of the appearance is an "appearing" which is no longer opposed to any *being*, there arises a legitimate problem concerning *the being of this appearing*. It is this problem which will be our first concern and which will be the point of departure for our inquiry into being and nothingness.

II. THE PHENOMENON OF BEING AND THE BEING OF THE PHENOMENON

THE appearance is not supported by any existent different from itself; it has its own *being*. The first being which we meet in our ontological inquiry is the being of the appearance. Is it itself an appearance? It seems so at first. The phenomenon is what manifests itself, and being manifests itself to all in some way, since we can speak of it and since we have a certain comprehension of it. Thus there must be for it a *phenomenon of being*, an appearance of being, capable of description as such. Being will be disclosed to us by some kind of immediate access—boredom, nausea, etc., and ontology will be the description of the phenomenon of being as it manifests itself; that is, without intermediary. However for any ontology we should raise a preliminary question: is the phenomenon of being thus achieved identical with the being of phenomena? In other words, is the being which discloses itself to me, which *appears* to me, of the same nature as the being of existents which appear to me? It seems that there is no difficulty. Husserl has shown how an eidetic reduction is always possible; that is, how one can always pass beyond the concrete phenomenon toward its essence. For Heidegger also "human reality" is ontic-ontological; that is, it can always pass beyond the phenomenon toward its being. But the passage from the particular object to the essence is a passage from homogeneous to homogeneous. Is it the same for the passage from the existent to the phenomenon of being: Is passing beyond the existent toward the phenomenon of being actually to pass beyond it toward *its* being, as one passes be-