

Alienation, Objectification, and the Primacy of Virtue

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This paper examines the ways in which Sartre's philosophy of mind supports some of the foundational claims of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics understands the idea of character as being explanatorily and normatively prior to the concepts of rightness and of value. This sharply distinguishes it from other approaches to normative ethics such as deontology and consequentialism. My aim is to show how Sartre's philosophy of mind is structured around a basic asymmetry between first and third personal ascriptions of mental predicates in a way that is very important to the phenomenological plausibility of virtue ethics. I will further argue that Sartre's claim that there is a sense in which one cannot think of one's own character as an 'object' is important to establishing the priority of virtue ethics over other normative theories.

1. The Tragedy of Consciousness

There is a clear sense in which Sartre's philosophy as a whole has an ethical basis: he places a tragic diremption at the very basis of consciousness. Conscious experience, structured as it is by our capacity intentionally to represent, is divided from itself in a way that it seeks to overcome but cannot possibly achieve. This tragic failure of the 'for-itself' (conscious experience) to achieve the self-identity characteristic of the 'in-itself' (the world of non-mental objects) is grounded in Sartre's account of negation. Negation introduces the freedom to think other than in the way one thinks when the object of thought is manifestly present to mind. However, the cost of this achievement is that negation also introduces division into consciousness. It is the internal structure of consciousness, explained in terms of negation, which explains why it self-defeatingly aspires to the condition of the non-conscious, non-mental world. That world is comprised of what simply is: the non-conscious world is made up of objects that are necessarily self-identical because they simply are. This tragic failure to achieve self-identity lies at the very basis of intentional representation and conscious thought.

Sartre's treatment of the connection between intentionality and consciousness is highly distinctive. Consciousness is properly to be identified as the act of positing an external object that extinguishes itself in that object. This account of intentional consciousness explains why, when we attempt reflectively to focus on consciousness, it is systematically elusive. First, there is the problem posed to our reflection on consciousness by the passage of time. When we attempt reflectively to grasp our consciousness we are always too late; we always find a 'consciousness reflected on', not consciousness itself. All we can find at the time of reflection is a trace of consciousness in short-term memory. Secondly, we fail to grasp our intended object: we sought consciousness, but instead we find the external object in which consciousness has been extinguished. For these two reasons we never seem to grasp consciousness itself in reflective thought. Consciousness has an elusive, evanescent quality: Sartre calls it a 'nihil', or nothing.

Sartre treats consciousness as both analogous to an activity and as functioning as a transcendental condition for the representation of objects. His analogy for consciousness is light:

I am as inseparable from the world as light, and yet exiled as light is, gliding over the surface of stones and water, never gripped and never held (TR: 308).

Consciousness is translucent, a nothing, but a something without which we cannot 'see' the objects of consciousness. It enables awareness of objects, but plays that role transcendently (Rosenberg 1981; Longuenesse 2008). Using the somewhat unhappy English translations of Sartre's central terms, all 'positional' consciousness directed towards an object is 'non-positionally' self-aware. However, the latter is an insight into an activity, not properly a matter of knowledge (Rosenberg 1981; Thomas 2006a).

2. From Consciousness to Self-knowledge

Sartre's general account of mentality can be interpreted as a reaction against Cartesianism. Common sense would seem to support Sartre's view that the asymmetry between my knowledge of my own mind and other people's knowledge of my mind has to be reconcilable with a low-key 'realism' that mandates that these are two ways of knowing specific instances of a more general thing – a token instance of minds in general. However, a long tradition of philosophical reflection seeks to replace these truisms with a contested, philosophical re-description of the subject matter.

This view abandons the common sense truism that access to my own mind is

knowledge of an instance of a more general type. It has bequeathed to us two contested issues: first, how can there be cognitively substantial knowledge of self with the characteristic features of such knowledge? Secondly, how can there be knowledge of other minds given the presumed inaccessibility of one's own mind that seems implied in any convincing answer to the first question? Sartre thinks that a description of our ordinary practices suffices to dissolve these problems. The way forward is to treat the asymmetry of first and third personal access to the mind as basic and to work with that idea while dispensing with the metaphors of 'inner' and 'outer' (Moran 2001: xxxiv-xxxv; Sacks 2005).

The constraint of objectivity in this context is that any philosophical account has to preserve the datum that first and third personal ascriptions of one and the same mental state answer to the same objective and cognitively substantial facts that makes each true. My talk of my headache and your talk of my headache are both about the same thing – a token headache that simply happens to be mine. First personal and third personal ascriptions of mental predicates are answerable to the same fact.

It is true that Sartre has a distinctive ontological gloss on this claim, but it respects the minimal form of objectivity internal to the way we think and speak about minds. This minimal objectivity blocks the proposal that mental facts are perspectival through and through; that would be a mistaken interpretation of the metaphor of consciousness as a 'for-itself'. The 'for-itself' and the 'in-itself' are essentially complementary, just as the metaphor of perspective has to be complemented by that upon which it is a perspective, namely, something non-perspectival (in this case the world of objects). Sartre's insight is that if we are going to be drawn into using metaphors like 'perspective' or 'point of view' when we think about the mind, then we must, essentially, see such metaphors for the 'for-itself' as being contrastive with, and complementary to, the 'in-itself'.

The real work done by the distinction between the 'for itself' of conscious experience and the 'in-itself' is to hold apart consciousness and the world in a way that respects the basic asymmetry between first personal and third personal perspectives as two distinct perspectives on one and the same mental reality. But that reality, too, is elusive. Sartre's account of the intentional objects of thought is shaped by his radical externalism. Sartre's externalism is expressed by his explanation of consciousness as an intentional positing that both culminates in, and is extinguished by, its objects. This emphasis on activity is distinctive of Sartre's view and opens up some of the most interesting of his claims, notably that there can be no 'inertia' in consciousness. For any of your mental states, the question arises as to whether you affirm it: the norm governing the rational standing of each of your mental states holds you responsible for the states in which you acquiesce as well as those that you actively endorse. This norm reflects the fact that your mind is yours to make up: mental action and inaction (acquiescence) are on a par (Moran 2001: 59, 63, 75-6, *passim*).

This is a crucial aspect of Sartre's view for what follows. Sartre seems prepared to advance the radical claim that all of your mental states are reason-sensitive, including emotions and moods, arguing that these are structured responses to situations that also invoke this norm of responsibility (see Webber 2009: 38-41). The idea of responsibility that Sartre appeals to here works at a deeper level than a superficial voluntarism that claims (falsely) that you can change your emotional responses or moods at will. The basis of Sartre's claim is that in so far as we can speak of consciousness as having a nature, then its nature is to be thoroughly active. Therefore, for any mental commitment of yours we can ask whether it can be connected to your rational endorsement of that commitment via Sartre's notion of a project. Projects are structured hierarchies of normative commitments (Webber 2009: 51-53).

This claim about the mind directly connects to the most well known element of Sartre's philosophy as a whole, namely the centrality to his work of the idea of freedom. From an interpretative point of view, Sartre's talk of 'freedom' can be interpreted in this context as referring to the idea of reason-sensitivity and its connection with projects. (This may, indeed, help to make Sartre's extended uses of terms such as 'freedom' and 'choice' seem more plausible.) A mental state can be sensitive to reason without being acquired by reason or passing through some filter of rational endorsement. For example, the perceiving subject is usually simply assailed by beliefs from her environment without an on-going process of rational endorsement. The key issue is that such beliefs are sensitive to further rational assessment (Thomas 2005: 38-40). In particular, choosing to acquiesce in those beliefs once you have become aware of them can be interpreted as a rational commitment on the thinker's part. As Jonathan Webber has pointed out, Sartre's idea of a rationally assessable project to which one can take an agent to be committed extends to such 'projects' as staying alive (2009: 49). That is not a purposive, goal directed activity, but a commitment rationally to underwrite acquiescing in a given state of affairs. It is, in that sense, a helpful example of the reason-sensitive nature of a mental commitment even in a case where it seems 'passive'.

Building on these points, it can be seen why, for Sartre, we have to take the asymmetry between first personal and third personal perspectives on mentality as basic. That is because you have a kind of direct rational control over your own mental states that others do not. But this notion of a perspective needs to be handled carefully. It is an inherently realist metaphor: perspectives are perspectives on something non-perspectival. Your first personal perspective on the world is not a perspective for you. Nor is it captured by some other metaphor such as a 'point of view' or a 'standpoint'. You do not occupy your mental life or view things from it: you are it. Sartre's externalist treatment of consciousness emphasises this further point: first personally your consciousness is opened out onto its objects in the world.

However, at this point a problem arises for the internal consistency of Sartre's view. When the conscious subject reflectively turns his or her thoughts to consciousness itself, it permanently escapes our grasp. Phenomenologically convincing though this may be, it does seem threatening to Sartre's fundamental commitment to treating the asymmetries of first and third personal knowledge of mind as basic. Our aim was to make sense of two perspectives on a common subject matter. Given the systematic elusiveness of consciousness, the threat is that we cannot locate in the first personal case any distinctive subject matter at all. Sartre has a particularly subtle treatment of this problem that connects his philosophy of mind with the foundations of virtue ethics, namely, his treatment of the connection between self-knowledge and knowledge of the Other. It is to that theme that I now turn.

3. Sartre on Alterity

From a first personal perspective your attention, qua rational agent, is simply opened out on to the world and the objects of your conscious experience. Yet, reflectively, you know that your mind is one instance of mentality in general. However, given that from our first personal perspective we find simply the world, and that whenever we turn our reflective thought onto consciousness it always slips through our fingers, what are the materials for substantiating that thought? I cannot improve upon the succinct summary Mark Sacks gives of Sartre's conception of the problem:

As long as my awareness is rooted solely in first personal thought I cannot, by reflection, dissociate myself from my subjective stance and identify myself as an object. Every object that I come to perceive as an object, is presented as essentially distinct from me, the perceiver; and just insofar as it is presented to me as a distinct object, it is presented as in principle alienable from me. The only item that is not presented as separable from me in that way, the only thing that is given to me with an immediacy that precludes the coherence of my thinking it away, is my own point of view. But that is always given as a point of pure subjectivity: it is behind the lens, so to speak, whereas anything captured as an object is always in front of it (Sacks 2005: 288).

Sartre both appreciates this problem and solves it in a way that respects the objectivity requirement for mental ascriptions. He does so solely for those mental predicates where the idea of a common subject of ascription across the first and third person has an application. Sartre is aware that it does not apply to mental dispositions or mental capacities where the basis of ascription is as third personal for me as it is for you (see Gardiner 1977: 72ff). Setting that class of cases aside, how is self-knowledge to be reconciled with the evanescence of conscious experience as a 'nihil'?

Sartre's solution is to turn to the inter-dependence of the first and third personal perspectives on mentality to argue that those patterns of your past behaviour that constitute your character are, for you, an interpretative artefact of how others view you. The only solution to the envisaged problem compatible both with the phenomenology of the first person and with treating the first-/third-person asymmetry as basic to our idea of mentality is to form a conception of oneself as one is seen by others.

The very idea that I can so much as refer to mentality in my own case depends on my being the subject of the interpretative gaze of the other, dramatised by Sartre's famous account of 'the Look' (Sacks 2005). The solution to the problem of other minds is to be found in an unlikely place: the moral psychology of shame. It is in the experience of being ashamed that I feel ashamed of myself through and through, as a whole person, in the gaze of another person.

The Other in this example need not actually be present, but can be surmised. Shame can be triggered by the fact that I could be observed. That phenomenological fact, in turn, is part of seeing the world as structured around other centres of consciousness each of which is a 'for-itself' that transcends its own reality just as I transcend mine. Solipsism does not need to be refuted: an account of its presuppositions exposes it as a view that claims to arise from our ordinary conception of mentality and the latter's claim to objectivity while it actually silently repudiates that concept of objectivity in an unacknowledged way. In the only sense in which I am given to myself, I am given to myself 'as for another'.

One aspect of Sartre's claim is that when we reflexively mirror our own character in the guise of how we seem to the Other, we resist such descriptions as falsely objectifying. This is the part of Sartre's treatment of the idea of character that has been picked up on by situationist sceptics, notably Gilbert Harman (2009). Sartre's view of character traits is that they are reason responsive patterns of action and motivation, comparable to Dennett's 'real patterns' (Dennett 1991). We pick out such patterns from a background of 'noise', irrelevant information that obscures the pattern that we discern. In classifying another person's actions as 'typical' of her, as 'out of character', or as 'throw away' actions that simply do not bear on the idea of character, we interpret the presence of a pattern in a person's responses that simultaneously involves treating other actions as irrelevant to the patterns that we seek.

Sartre objects to two forms of false objectification of this process: one models patterned rational responses on the idea of a fixed inner causal mechanism grounded in a person's 'nature'. But the other form of false objectification is our justifiable recoil from having this process of interpretation applied to our own case. When we discover that others find us 'cranky' or 'charming' we refuse to identify with such ascriptions simply because we take ourselves to transcend any such pattern. The reason for Sartre's emphasis on this point is his distinction between transcendence and facticity that I will discuss further below.

Given Sartre's unique achievement in describing this area of moral psychology and conceiving of a range of 'pathologies of self-regard' that other moral psychologists had neglected, it is tempting to allow these diagnoses to overshadow the fact that there is a positive sense in which one is presented to the Other as object. However, there is such a positive aspect: one is presented as an irreducibly whole person, a basic subject of reference. It is as oneself that one is presented to the Other (Theunissen 1984: 224-7, 230, 236-7; Sacks 2005: 285-90). The pathologies of self-regard arise only when one views oneself merely as an object. The key idea for Sartre is that we are never self-identical in this sense: we know ourselves both as transcendence and as facticity. The pathologies of self-regard result from a collapse of one of these aspects of subjectivity into the other.

Given the richness of the territory in moral psychology that Sartre explored in his account of bad faith, it is understandable that a great deal of the literature on his moral philosophy focuses on the nature of these pathologies. However, for my purposes it is the positive sense in which one is presented to another, such that this is how one can conceive of oneself, that is of greater importance than his explanation of bad faith. If Sartre is correct, then there is a plausible basis in the philosophy of mind for two arguments that are helpful for the development of a virtue ethic.

The first is the claim that there is a fundamental asymmetry between the first and third personal use of virtue terms; this would be a corollary of Sartre's more general thesis that this asymmetry holds true for a wide range of mental ascriptions. The second is the claim that there is a sense in which one cannot think of one's own character as merely an object for oneself. But to understand both of those claims we need to understand a more basic Sartrean distinction between the self as transcendence and as facticity.

4. Transcendence and Facticity

If the first personal point of view is a rational openness to the world, then this seems to problematise self-knowledge. Sartre's solution appeals to the Other's conception of oneself. This puts in play the fundamental distinction in Sartre's account of character of knowledge of your own facticity versus insight into your own transcendence. With this distinction substantiated Sartre can go on to generate all of his diagnoses of bad faith as involving the affirmation of 'facticity as being transcendence and transcendence as being facticity' (B&N: 79).

I have explained Sartre's emphasis on freedom by invoking the idea of reason-sensitivity. Consciousness is an openness to the world in the sense that one is rationally oriented to that world in a way that imposes the norm for reason-sensitive mental states that the agent cannot acquiesce in any such state. They are all, in principle, connected to reason-sensitivity via the idea of a project. When this thought is combined with the idea that the asymmetry between first and third personal access to the mind is basic, the consequence is that in integrating another person's conception of you as your conception of yourself, then the latter must have the capacity to outstrip the former. This is because the pattern in your conduct that the other has discerned in your past actions and reflexively 'returned' to you was, after all, a pattern in your past rational responses to situations. It is only in so far as you are an appropriate subject for such rational interpretation that this conception of yourself for another has any salience for you. But you have not ceased to be such a rational subject and thereby open to the demands, not of your own past character, but of the world. In knowing your own character via the way you are interpreted by the Other, then you must, thereby, transcend that character. That is the basis of Sartre's distinction between facticity and transcendence.

Practical deliberation is, in fact, the most helpful case for making this kind of point even if Sartre's eventual aim is to generalize it for responsibility for all your rational commitments, practical and theoretical. If your virtues are oriented to a situation via sound practical deliberation about what to do, then in any particular instance of practical decision the circumstances call upon one or more of your virtues. Sartre actually thinks that the entire perspective of deliberation will be so structured by the prior commitments expressed by your virtues that there is not much of a task left for the deliberative process itself (B&N: 472-3).

Responsible decision, that which Sartre calls authentic choice, always involves both facticity and transcendence. Your aim, qua deliberator, is to be rationally sensitive to the demands of the situation. This is largely pre-determined by the patterns of relevance and salience in the situation to which you are attentive that have been established by your virtues. This represents your facticity: the real pattern within your rational responses to past situations that forms the reality of your character for another. However, from your first personal, engaged, situation your engagement is with the situation. In that respect you must transcend your facticity: you must do so because what you are responsible to is a correct response to this situation, regardless of how much your apprehension of this situation has been structured in advance by your prior facticity.

Sartre's insight into transcendence and facticity has been taken up and explored by, amongst others, Stuart Hampshire (1971) and Richard Moran (2001). Both Hampshire and Moran emphasise that one can form a belief or intention from an engaged perspective from one's own character. However, this engagement must also be informed by knowledge of that character as an 'object' for one. (Where the relevant notion of character encompasses the very normative commitment that one is about to make.) That this practical question is irreducibly first personal is brought out by noting that even in the case of facticity, it is one's perspective on one's own character that is in question, even if it is modeled on other people's knowledge of your character. Your mind is yours to make up the way that the minds of others are not. Only your decisions are expressive of a capacity for direct rational control of your intentions, decisions, and actions.

I have noted that Sartre's view is that responsibility for decision (authenticity) always involves both facticity and transcendence. Richard Moran explains why, using the idea of intention formation as involving 'answerability' to evidence:

...When I avow my belief I do not avail myself of psychological evidence of any kind, I nonetheless take what I say in that context to be answerable to whatever psychological evidence there may be...Since an expression of intention is not a prediction, it is not contradicted by a contrary prediction (but by the expression of an opposed intention). To say this is not, however, to deny that in declaring the intention the person is committed both to the practical endorsement of the action and to the expectation of a future event (Moran 2001: 87-8).

Denying answerability is precisely to commit oneself to transcendence without facticity or vice versa. These constitute the two general patterns of bad faith as two different forms of ethical evasion.

On the one hand, there is the empty, illusory 'transcendence' of a normative commitment in decision that is simply insensitive to the evidence as to whether one will, in fact, act as one's commitment dictates (Moran 2001: 81-2, 88). This is an ethical error as a first personal avowal of intention creates an expectation as to one's future action. Therefore the agent's responsibility includes sensitivity to the same range of facts appealed to in establishing his or her 'facticity'.

On the other hand, there is the pretence of submerging one's transcendence in one's facticity, as if one's active role in sustaining a normative commitment has been submerged in a mechanism beyond one's own control. This second general form of ethical error is, to borrow Moran's helpful phrase, a 'tactical substitution' of one's facticity for one's transcendence. Here one reflects that one simply cannot help being the kind of person that one is. This is a particularly subtle form of bad faith as it can assume the guise of a hardheaded realism about one's own motivations, simultaneously self-aggrandizing and evasive.

In this second kind of bad faith there is an evasion that seeks a guarantee for one's resolve by absorbing it into facticity. It is as though one had put in place of one's ongoing rational commitment a mechanism to whose operation one is now indifferent. This can only lead to the undoing of one's resolution. Attention has been diverted from where it ought to be directed: to your reasons. Those reasons, in turn, direct you outwards to those evaluative features (reasons) to which your rational judgment is a response. Paradoxically, reliance on knowledge of one's character as 'facticity' (as an external mechanism to back up one's reasons analogous to alienated action control) succeeds only in qualifying whether there was a commitment there in the first place. As both Hampshire and Moran note, if a person seeks to strengthen her resolve by the subterfuge of tactically

substituting facticity for transcendence then I, your interpreter, ought, rather to conclude that your avowal is insincere or at least significantly hedged (Hampshire 1975: 52; Moran 2001: 81-2). All you achieve with this tactical substitution is to raise doubts in your interpreter's mind as to whether you sincerely undertook a normative commitment at all.

Underpinning these diagnoses of bad faith is a positive ideal of authentic choice that reflects the following principle:

When I avow a belief, I am not treating it as just an empirical psychological fact about me; and to speak of a transcendental stance towards it is meant to register the fact that it commits me to the facts beyond my psychological state; and as a commitment it is not something I am assailed by, but rather is mine to maintain or revoke (Moran 2001: 89).

The important issue is that one can derive from Sartre's work a positive model for responsible, authentic decision-making that is as interesting as his diagnoses of the pathologies of self-regard. My interest in this ideal is the light it casts on the fundamental rationale for virtue ethics for reasons that I will now explain.

5. Sartre and Virtue Ethics

The foregoing account of Sartre's moral psychology offers two powerful arguments in support of virtue ethics. If it can be proved that Sartre believes in the reality of moral character, interpreted not as an inner causal mechanism but as an interpretative pattern in a person's actions that is sensitive to reasons, then he offers two considerations of central importance to an ethics of virtue. The first is the robustness of his claim that there is a deep asymmetry in first and third personal uses of virtue terms. The second is the claim that it is an ethical error always to think of oneself merely as an object. I will now set out these claims, describe why they are important to virtue ethics, and how Sartre's views can be put to use in resisting an attempt to undermine the distinctiveness of virtue ethics as a self-sufficient approach to normative ethics.

Given the priority he attaches to freedom, Sartre is consistently hostile to the idea of independently existing values. It would, then, be completely alien to his thought to interpret the kind of openness to the world characteristic of his externalist view of consciousness as capable of being extended to the idea of openness to values. However, given that Sartrean freedom is rational freedom, there is less strain in interpreting a Sartrean account of rational deliberation as openness to those features of a situation that are the basis of her reasons.

Virtue ethicists since Aristotle have noted that it is characteristic of the majority of virtue terms that they do not figure in the first personal rational deliberation of agents. That which figures in such deliberation are those features that ground an agent's reasons: that another person is in distress, is easily helped, and so on. The concept of a particular virtue, whether it be kindness, compassion, helpfulness, is not part of how the agent conceives of the situation calling for action with the exception of some special cases such as justice or righteousness. This phenomenological point is basic to an ethic of virtue that conceives of virtues as a sensitivity to those features that ground an agent's responses of the kind found, for example, in the work of neo-Aristotelians such as John McDowell.

If, as Bernard Williams argued, virtue terms are asymmetric across their first and third personal uses, then any use of a virtue term in a person's first personal ethical deliberation is, in his memorable phrase 'a misdirection of the ethical attention' (Williams 1985: 11). Sartre's moral psychology offers a grounding for that claim. Attention to one's character is properly a part of learning to be good. However, it is not a part of a mature ethical understanding when that process is completed. That consists, as John McDowell puts it, in an 'an ability to recognize requirements which situations impose upon behaviour' (McDowell 1979: § 2).

This phenomenological argument is important to virtue ethics as it is the first step one can take as a response to views that seek to deflate the importance of virtue ethics as a self-sufficient ethical view. The claim of first and third person asymmetry in the ascription of virtue terms is not simply true to our ethical experience. It also points to some of the difficulties in store for any view that simply wants to adopt the idea of a virtue and make it a derived concept in a wider framework in which other concepts (such as duty or optimal consequences) are described as being normatively and explanatorily prior to that of a virtue.

Any view of this kind requires your own character to be merely an object for you in a way that Sartre exposes as illusory (whether that object is valued instrumentally or intrinsically). Later in the work in which Williams argues for the first/third personal asymmetry in the use of virtue terms he suggests this more general form of argument. It takes as its target precisely that family of views that seeks indirectly to model a virtuous sensitivity to reasons with a theory that attaches derivative importance to virtues:

Is there anywhere in the mind or in society that a theory of this kind can be coherently or acceptably located? The theory finds a value for these dispositions, but

it is still an instrumental value. The dispositions are seen as devices for generating certain actions... That is what those dispositions seem like when seen from outside... But it is not what they seem from the inside... The dispositions help to form the character of an agent who has them, and they will do the job the theory has given them only if the agent does not see his character purely instrumentally, but sees the world from the point of view of that character. Moreover, the dispositions require the agent to see other things in a noninstrumental way. They are dispositions not simply of action, but of feeling and judgement, and they are expressed precisely in ascribing intrinsic and not instrumental value to such things as truth-telling, loyalty and so on (Williams 1985: 108, emphasis added).

This argument is unsatisfactory as it stands: it is possible for an indirect theory to model virtues as intrinsic goods, as Williams recognized in his later work on the epistemic virtues (Williams 2004; Thomas 2008). However, I think that the phenomenological force of Williams's critique remains powerful, notably in the sentence I have emphasized concerning the necessity of the agent's 'see[ing] the world from the point of view of that character'. That remark suggests a connection with Sartre's conception of the rational agent as open to the world and those considerations that ground her reasons.

This phenomenological point suggests a deeper Sartrean argument against moral theories that seek indirectly to model the value of virtue. They require a standpoint from which your character is merely an object for you, qua deliberating agent. That distinctively Sartrean claim would be tantamount to the claim that theories that assign an indirect, derivative role for virtue (even qua forms of intrinsic value) are in bad faith. That would be a powerful argument for the priority of virtue ethics if it could be made good. However, the claim that one's character cannot be an object for one's own reflection seems, on the face of it, very implausible. It is to an assessment of this Sartrean claim that I now turn.

6. Treating Oneself (Merely) as an Object

Sartre's moral psychology underpins the asymmetry between the first personal and third personal ascription of virtue terms. Furthermore, his account suggests a novel counter-argument against the attempt to model virtue ethics in an impartialist ethical theory, to be developed along the lines that Williams suggested in the passage I have cited. Those sympathetic to the priority of virtue ethics over other normative views need to show that any attempt to model virtue ethics in an impartialist theory is falsely objectifying. Sartre seems to offer a basis for this argument but, unfortunately, it involves interpreting one of his less clear claims, namely, that an ethical agent cannot treat him or her self as an object.

Critical reaction to this claim is, understandably, that it is a paradigm instance of Sartre exaggerating a claim such that a genuine insight is lost in an empirical falsehood (Gardiner 1977: 77; Moran 2001: 174). Nothing could be more commonplace than the thought that one ought to work on being a better person. However, I have emphasized two points throughout this chapter. First, that in the case of exposure to the Other in the Look, the sense in which one is presented to another can be in a positive and not an objectifying sense. So there is one respect in which Sartre is quite happy to defend the view that one can reasonably be thought of 'as an object'. Secondly, the key formulation is that one ought not to regard oneself (to borrow a Kantian formulation) as merely an object. There is an acceptable sense in which one thinks of oneself as an object, but not merely as an object, when one thinks of oneself in the light of the two complementary aspects of transcendence and of facticity.

So Sartre can agree with the common sense thought that one can think of one's own character as an object while disambiguating that claim and finding another sense in which it is always an ethical error to think of oneself always as merely such. Patrick Gardiner critically examined Sartre's claim in his 'Sartre on Character and Self-knowledge' (Gardiner 1977). I think that some of the concerns that Gardiner expresses there can helpfully be allayed by some of the considerations that I have canvassed. He describes Sartre's view as follows:

[Sartre] seems to be saying that there are really only two alternatives here: either the putative self-ascriber is referring to a stretch of his past history or else he is giving expression to what amounts to some kind of resolve or intention concerning his future conduct. The third possibility, that he is treating himself as the subject of certain evidentially based predictions, is considered to be one which is in some sense not open to him (Gardiner 1977: 75).

Gardiner gives the putative counter-example of a person with a tendency to irascibility who sometimes tries to control himself and succeeds, or tries and fails, or who simply expresses his character trait:

In each [case] it would not merely seem natural for the man in question to conclude that he was irascible: it would also seem odd to propose that, if he expressed this

opinion, he should not be understood to be implying anything with predictive import (Gardiner 1977: 71, emphasis added).

If, in these examples, a person concludes that he or she is irascible, why is this not an empirically grounded regularity with 'predictive import' about the future actions of the person involved, who just happens to be me? If Gardiner is right about that, then Sartre's claim that there is some in principle difficulty about knowledge of one's own character that makes it categorically different from knowledge of another person's character seems indefensible. Thus we can think of our own characters as objects, namely, by thinking of them in exactly the same way as we think of other people's characters. Therefore Sartre's claim about the distinctiveness of the first personal case lapses.

However, I have already noted points that address Gardiner's concerns and, indeed, move one towards the more sympathetic reconstruction of Sartre's own views at the conclusion of his paper. First, we need a very weak interpretation of the thesis that the point of our ascribing mental states to others is to predict their behaviour if we are not to run very quickly into the serious difficulties posed by the extreme complexity of such iterated predictions (Morton 1996). Secondly, Sartre does recognize the issue of 'predictive import'. Consider a remark of John McDowell's in the course of his discussion of Wittgenstein's rule following remarks:

When I claim understanding of someone else, and construe this as knowledge of the patterns to which his present utterance owes allegiance what I claim to know is not that in such and such a circumstance he will do so and so, but rather at most that that is what he will do if he sticks to his patterns. And that is not a prediction at all (McDowell 1984: 349, emphasis added).

McDowell's concluding moral seems to me wrong: in this case one does make a prediction, but only a conditional prediction. However, this point suffices to restore the asymmetry that Sartre emphasizes. In the case of predicting the actions of others, those predictions are conditional on the other person 'sticking to his or her patterns' in his or her own case in a way beyond your direct control. First personally, however, that normative commitment is yours to maintain or revoke. The direct relevance of this observation to Sartre's ideal of authenticity is that the latter views us as always both facticity and transcendence. Therefore, if you are a reason-sensitive agent whose intention formation is appropriately sensitive to reasons then, in the light of your forward looking commitment, I can predict what you are going to do, all other things being equal. However, that prediction cannot simply leave out the normative commitment, your transcendence, from the picture. That would be to leave out precisely that which Moran called 'answerability to evidence'. This is, moreover, disanalogous to one's own case. Gardiner later softens his criticism of Sartre:

The solution of the problem of what we are going to do or be cannot appropriately appear to us as some-thing which we can merely 'read off' in a theoretical fashion from knowledge of our past history; for all that, an awareness of how we are prone to behave may play a crucial role in contributing to the decisions we actually take.... For to try to treat the question of what one will do as if it were essentially a matter of investigation and discovery, answerable solely on the basis of data provided by one's past behavior, is necessarily to be precluded from treating it at the same time as if it were genuinely a matter for decision which one is called upon to make in the light of reasons (Gardiner 1977: 79-80, emphasis added).

This more nuanced assessment seems to be exactly right and to converge with the interpretations of Sartre's view by Hampshire and Moran that I described above. But now there is a clear sense in which Gardiner has vindicated the claim that one's character cannot be merely an object for oneself. Therefore, there is a significant asymmetry between your knowledge of your own character and your knowledge of the character of others.

How does this Sartrean argument connect with the attempts to undermine the priority of virtue ethics that I described in the previous section? It does so in this way: the Sartrean counter-argument would be that any such view, even if it values the exercise of virtue as an intrinsic good, is committed to requiring a deliberating agent to treat her character as merely an object for her. The deliberating agent would be required to see her character merely under the guise of facticity.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that an impartialist ethical theory captures all the evaluatively relevant features of situations in a finite set of finite general principles (Holton 2002). Suppose, further, that the theory is liberal enough to include the fact that these principles are applied via the exercise of virtue as a further intrinsic good, perhaps to be built into the outcomes thus brought about (Hurka 2001). What directives does such a theory issue to the deliberating agent? To try and do the right thing. Now, admittedly, the virtuous agent will not try and do the right thing under that

description. For example, he or she will, rather, try and alleviate the suffering of a particular person in a particular context (in a way consistent with the first person and third person asymmetry in the use of virtue concepts). However, if the theory is true, then that does not matter: if all evaluatively relevant features are indeed truly captured by the principles, and if the theory intrinsically values the exercise of virtue, then in doing what is in fact the right thing by her own lights, the agent will have done the right thing as the theory conceives of it even if that is not how the agent conceives of it. How does this involve, at any point, an agent thinking of herself 'merely as an object'?

In this sense: Sartre's norm of epistemic responsibility for any reason-sensitive state of the agent's requires any conclusion, or verdict, to be underwritten by the agent's first personal executive authority. The role of that authority is ineliminable even where, as in the case described, the verdict determined by the application of theory and the verdict determined by practical judgment coincide. By not requiring the operation of this capacity and the implication that the agent could have judged otherwise, the indirect modeling of a competence requires the agent to view him or her self as merely an object in the sense that a privilege of the first person standpoint has been suspended. Such a theory thereby violates the agent's integrity even where the verdict derived from the theory and the agent's own judgments are the same. However, Sartre takes the role of the first person in underwriting one's own rational verdicts to be ineliminable.

I conceded the hypothesis that there could be a finite specification of a finite set of general principles for the sake of argument. In doing so, I accepted the kind of epistemological modesty that such views now advertise. We are now told that the aim of the theorist is not to say anything about practical reasoning, or deliberation, but rather to describe what are in fact the right making features of actions (Bales 1971). An account in terms of general principles has nothing to say to the deliberating agent going forward in the process of decision, but is an attempt to show, *ex post facto*, how any true moral verdict can be derived from moral principles and 'the facts' (Holton 2002). A further response to these views would be to challenge this modesty: it is not simply that an indirect impartialist theory does not address these issues, but that it cannot do so. It is a very serious cost that a theory of this kind can say nothing about the process of practical deliberation (Thomas forthcoming).

By way of contrast Sartre's focus is primarily on forward-looking deliberation and how it is structured by character. It is true that he does not say very much about practical deliberation, but that is because of the point noted above that he believes that the ensemble of projects that make up one's character have already structured one's experience in terms of the patterns of relevance and salience that they dictate so that the task of deliberation is relatively complete. That is one explanation of why the truly interesting cases for Sartre are dilemmatic where the situation places incompatible demands on the way in which your projects have structured the situation.

However, it is this epistemological role of character in forward-looking deliberation that my hypothetical indirect theorist faces particular difficulty in accommodating. In a deliberative context, character works as a filter on practical options, a determinant of relevance and salience. Your character is expressed as much by that which you do not consider in a particular context and by the quality of your deliberation as it is by your actual choices. It can play this role only if it is not an object for you in the sense of an explicitly thematized 'filter' on your options. You do not solve the problem of relevance by suggesting that a deliberating agent inspect every piece of potentially relevant information and classify it as relevant or not: that is evidently a self-defeating strategy. (It is not a solution, but a re-statement of the problem.) The same is true of salience: an expert chess player focuses on only one salient situation or pattern in a chess game while a tyro looks all over the board, failing to grasp the key strategic overall pattern in play (Groot 1965). A virtuous person displaying sound practical reason has the same focus on the salient aspects of a situation as the expert chess player has of her strategic position. How are those epistemic roles of character to be captured by theory? These roles are functions that general principles simply could not discharge (Thomas forthcoming.).

This epistemic role of character does not reduce it simply to a facticity even though relevance and salience are products of past decision. The deliberating agent is focused outwards on those reasons called for by the situation just as his or her sense of relevance and salience are determined by past sensitivity to such reasons. Given that the deliberating agent is always both a facticity and a transcendence, he or she is 'answerable' to the determinations of relevance and salience, but they are not finally determining for him or her. In Sartre's terms, you know yourself in not being merely that facticity and the final, all things considered, practical verdict of the agent that expresses a capacity for executive decision is never determined in advance. In that sense Sartre's ideal of authenticity respects what I have called his requirement that any reason-sensitive state of yours can be rationally underwritten, reflecting the deeper fact

that you have a rational control over your own mind that you do not have over the mind of another.

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