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Christian Skirke on Sorin Baiasu's "Kant and Sartre: Re-Discovering Critical Ethics"

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[SORIN BAIASU | Kant and Sartre: Re-Discovering Critical Ethics | Palgrave Macmillan 2011](#)

By Christian Skirke

Many commentators believe that Sartre is an opponent of Kantian moral philosophy, and numerous passages from Sartre's *œuvre* seem to support their view. In *Kant and Sartre*, Sorin Baiasu goes against this tradition. He argues that Kant and Sartre converge on a number of issues, for example on the controversial moral obligation of unconditional truthfulness (p. 6) and on the transformative character of ethics (p. 63).

In this critical note, I want to address several interconnected problems with the Sartre that Baiasu presents to us. First and foremost, Baiasu tends towards a cognitivist interpretation of Sartre. He stresses Sartre's commitment to what he calls reflexivity, a certain way of making the self-conscious character of intentional experiences or engagements explicit. Maybe this is to strengthen Sartre's connection with Kant; and I'm broadly sympathetic to this emphasis. However, I believe that Baiasu's interpretation fails to give reflexivity the right place in the intentional life of self-conscious agents. Especially with moral agency and related normative issues in mind, what seems crucial to me is that Sartre, like Husserl, sees a close connection between reflexivity as a feature of self-conscious agency and reflexivity in the sense of self-knowledge and self-responsibility. This is an aspect of Sartre's account of agency that Baiasu's book largely ignores.

Further, I believe that Baiasu's treatment of reflexivity has consequences for his account of more tangibly ethical issues in Sartre such as bad faith, shame, and self-transformation. Baiasu associates bad faith and shame uniformly with inauthentic attitudes, engagements or life choices, and self-transformation with how to achieve authenticity in one's life. This association seems to me to underplay the nuance and richness of Sartre's observations on moral agency. By arguing for the relevance of self-knowledge and related demands of truthfulness for bad faith and shame, I want to contrast Baiasu's picture with a suggestion on the situation-sensitive character of Sartre's critical ethics.

Reflexivity

Let me start by rehearsing a few fundamental assumptions underlying Sartre's account of experience and agency. In *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre 2003), Sartre distinguishes between the ontological status of non-conscious and self-identical entities (being-in-

itself) and the ontological status of consciousness (being-for-itself). According to Sartre, consciousness is not self-identical, and thus cannot be identified. That is, we can't say directly and literally that there are individual entities which are conscious. Ontologically speaking, infamously, Sartre claims that consciousness is nothingness. That is, consciousness possesses intentionality so that its primary role is to engage with the world in a direct, pre-reflective, manner. But it is only in engaging with the world that consciousness is able to fashion itself as something substantive and identifiable, as a self or ego. In other words, consciousness becomes a recognisable individual over time, in retrospect, rather than possessing the ontological status of ego or self *ab initio*.

To complicate matters, Sartre claims that consciousness directs itself towards the world in a self-conscious way and thus in a way that possesses a certain kind of unity. As the foregoing makes clear, this unity can't be owed to anything substantive and identifiable, i.e., to a self or ego. Rather, we are pre-reflectively aware that all the intentional experiences we live through appear to us as in each case our own (e.g. Sartre 2004:13; 2003:128). Contemporary authors speak of the phenomenal unity of consciousness in this context (Siewert 2004). What is relevant for self-conscious experience is simply that intentional experiences appear unified to those living through them.

Baiasu approaches Sartre's account of self-consciousness negatively. He tries to explain the self-conscious character of pre-reflective consciousness by its *lack* of self-identify. Pre-reflective consciousness appears to itself *without* identifying itself as the object of its intentional experience (p. 53). For this reason, Baiasu argues, the peculiar reflexivity of the self-conscious subject amounts to a *denial* of self-identity. He claims that the subject is "a unity established as a negation of identity" (p. 55); he writes further that

through its reflexivity, the self destroys the identity of the being-in-itself and raises a new question of identity, the identity that enables us to talk about reflexive consciousness as consciousness (of) self. Reflexive consciousness must be conscious in a pre-reflective way of something, which must in some sense be distinct from itself (as object) and identical with itself and, thus, lead to consciousness (of) self. (p. 56)

According to Baiasu, then, the subject experiences its own intentional experiences by having experiences which seem indistinguishable from the former as they are experiences with equal status and from the same stream of consciousness. Yet, there seems to be an irreducible and subtle difference between the experienced experience and the experiencing experience as subjects cannot live through the latter without the former.

The above passage from *Kant and Sartre* echoes Sartre's account of belief as "a duality which is unity" (2003:100) or his claim that self-presence involves "an ideal distance within the immanence of the subject in relation to itself, a way of not being his own coincidence" (2003:101). However, Baiasu's account of self-consciousness is problematic because it shifts back and forth between two different types of reflexivity. On the one hand, he says in the passage above that intentional experiences are unified under "a

new question of identity” as consciousness (of) self. This looks like a reference to Sartre’s teleology of the self, where Sartre envisages personal identity as a series of identifying projections which fail to establish actual self-identity. Hence, I take it, Baiasu puts emphasis on an identity that is in question. And this emphasis, albeit oblique, captures something central about self-conscious experience, namely that it is a kind of reflexivity that doesn’t posit anything objective but remains subject-directed throughout, a species of “experiencing experiencing” as Husserl calls it (1988:134).

It is clearly in the same spirit that Sartre envisages self-conscious belief as an intentional experience “escaping identity while positing it as unity” (2003:101). What makes belief self-conscious isn’t something objective, identity with itself, but something subjective, its unity. On the other hand, however, Baiasu says in the passage above that reflexive consciousness “must in some sense be distinct from itself (as object)” (p. 56). Obviously, this phrase characterises reflexivity as a higher-order objectifying process. This characterisation of reflexivity may be perfectly intuitive; but it lands us with the following problem: If reflexivity were to have a higher-order objectifying form, the defining characteristic of Sartre’s subject, its lack of self-identity, would be owed to some kind of internal self-objectification in the course of which the subject posits its own intentional experiences as objects of contemplation. This can’t be right. If reflexivity were to mean that subjects posit their own experiences as intentional objects, their intentional life would acquire identifiable traits and thus become self-identical on reflection. As a consequence of this, the inherent reflexivity of intentional life could not be explained as Baiasu initially (and correctly) seeks to explain it—by the fact that subjects have no self-identity. What would be lost on this interpretation is precisely the subjective character of self-consciousness.

It may be worth stressing that Sartre’s discussion of reflection in *Being and Nothingness*, dispersed across the text and sometimes hard to follow, is unambiguous on this point:

the reflected is the reflected-on in complete immanence although in the form of “not-being-in-itself”. It is this which well demonstrates that the reflected-on is not wholly an object but a quasi-object for reflection. Actually the consciousness reflected-on is not presented as something **outside** reflection. (2003:178)

Despite Sartre’s awkward reference to some “quasi-object”, this passage states clearly that consciousness (of) self isn’t a species of self-objectification. Self-consciousness becomes explicit purely immanently, like Husserl’s “experiencing experiencing”, without positing anything identifiable. Contrary to Baiasu’s interpretation, therefore, Sartre’s subjects don’t owe their self-consciousness to the fact that they experience themselves as objects. They owe their self-consciousness to what Husserl, Sartre or Merleau-Ponty call “transcendental”, “pure” or “radical” reflection. Higher-order reflection takes lower-order intentional experiences as its objects whereas “radical”, “pure” or “transcendental” reflection is subject-directed and reveals underlying structures of intentional experience in the act itself. The former—Sartre calls it impure reflection—supplants subjective processes with placeholder objects, for instance with mental states or psychological facts

about the subject (2003:184). The latter—Sartre’s pure reflection—presents us with various ways in which our intentional experiences and their underlying structures appear to us. As intimated above, our capacity to experience our experiences purely subjectively, or purely intentionally, can be said to reveal to ourselves that our conscious experiences must possess a certain unity or, as Sartre puts it, “refers us to the unitary organization of immanence” (2003:100). Without this capacity we couldn’t even speak of intentional experiences but would be faced with a loose assembly of disparate experiential episodes. What reflexivity reveals in the end is a unity that is constitutive for basic intentional experiences and thus for our basic engagements with the world, with ourselves, and with others.

The fact that Baiasu mentions, but doesn’t discuss, Sartre’s pure reflection (p. 126) is further evidence that Baiasu confuses transcendental (pure) reflection with higher-order (impure) reflection. And it seems to me that this confusion gets him embroiled in problematic assertions about agency. In the section of *Kant and Sartre* which is expressly dedicated to reflection (pp.110–3) he writes:

The **reflective** process brings about a consciousness reflected-on and a reflective consciousness, each of them being conscious (of) itself. Hence reflection separates the person in two types of consciousness, each having the structure of a person’s consciousness. (p. 110, original emphasis)

Keep in mind that, in Sartre’s context, reflection is a structure of the for-itself, and the for-itself isn’t yet a full-blown, individuated and identifiable, person. For this reason, Baiasu’s straightforward first-personal interpretation of reflection looks rash. And even if we grant his first-personal interpretation, it isn’t correct to say that reflection duplicates persons or person-like structures. No reflective process brings about two consciousnesses or types of consciousness. In the case of higher-order consciousness (impure reflection), reflective consciousness taken by itself is pre-reflective whereas the consciousness reflected upon is converted into, or supplanted by, an intentional object. In the case of transcendental (pure) reflection, what we encounter is one consciousness with two components, one of them world-directed, the other one self-directed. As Gennaro (2002) suggests under the title of wide intrinsicity, it is the whole intentional act that is self-conscious due to its composition, that is, due to the way in which its components are related to each other. In neither of these two cases, therefore, do the two sides of reflection have the structure of a person’s consciousness. Either (impure reflection) one element is an intentional object and thus has the non-conscious status of being-in-itself. Or (pure reflection) reflection and reflected-on are components of a self-conscious whole, yet aren’t self-conscious if taken in isolation.

I have tried to bring out in this section that the kind of reflexivity relevant for a deeper understanding of self-conscious agency is Sartre’s pure reflection. It makes ourselves visible to ourselves as agents who act on the world and interact with others. To push things a little, just as pure reflection makes perspicuous to ourselves how what we perceive looks or sounds to us, it makes perspicuous to ourselves how our actions and

action-guiding thoughts strike us in our intentional life. As Baiasu shifts between different kinds of reflexivity, he misses this central, subject-directed, feature of self-conscious agency and associates reflexivity with a subtle form of self-objectification instead. I want to look at some general implications of his confusion in the next section, and turn to more specific ones subsequently.

Self-Knowledge

Baiasu's shifts between transcendental reflection and higher-order reflection have consequences in particular for the normative outlook he attributes to Sartre. For instance, he contrasts Kant and Sartre on the categorical imperative procedure. He states that, on Sartrean premises, the Kantian original would have to be counted as a problematic instance of higher-order reflection, placing the normative source of obligations in some substantive self. In a further twist on the reflexivity theme, Baiasu argues that, as impure reflection is normatively unacceptable for Sartre, Sartre has to resort to placing the normative source of obligations in others.

As Sartre's discussion of shame may bring home, this is not an entirely unproblematic idea, certainly not unproblematic given the moral psychology in the background. First of all, as Baiasu acknowledges in various places, shame is a structural concept for Sartre and not simply an anthropological phenomenon. Globally speaking, I feel ashamed before others because I experience myself as being seen from the other's vantage point. This doesn't entail, though, that the normative source of my shame is in others; for example, it doesn't entail that I feel lacking or humiliated according to ethical standards embodied by others. According to Sartre, "I am ashamed of myself as I appear to the Other" (2003:246). What gives rise to shame in Sartre's structural sense is that I experience the sheer presence of intentional experiences which are not mine. Shame can be said to resemble empathy in this respect (Skirke 2015). Empathy, too, has to do with how we experience the presence of others (Stein 1961). Contrary to sympathy or emotional contagion, however, empathy doesn't emulate emotions from others or develop emotions on behalf of others. It simply allows me to experience that there are intentional experiences around which aren't my own intentional experiences. Similarly, I don't adopt the conventions, attitudes or judgements of others when I feel ashamed (Scheler 1954). Shame in Sartre's structural sense, is how I experience, or live through, the presence of others. I'll have more to say about the negative or pejorative connotations of shame below. For now, however, let's treat shame simply as a structural feature of coexistence without specific normative content. It follows immediately that others don't play the decisive normative role Baiasu assigns to them. The most we can say at this point is that I take a normative attitude on myself as I experience the presence of others, or of intentional experiences that are not mine.

If we add Sartre's full picture of reflexivity to this, it becomes obvious that, in searching for the normative source of (moral) obligations, Baiasu leaves an important route unexplored. If Kant's categorical imperative procedure is existentially or phenomenologically problematic for its higher-order character, as Baiasu asserts, why look to others? Why not simply resort to pure reflection in response? Maybe pure

reflection appears too thin for practical matters at first sight, too thin to make a normative difference. But this verdict would be hasty, and is unwarranted. Let's stay with higher-order reflection for the moment, and take a look at its normative properties. Typically higher-order reflection legitimises lower-order intentional acts from above, as it were. In the case at hand, Kant's categorical imperative procedure, the higher-order element may be said to owe its authority to its universality or its conformity with reason. But higher-order reflection also supplants something subjective, namely the lower-order act, with something objective. That is, on the given interpretation at least, the original categorical imperative procedure brings to bear its authority on an objectified action-guiding thought. This, indeed, is Baiasu's conclusion (p. 123): the categorical imperative procedure flies in the face of Sartre's account of self-consciousness because the categorical imperative procedure, conceived in higher-order terms, arrests agency in order to assess it. This is the point at which Baiasu suggests that others provide us with normative grounds for obligations. If the aim is to keep self-conscious agency fluid and active, however, to my mind, there is no way around pure reflection. Pure reflection accounts for the unity of one's intentional life and, by that token, also for the unity of one's agency and one's basic normative orientations.

Let me take up an intimation from the previous section, and make a very brief suggestion on what the unity of one's agency might signify in the Sartrean context. Pure reflection on maxims or precepts, our "experiencing experiencing" of action-guiding thoughts or attitudes, tells us how our practical beliefs or commitments strike us, whether we endorse a certain course of action or not. That is to say that pure reflection is a kind of self-knowledge (Sartre 2003:177-8). This connection provides us with a different perspective on the normative grounds of agency. We may say that agency along the lines of pure reflection has its normative grounds in truthfulness (Moran 2001; Williams 2002). Truthfulness means accountability for one's actions and motives in light of one's individual normative commitments. Authentic moral agency, in turn, embodies these commitments in one's actions.

Baiasu's book doesn't say anything about the tangible role of self-knowledge in Sartre's account of agency. Again, this seems to me rooted in the fact that pure or transcendental reflection isn't kept in view. Even if we are suspicious about Sartre's heroic individualism, and think we need to involve others in the making of the full moral agent, we can't ignore the association, common in other phenomenologists as well, between a special kind of reflection and self-knowledge. Baiasu is needlessly quiet about it. None of this precludes regard for others or even something more forceful, such as the experience of the freedom of others as a constraint on one's own agency. What remains decisive for agency, at any rate, isn't a value represented by others. It is how agents live their freedom individually. To be accountable for one's actions means at bottom to be truthful and not self-deceived about one's actions, attitudes and commitments. What we end up with here is thus a capacity of self-obligation that measures what one ought to do by what one's genuine motives are.

This gives us a fairly straightforward explanation for Sartre's insistence on unconditional truthfulness in moral matters. Moral agency is the expression of one's commitments; and truthfulness, as the standard to which self-knowledge can be held, requires us to express and embody our commitments accurately. If we interpret truthfulness as a moral standard, lies or deflections are morally unacceptable because they work on the pretense that we're sincere and committed to what is true while we misrepresent what we know to be factually the case. Similarly, instances of double-thinking or self-deception are morally unacceptable because they effectively leave open what our commitments are. We might mitigate the counterintuitive overtones of Sartre's insistence on truthfulness in the face of adversity by saying that lying and deflecting undermines the core of one's moral agency and for this reason can't be morally recommended.

Bad Faith

The topics of self-knowledge, truthfulness and self-deception lead seamlessly to Sartre's discussion of bad faith. As is to be expected of a study of Sartre's ethics, Baiasu's book gives ample space to bad faith. Let me start with a few general remarks on the phenomenon of bad faith itself before I turn to a critical appraisal of Baiasu's account.

The bad faith chapter has a very interesting and telling position within the whole of *Being and Nothingness*. It follows directly on Sartre's introductory discussions of consciousness as an ontological item that lacks self-identity, and essentially presents us with various misguided attempts on the part of consciousness to reclaim and possess an identity. These attempts are paradigmatic cases of self-deception—Sartre's famous waiter identifies with his role in the café, a woman faced with an obnoxious suitor turns herself into a disembodied Cartesian mind, a gay man identifies with the absence of self-identity in conscious agency in order to avoid his coming-out. Self-deception consists in the direct, unmediated, identification of a subject with "itself". As a subject cannot be identical with anything, any identification with "itself" has to be a fundamental self-misrepresentation; "itself" is an intentional object and nothing subjective. Sartre provides insight into what counteracts self-deception immediately after his discussion of bad faith. The following part of *Being and Nothingness* addresses the self-presence of the subject. This self-presence comes down to an exercise of pure reflection, the "experiencing experiencing" that ultimately provides us with an accurate or sincere account of our own intentional life.

My interpretation of the bad faith chapter and its context is controversial as the exchange between Eshleman (2008) and Santoni (2008) shows. Eshleman argues that the bad faith chapter should have followed the discussion of the "look" so that higher-order reflective or other-mediated forms of self-misrepresentation could have been integrated in the discussion of bad faith. Baiasu doesn't argue for his position on bad faith, or refer to this debate. But it seems to me that he effectively agrees with Eshleman's view. According to Baiasu, bad faith couldn't be understood without Sartre's account of impure reflection which follows about a hundred pages after the actual discussion of bad faith. He writes:

[I]mpure reflection is reflection in bad faith and bad faith is an attitude brought about by impure reflection. In other words, impure reflection and bad faith are mutually constitutive. (p. 127)

In what follows I dispute this statement, again in the name of pure reflection. It will become clear that I agree with those who take bad faith to be systematically prior to reflection. I argue, in particular, that bad faith isn't necessarily a case of impure reflection; and that impure reflection isn't necessarily a case of bad faith.

Impure reflection, as Sartre introduces it, is not simply reflection in bad faith but specifically higher-order reflection. And, it seems to me, higher-order reflection is legitimate for certain purposes. It is legitimate, for instance, if we want to represent a subjective process in objective terms, say, in order to speak of intentional acts as psychological states. Impure reflection is reflection in bad faith only if we employ it in order to account for subjectivity, spontaneity, or freedom on their own terms. Sartre calls impure reflection "an abortive effort on the part of the for-itself to be another while remaining itself" (2003:184). But this is problematic only if we don't recognise our move for what it is, namely the substitution of an objective placeholder for a conscious process. What is wrongheaded here is simply the expectation that impure reflection stays entirely within the sphere of subjectivity. Baiasu reduces impure reflection to this case. A more balanced interpretation would tell us that impure reflection can be used to generate false identities which fall under bad faith. But not all instances of impure reflection generate false identities so that not all instances of impure reflection are instances of bad faith.

Bad faith, in turn, isn't an attitude brought about by impure reflection. Or better, it is false to hold that bad faith is brought about by impure reflection alone, and it is debatable whether impure reflection is responsible for bad faith at all. As I've suggested above, bad faith can be described as the direct relation of a subject to "itself" where "itself" is an intentional object and not a subject. As Sartre's famous examples show, "itself" can be a social role (the play-acting waiter), can take the shape of some deflection that posits the subject as a purely mental, disembodied, entity (the woman in the suitor example), or even employ the very definition of "for-itself" for self-deceptive ends (the example of the gay man in denial of his sexuality). Crucially, no reflection is involved here, not even pure reflection. The only intentional act taking place here comes down to a direct, pre-reflective, identification of the subject with an object. Evidently, any subject must be self-deceived on account of this direct, pre-reflective, identification. This is true even in cases where impure reflection seems to give rise to bad faith. Whereas any identification of the subject with an object is a case of bad faith without further reference to subjective processes, impure reflection represents pre-existing subjective processes as objects, without further self-identification. That is, impure reflection doesn't say that the subject is an object; it represents the subject as an object or as if it is an object. The fact of representation alone, therefore, is not sufficient for bad faith. Impure reflection turns into a case of bad faith only if the reflecting subject identifies itself with placeholder objects which represent conscious processes.

To sum up my criticism, self-deception doesn't enter the picture with impure reflection. Self-deception enters the picture when subjects (being-for-itself) identify themselves immediately with objects (being-in-itself) such as social roles, souls, egos, unconscious drives and so forth. This tells us that self-deception turns on self-identification, not on reflection. Indeed, as Baiasu points out in his discussion of reflexivity, certain kinds of reflection counteract identification. Again, pure reflection is the case in point. Contrary to impure reflection, pure reflection stays clear of just those items that lend themselves to identification. Allowing subjects to experience their intentional lives subjectively or intentionally, the "experiencing experiencing" that is pure reflection doesn't involve positing intentional objects. Rather, pure reflection gives subjects access to the phenomenal dimension of their perceptions and attitudes. In giving them access to this dimension, pure reflection puts subjects in a position to track how their beliefs and moral convictions strike them, and thereby brings into relief that we have various commitments with respect to our beliefs and moral convictions.

That we recognise our commitments in pure reflection has a normative point. Typically, beliefs or moral convictions that arise under conditions of self-deception are conflicting beliefs or moral convictions. But we cannot genuinely be committed to conflicting beliefs or moral convictions. Our commitments belong to the background of our intentional lives. This background, based around the phenomenal unity of consciousness, makes intentional experiences and engagements possible for us. Accurate and sincere accounts of our commitments presuppose phenomenal unity as well. We can't genuinely be committed to conflicting beliefs or moral convictions because it isn't possible that conflicting beliefs or convictions are part of a unified intentional life. In this case, evidently, the very preconditions for accurate and sincere accounts of the related commitments aren't fulfilled. Pure reflection, by contrast, counteracts self-deception because it takes us to what unifies conscious experiences. In more practical terms, it may be said to involve taking a stand on our beliefs and moral convictions. Taking a stand of this kind means being responsive to demands for truthfulness, to demands that we address and resolve conflicts between our convictions and beliefs whenever such conflicts arise.

Considerations of this kind, I believe, would have made it easier to follow Baiasu's numerous deep insights into Sartre's ethics, for instance his astute observation "that Sartre sees the person's conversion from the 'natural' attitude of bad faith to the 'original' conduct of good faith as the key in the constitution of authentic, that is, ethically valid interpersonal relations" (p. 134). I believe Baiasu's observation touches on the very core of Sartrean ethics. If this is true, however, the basic idea of this ethics, it seems to me, isn't that we express demands to other free agents or respond to demands other free agents have. Its basic idea is, rather, that agents exercise a capacity for personal transformation. This capacity rests on pure reflection or self-knowing agency simply because agents couldn't "convert" from self-deception to authenticity without pure reflection. Sartre foregrounds the interpersonal dimension in his *Notebooks*. However, what gives interpersonal normative demands traction with agency is the fact that individual agents can act in light of their commitments and let go of self-deceived

courses of action. It is only under this authenticity condition that interpersonal normative demands promote good faith in Sartre's agents. This would suggest that self-knowledge is constitutive for moral agency, that is, a kind of agency which is responsive to interpersonal normative demands. And that, in turn, would suggest that Sartrean ethics capitalises on self-knowledge and truthfulness rather than on interpersonal bonds and obligations.

Shame

Sartre's phenomenology abounds with little vignettes of morally salient situations. The discussion of bad faith is well-known for these, and so is the discussion of shame. When we took a brief look at shame before, I emphasised its structural role and downplayed its normative aspect completely, perhaps excessively. Let me set this right now. To recall, I said, and maintain, that shame doesn't mean that I adopt the attitudes, customs or judgements of others, but is my way to experience the presence of others. Doubtless, however, shame has negative and pejorative connotations; and precisely these connotations become prominent in illustrations such as the famous scene where the subject freezes in shame because it is caught in the act of spying through a keyhole.

Baiasu is acutely aware that, despite some thematic congruence, Sartre's ethics is profoundly opposed to Kantian deontology (p. 135). This opposition is tangible in the moral colouring of Sartre's phenomenological descriptions. However, Baiasu takes these pejorative connotations and colourings unequivocally to illustrate inauthenticity and to call for moral transformation. In my view, this interpretation homogenises different facets of Sartre's descriptive accounts. Rather than illustrating the same structural lapse into inauthenticity over and over again, I believe, Sartre's descriptions enrich the picture of moral agency in a way that brings out its sensitivity to situations and suggests that Sartre's ethics is exemplary rather than principled.

This brings us back to shame and my claim that shame in the structural sense refers to my experience of the presence of others. What is normatively significant about the presence of others, Baiasu and I agree, is that they are free agents. In a sense, shame in the structural sense tells me immediately that my freedom isn't the only freedom around. Sartre's gloss on this theme is that the presence of others alienates my possibilities from me. Baiasu addresses exactly this aspect of shame when he asserts that "[s]ince my possibilities are determined by the other person, what I experience, in fact, is the other person's freedom" (p. 132). This is fitting, but it doesn't address fully how one's agency is shaped by this sense of alienation vis-à-vis others. Taking up a thread from the previous discussion, I want to insist that the connection has to be through a kind of self-knowledge where shame makes my commitments resonate with the fact that there is more freedom around me than my own freedom; or that my freedom is limited by more freedom, namely the freedom of others. Interestingly, this gives me more than the need to extricate myself from some kind of alienation. Yet this need is the only thing in view if the freedom of others is taken to amount to what determines, and thus annuls, my possibilities.

Contrary to this fairly common picture, which is Baiasu's, whether I act on this limit of my freedom as a constraint, thus *against* others, or as a possibility, thus *with* others, seems to me to depend on further situational details rather than the sheer presence of others. For example, I would be true to my commitments (and thus free) if I acted against others whose freedom embodied commitments inimical to my own. But I would also be true to my commitments (and thus free) if I acted with others whose freedom embodied commitments congenial to my own. Conversely, I would be in bad faith (and thus unfree) if I collaborated with those whose commitments I can't share and if I antagonised those whose commitments converge with mine. The way in which structural shame constitutes interaction is thus situation-sensitive. Its situation-sensitive aspect disappears if shame comes down to what Baiasu takes it to be, a general issue with authentic existence and the general preservation of one's freedom.

It is obvious, I believe, how important this situation-sensitive aspect is for Sartre's account of moral agency. He thought that a life without shame, without play-acting, without contortions about one's sexual identity is morally superior to a life of middle-class conventions, of guilt, of self-diminishing attitudes. But the superiority of this life isn't evident in a vacuum or once and for all. It only is evident if suitably contextualised in an appropriate historical setting such as the prevalent middle-class morality of the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Only then do those alienating aspects of interpersonal relations become salient to which Sartre's illustrations of the "look" owe their pull. And they don't just become salient in a detached descriptive account of agency. They have to become salient to the agents themselves, in light of their commitments. Other situations or historical circumstances might have asked for a different concept with different descriptive connotations and with a different associated set of commitments. Not that Sartre makes too many references to other situations than to the period from the mid-nineteenth century up to his present; Merleau-Ponty's early criticisms of Sartre are telling in this respect (see 2012:478 *et passim*). But Sartre's account is unmistakably situation-sensitive. And it would have been interesting to see this sensitivity included in an account of Sartre's critical ethics.

Self-Transformation

Self-knowledge has been the overarching theme behind my remarks throughout. I'd like to come back to this theme now, in conclusion. Kant argues in the *Religion* essay that agents are receptive to what the moral law ordains if they have the right fundamental disposition. Agents usually don't start out on the right fundamental disposition but come to change into it from some other, unethical, fundamental disposition. Similarly, Sartre speaks of choosing one's fundamental project in a choice without reasons and deliberative volitions. Baiasu thinks that there is a deep connection between Kant's and Sartre's notions of self-transformation.

In a pathbreaking article, Baldwin (1980) suggested that Kant and Sartre share the concept of an original choice that can't be formulated along the usual lines of a choice between alternatives but is something intangible that expresses itself in one's actions, in one's engagements with others. Although this is correct in some respect, Baiasu rightly

opposes the terms of Baldwin's rapprochement between Kant and Sartre. For what is underlying this rapprochement is a conventional and limited conception of a choice. Instead of a choice between alternatives, Baiasu insists, the paradigm of a choice should be non-deliberative, spontaneous, or radical so that we don't have to resort to the intangible or ineffable when we think of self-transformation (pp. 68–9). Sartre speaks of continuous self-choice in this non-deliberative, spontaneous, or radical sense; and Baiasu tries to incorporate this notion into his improved Kantian-Sartrean account of a fundamental project that is sensitive to moral requirements and obligations. Still, eventually, Baiasu seems to be caught up in the conception of the fundamental project as something intangible: "The fundamental project of a person is centred around an end, more precisely around the person's sum of possibilities and values" (p. 74). As I've stressed at the start of my comments, this end, "the person's sum of possibilities and values", is Sartre's perpetually deferred self. Given Sartre's conception of conscious being, this end is deferred because, short of unconscious paralysis, there has to be at least one more possibility that is left for me to actualise. So what has been gained by rejecting Baldwin's conventional interpretation of a choice?

For Baldwin, Sartre's fundamental project and Kant's fundamental disposition are intangible because they amount to special choices that are articulated indirectly in the medium of choices between alternatives. The way Baiasu puts things, they aren't simply intangible but come close to providing a frame of intelligibility or significance for individual moral agency. They constitute individual moral agency because they are spontaneous and radical; they can nullify all previous choices between alternatives by rendering them incomprehensible or insignificant; and they establish a new and comprehensive agential perspective. What is not clear to me, to put it cautiously, is the precise contribution that a teleology of the deferred self is to make to this framework. The idea seems to be that the self stays in place as some kind of entity-like ideal, reminding agents, as it were, of the unaccomplished unity of their ongoing projects. This suggests that their ongoing projects, even though based on a fundamental choice or disposition, are not fully comprehensible or not fully significant to agents. They are not fully comprehensible or significant to agents because they lack actual unity. And this may chime with Sartre's rhetoric of man as a "useless passion" (2003:636).

If this is true, however, fundamental choices can't be constitutive for authentic moral lives. What is characteristic of authentic moral lives is their unity; and it is the unity of their lived experiences and engagements that enables agents to invest their lives with significance. If we think of fundamental choices in terms of their deferred end, our projects reveal their significance to us only in retrospect, after yet another fundamental choice has forced their conclusion on these projects. For it is only in this case, given the teleological perspective of deferred ends, that these projects possess unity. But if these projects have been accomplished, these projects have been superseded as projects. They lack the sort of significance we accord to our ongoing projects ipso facto because they have ceased to be an active part of our moral life.

I would suggest that we treat what makes our projects significant along the lines of the phenomenal unity that our projects already possess while they are in the making. We've seen that how we experience our experiences in instances of pure reflection provides us with vital clues as to the phenomenal unity of our intentional life. This goes for individual moral agency as well. Pure reflection doesn't respond to an entity-like reminder of the unaccomplished completion of our project. Pure reflection draws attention to our commitments when we reflect on our actions and thus contributes to our self-knowing agency. Self-choice, in turn, may be said to constitute our commitments, and the way our actions resonate with our commitments comes out in pure reflection. What makes our individual moral agency significant, therefore, is the way in which our ongoing actions embody our ongoing commitments. More precisely, what makes our individual moral agency significant is the demand that our actions embody our commitments accurately and sincerely.

As important as the deferred self and the unaccomplished completion of our projects may be ontologically speaking, I'm more easily convinced by the view that the normative weight of Sartre's self-choice and self-transformation is carried by self-knowledge and its appeal to truthfulness. This appeal, I take it, motivates moral transformation, one of the common Kantian-Sartrean themes at the centre of Baiasu's study. Moral agents change their moral perspective when certain fundamental normative orientations are exhausted and don't allow them to be true to themselves. The most obvious form this can take is the converse of agency in light of one's commitments. When one's agency is in crisis, commitments may strike us as odd in light of tensions with how we act. What brings on fundamental choices, therefore, are courses of action that we feel compelled to pursue in the face of what we take our commitments to be. A critical ethics according to Sartre may be said to urge agents to be thorough in keeping track of both, the resonance of their actions with their commitments, and the fittingness of their commitments in light of their actions.

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