Sartre, Hodological Space, and the Existence of Others*

ADRIAN MIRVISH
California State University, Chico

It would seem fair to characterize Sartre's work in its current relation to the philosophical community in terms that for the most part vary between the nororious and the unorthodox. This is certainly so when it comes to his treatment of the Other, where it has been claimed in the critical literature that an overriding and unwarranted pessimism comes to the fore. Concomitantly in this regard it has been said that Sartre's work here involves a set of perspicuous if biased examples without any underlying systematic theory to unite them.

Thus, for example, regarding the subject's relation to the Other, we are told by one critic:

... relations between human beings could only be those of conflict—of one freedom pitted against another .... Man's characteristic reaction to the 'look' that someone else turned upon him has to be to feel naked and ashamed. In the Sartrean universe shame was the token and measure of human inadequacy.¹

The above interpretation is not at all uncommon, but we would claim it is misleading on two counts. In the first place, we will show in what follows how for Sartre there exists the quite viable notion of a loved Other. At the same time we will see that, in order to make this view

*A shorter version of this paper was read at the 1983 meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy.
explicit, it will be necessary to give a detailed account of certain underlying ontological themes in *Being and Nothingness* which have essentially been ignored in the literature. Once this is done, it will then be possible to see that, far from being fitful in his approach, Sartre provides us with a methodology which is consistently used throughout his treatment of the Other—a methodology which is moreover innovative and insightful.

In particular, we will have to pay attention to how, for Sartre, a subject constitutes a world in terms of certain Gestalt differentiations and how, concomitantly, the Other is always experienced in terms of what Sartre, after the psychologist Lewin, calls hodological space. It is on this underlying ontological basis that some of the supposedly infamous claims about the nature of the Other will be able to be evaluated.

In what follows, therefore, we will first show how Sartre approaches the problem of the existence of Others, and why historically he takes the particular tack which he does. Lewin's theory of hodological space will then be outlined, in order to show how it, along with certain Gestalt tenets, is used by Sartre to give us an analysis of the above problem as well as that of human relations.

That Sartre's approach to the existence of Others is not a traditional one is immediately indicated when, for example, in *Being and Nothingness* he notes that, "[i]n my own inmost depths I must find not reasons for believing that the Other exists but the Other himself as not being me." Clearly, Sartre is not concerned with those conditions which supposedly enable us to intellectually or reflexively comprehend under what conditions an object as Other can exist for a subject. Rather, he is concerned with a much more immediate or 'pre-ontological comprehension' of the Other which he goes on immediately to tell us:

... comprises a surer and deeper understanding of the nature of the Other and the relation of his being to my being than all the theories which have been built around it.

Given that so much of what Sartre will have to say depends on this notion of a 'pre-ontological comprehension,' it is important, for a detailed picture, to see that he comes to this point of view not just as a general reaction against traditional theories concerning the existence of Others, but specifically as a reaction against Intellectualist and Idealist theories to which he was exposed as a student. Let us therefore turn briefly to see what Léon Brunschvicg—one of Sartre's teachers at the Sorbonne—has to say concerning this same problem, which in turn and by contrast will help to make Sartre's own position all the clearer.