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**SARTRE ON THE EMOTIONS**

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**1. The Significance of Emotions**

To understand Sartre’s *Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions* it is crucial to clarify the sort of inquiry that Sartre takes himself to undertake. In the Introduction to the *Sketch*, Sartre contrasts the method employed by prominent psychologists at the turn of the 20th century, commonly referred to as introspectionism, with the method of inquiry employed by Phenomenology, understood as the discipline inaugurated by Edmund Husserl. Introspectionist psychologists were interested in studying the factual contents of mental phenomena. Introspectionists would typically collect their data by asking subjects to introspect and report the content of their experiences, for instance by detecting threshold stimuli. Introspectionist psychologists would then compile detailed descriptions of psychological states by relying on their patients’ factual reports. By contrast, Husserl’s phenomenological method was interested in eidetically grasping the universal structures of consciousness. Husserl believed that it is in virtue of its structure that consciousness grasps objects in the world as meaningful. It was precisely the generation of meaning characteristic of the relation between consciousness and the objects in our environment that Husserl wanted to study by means of uncovering universal structures of consciousness. Sartre was inspired by Husserl to pursue an explanation of the role of consciousness, and in particular of its structure, in generating the experience of a meaningful world. It is no surprise then that Sartre takes issue with the tendency of introspectionists to treat psychological states as empirical factsthat can be accurately accessed and studied by means of an introspective, observational effort. In so doing, according to Sartre, psychological states are decontextualized, that is, they are extracted from the context within which they arise. Sartre argues that this sort of decontextualisation leads to a conception of our psychological states as entities that have a merely contingent relationship to human experience of the world as a meaningful whole. We therefore lose sight of the fundamental character of psychological states as responses to particular situations and simply describe a psychological state as an enclosed nucleus “within our mind.” Ultimately, then, Sartre charges introspectionist psychologists of divesting psychological states of their *significance*. The “significance” of psychological states refers to their role as constituents of ‘human reality’, that is, of the experience of the world as a meaningful whole (12). In applying the introspectionist method on emotions, introspectionist psychologists fundamentally distort the nature of psychological states.

Sartre applies Husserl’s insight onto the specific case of the emotions. Sartre argues that the phenomenological method avoids the mistakes of the introspectionist psychologist by elucidating the conditions that render an emotion meaningful precisely *as* an emotion. According to Sartre, this entails rejecting a purely inward-looking attitude towards emotions and adopting an outward-looking attitude instead. Emotions are now conceived within the context within which they arise, namely as responses to a world experienced as a meaningful whole, that is, as constitutive elements of reality as we humans experience it. As Sartre puts it, ‘[an emotion] is that human reality itself, realizing itself in the form of ‘emotion’’ (12). Indeed, once we switch from an introspectionist to a phenomenological method of inquiry, the term “psychological *state*”seems to misconceive the subject matter because it understands emotions as things (or quasi-things) that literally populate the interiority of our minds. In contrast, Sartre refers to the emotions as psychological *phenomena*, ‘that is, the actual psychic events in so far as these are significations, not in so far as they are pure facts’ (13).

Yet Sartre tells us that although the phenomenological method is to be preferred over the introspectionist sort, “[i]t is not our intention here to attempt a phenomenological study of the emotions” (12). Rather, “[m]ay the following pages be regarded as an experiment in phenomenological psychology” (14). Otherwise put, Sartre does not burden himself with adhering to the strictures of phenomenological orthodoxy. More specifically, Sartre does not engage in the complex “phenomenological reduction”, that is, the bracketing of our assumptions regarding the existence of the world in the observation of the essential structure of conscious experience. Rather, Sartre clarifies that his focus of interest will remain ‘*man in situation*’ (12). Therefore, Sartre’s starting point about the nature of emotions concerns the way that we experience our emotions in concrete situations. Moreover, it is important to note that Sartre is not attempting to give an all inclusive theory of the emotions. For instance, Sartre leaves out any detailed treatment of feelings. Rather, throughout this work, Sartre is concerned with the study of a particular class of emotions, the sort that transform our world and thus have a role to play in our self-deceptive tendencies. It is to a sketch for a theory of these emotions that we now turn.

**2. The Finality of Emotions**

Two claims drive Sartre’s account of the emotions, or so I will argue. First, the emotions are not merely a form of disturbance or erratic behaviour but rather an essential aspect of human reality that is organized and goal-directed in structure. Sartre refers to the goal-directed structure of emotions as the “finality” of emotions. As we will see, emotions play a purposeful role in navigating difficult aspects of the world. The second claim is subtler. Sartre argues that the way in which we consciously experience emotions, from a first-person perspective, plays an essential role in understanding the significance of emotional behaviour. As we shall see, these two claims are intimately related and best understood by contrasting them with the dominant theories of emotion that Sartre rejects. The rest of this section focuses on the first claim and discussion of the second claim arrives in Section 3.

The strategy Sartre employs to critically assess opposing theories of emotion involves his praising what he deems to be of value while rejecting what he deems to be inaccurate. And, as we shall see, Sartre incorporates the elements he praises into his own theory. Sartre begins with William James’ peripherical theory. The core of James’ theory, according to Sartre, is a distinction between two phenomena involved in emotional experience. On the one hand, the physiological component of an emotion. In the case of, say, fear, our heart pumps faster, our muscles tense, and sweat drips down our back. On the other hand, there is the psychological component of emotions, which Sartre terms ‘the *state* of consciousness’, or our conscious awareness of an emotion. According to Sartre, for James an emotion is nothing but our conscious awareness of physiological changes. For instance, fear just *is* the conscious awareness of our heart pumping faster, our muscles tensing, and shivers down our spine (16). Sartre praises the way in which James gives a role to physiological changes in the description of the way we experience emotions, since we clearly do experience such changes (17). At the same time, Sartre objects that James reduces a state of consciousness to the mere awareness of physiological changes and this lands us in a position unable to capture what is distinctive about an emotional state *as such*. For it is unclear why, say, the mere awareness of our heart pumping faster or our muscles tensing should *mean* fear, as opposed to excitement or intense anticipation. After all, the same sort of awareness can occur after we have strenuously exercised yet that experience is not one of fear. Therefore, James’ theory fails to capture what distinguishes an emotional experience qualitatively *as emotional* and it is therefore unable to capture its significance.

Sartre then moves onto Pierre Janet’s theory of the emotions. Sartre argues that Janet improves on James’ theory in providing us with a first, albeit ultimately unsatisfactory, step towards capturing the significance of emotions. This is the first time we encounter the idea that emotions have an organised structure and are not merely physiological disturbances. According to Janet, emotions perform a specific function in a subject’s attempt to adapt to a difficult situation. The function of emotions consists in allowing the release of “psychic energy” that has built up due to a confrontation with an experienced hardship. The psychic release results from adopting a behaviour that requires less “psychic energy” and therefore it relieves the subject of the discontent induced by the experienced hardship. Thus, emotions, according to Janet, are precisely the adoption of the stress relieving behaviour (20). Sartre provides us with the example of a girl who is told by her father that he might suffer from paralysis. The girl worries that she will have to take care of her infirmed father. Consequently, the girl reacts to this potential hardship with intense despair. After seeking treatment from a doctor, the girl confesses that the thought of having to nurse her father is unbearable. The girls’ violent outbursts of despair, according to Janet, are her means of having to adapt to a hardship of nursing her father by releasing tension.

Sartre identifies in Janet’s theory a preliminary formulation of emotions as organised means of response to our environment, namely as a function that allows the subject to cope with a difficult situation. Yet, Sartre argues that Janet’s formulation of the organisation of the emotions is problematic in the following way. If we characterise emotions as a quasi-mechanical, hydraulic system that simply replaces one sort of behaviour with another that releases “psychic energy,” then we are unable to explain what makes a determinate emotion the emotion that it is (20). For instance, if we understand the girl’s outbursts as a merely automatic system that replaces one sort of behaviour with another in order to release tension, then we are left wondering what exactly is it that allows us to understand the girl’s behaviour as having the meaning of *despair*. There is nothing in the notion of an organic system whose adaptive function is to reduce tension that provides us with an understanding of the meaningfulness of behaviour, in this case, *despair*. For example, if sadness is merely an automatic system like despair, then what allows us to understand each emotion as having the distinct meaning it has? What would distinguish fear from sadness and from despair? Thus, Sartre argues that while Janet’s theory improves on James’, insofar as it recognizes a form of organisation in emotional behaviour, it nonetheless falls back into the same problem that plagues James’ theory, namely the inability to capture the qualitative distinctiveness of emotion.

Nevertheless, Sartre points out another aspect of Janet’s account that deserves our attention. This is crucial to understand how Sartre arrives at his first key claim driving his own account of the emotions. Sartre notes that some of Janet’s patients report admitting defeat *before* engaging in emotional behaviour. That is, these patients purposively adopted the relevant emotional behaviour *as a means to* releasing their tension, as opposed to being constitutive of the release itself. Referring to a patient who would burst into tears every time she tried to confess her socially unacceptable behaviour to her therapist, Sartre asks: ‘is she weeping *because* she can say nothing?... Or rather, is she not crying precisely in order *not* to say anything?’ (21-22). Whereas the first question assumes that an automatic system drives the patient in a way that *causes* her to weep (due to being unable to say something), the second question introduces a *spontaneity*, where we view the patient as an agent that intentionally and purposively weeps *in order* not to have to say anything.

Sartre then argues that only with the introduction of some form of spontaneity on the part of the subject do we gain a proper conception of the finality of emotions. This is because we should conceive the goal orientation of emotions not as a mere causal mechanism to which the subject is passively subjected, but rather as the means by which a subject purposively attempts to avoid modes of conduct that she does not want to pursue. In turn, according to Sartre, this provides us with a way to avoid the problem of James’ and Janet’s theories. So understood, what captures, say, the meaning of despair *as such*, is the particular way in which the subject purposively adopts the relevant emotional behaviour as a means to elude a specific behaviour that she is averse to perform. Crucially, it is in light of the subject’s tacit awareness of wanting to avoid a certain course of action that we can understand the adoption of, say, the particular emotional behaviour that we call “despair”. This point that will become crucial below.

Sartre then moves onto Guillaume’s adoption of Gestalt psychology and praises it for its effort, albeit also ultimately unsatisfactory, to capture the finality of the emotions. Gestalt psychologists, such as Lewin and Dembo, argued that our experience of the world as a structured whole result from perceptual construals, or interpretations, guided by a set of organizational principles. Guillaume implicitly relies on this idea to characterize emotional behaviour as the means by which we effect a re-construal or reinterpretation of a situation we experience as involving an insurmountable difficulty. The re-construal of the situation changes the way we apprehend it in a way that removes the insurmountable difficulty. Sartre phrases this thought in the following way: emotional behaviour restructures difficult situations through a reinterpretation that ameliorates the perceived difficulty. For instance, the incessant crying of Janet’s patient is conceived as her reinterpretation of a situation presenting her with the need to confess. Although Guillaume, according to Sartre, correctly identifies the finality of emotions as the attempt to surmount an insurmountable difficulty, the Gestalt framework, nonetheless, leaves out an essential component of their finality: consciousness. On the one hand, a Gestalt explanation of the finality of emotional behaviour successfully explains the shift in construal by means of the idea that the subject experiences a situation as having its meaning due to the organisational principles that rule the subject’s perception. On the other hand, Gestalt theory is unable to explain why a particular re-interpretation of the situation is preferred over the original interpretation. In other words, it fails to explain why a subject favors the meaning of the re-interpreted situation to the meaning of the former interpretation. For instance, according to Sartre, Gestalt theory is unable to explain why Janet’s patient effects the switch from an interpretation of the situation presenting her with the need to confess to a situation presenting her with, say, despair that covers the need to confess. As previously noted, according to Sartre, what is missing to explain this shift in preference is, precisely, consciousness. Only by understanding the essential explanatory role of consciousness and its relation to finality can we successfully come to grips with the significance of emotions.

**3. The Explanatory Role of Consciousness**

Sartre argues for his second claim, the essential role consciousness plays with regards to emotions, by critically assessing the psychoanalytic interpretation of emotional behaviour. Sartre begins by praising psychoanalysis for having recognized that the significance of the emotions is found within their finality: “We cannot understand an emotion unless we look for its signification. And this, by its nature, is of a functional order. We are therefore led to speak of the finality of emotions” (28). Yet, Sartre argues, the major flaw with psychoanalysis is that it places the explanatory weight of behaviour onto the *unconscious*. For instance, psychoanalysis explains a woman’s phobia of laurels as the repressed desire to not relive a traumatic event from her childhood that is associated with laurels. For Sartre, psychoanalysis conceives of the relationship between the repressed desire and the conscious component of the emotion as one of *causality*. The conscious experience of fear is the *effect* of the repressed desire. Relatedly, psychoanalysis assumes that the source of meaning of the emotional experience i.e. the repressed desire, is *externally* related to the emotion (31). Sartre contrasts external relations with internal relations. For Sartre, when two relata are internally related, they cannot be specified independently of one another. An adequate understanding of one of the relata needs to make reference to the other relatum, and vice versa. Therefore, Sartre objects to psychoanalysis the assumption that an adequate understanding of the meaning of emotional experience need not make reference to the conscious episode of the emotional experience itself. For instance, in the case of the phobia of laurels, psychoanalysis assumes that we can adequately understand the meaning of the conscious emotional experience i.e. the woman’s fear at the sight of laurels, independently of the conscious episode itself. That is because, according to Sartre’s interpretation of psychoanalysis, the meaning of the conscious episode of fear is the woman’s repressed desire not to relive her traumatic experience. In other words, there is nothing within the conscious episode of fear that we need to mention in order to capture its meaning: the meaning is fully enclosed in the repressed desire. Thus, within this framework, conscious experience of fear plays no explanatory role in the woman’s emotional behaviour, since the role is played entirely by the repressed desire. If, then, the finality of emotions and their significance is interpreted as having their source in an unconscious process, it follows that the conscious component of emotional behaviour plays no explanatory role.

Why does Sartre dispute the way psychoanalysis conceives of the relation between the conscious component of emotional behaviour and its significance? The crux of the matter lies in Sartre’s claim that for an emotional behaviour to have significance, the subject needs to be aware of the emotion’s finality. If the desire constituting the finality of the emotion is unconscious and merely causally related to the emotional behaviour, then there isn’t ‘an immanent bond of *comprehension*’ between the emotional behaviour and that which bestows significance upon it, namely its finality (32). That is why Sartre claims that the significance of a conscious episode of emotional behaviour is found *within* the conscious episode itself. Interestingly, Sartre concedes that other aspects of the psychoanalytic interpretation also embrace this principle in its own way. In particular, this occurs when psychoanalysis postulates a *constitutive* relation between the symbol and the symbolized, that is, between the meaning of the conscious episode of emotional behaviour and the unconscious desire. Yet, Sartre argues that if psychoanalysis wants to preserve the claim that the relationship between the meaning of an emotional behaviour and what bestows the emotional behaviour with meaning is constitutive, then it needs to abandon “its underlying theory of psychic causality” (33). In arguing that the significance of emotional behaviour is to be found within conscious episodes of emotional behaviour, Sartre aims to show that the explanatory weight of emotions is to be found in their conscious component: “whatever is going on in consciousness can receive its explanation nowhere but from consciousness itself” (33).

We are now in the position to further our understanding of the intimate relation between Sartre’s two key claims distinguished above. The meaning of emotional behaviour derives from its finality, i.e., the goal of re-interpreting a situation experienced as an insurmountable difficulty into a “path” that allows one to act. Yet, it is only if we understand the finality of emotions as a conscious affair, that is, as a process that the subject does not merely suffer but in which she is tacitly aware of being purposively engaged, that the finality of emotions can provide us with their significance. Sartre flags one problem with drawing this intimate relation between the finality of emotions and their conscious aspect. For “how” conscious are we of such finality? As Sartre himself writes, being conscious of such finality “does not mean that the signification [of emotional behaviour] must be perfectly explicit” (31-32). If so, then how explicit must it be such that we do not relapse into a psychoanalytic interpretation? And in what sense are we conscious of our emotional finality when ‘struggling, in our conscious spontaneity, against the development of emotional manifestations [when] we are trying to master our fear, to calm our anger, to restrain from weeping’ (33-34)? In other words, Sartre is concerned with making sense of how we can both be aware of our active engagement in the re-interpretation of a situation while nevertheless experiencing the emotion as something that overcomes us. For instance, how can we make sense of the claim that Janet’s patient is aware of not wanting to confess, and thus re-interpreting the situation as, say, one of despair, while nevertheless experiencing the emotion of despair as one that overcomes her? It is this issue that Sartre promises to solve in his own account of the emotions to which we finally turn.

**4. Sartre’s Theory of the Emotions**

*4.1 Non-Positional Self-Awareness*

Sartre’s attempt at answering the worry above begins with the fundamental distinction he draws between non-positional, or non-thetic, self-awareness and positional consciousness of objects (50, 51, 77-78). Positional consciousness of an object entails a subject-object distinction achieved by the subject’s conceptualising the object of experience. For instance, my perceptual experience of the book before me involves a subject-object distinction achieved by my conceptualising the object as a book. Thus, my perceptual experience counts as a positional consciousness of a book. By contrast, non-positional self-awareness is self-awareness that does not involve the subject-object distinction and does not involve conceptualising one’s own awareness. Non-positional self-awareness is moreover contrasted with reflective self-awareness. Recall from Section 1 that Sartre rejects the introspectionist method of inquiry. According to Sartre, introspection is normally thought of as involving a reflective act that shifts focal attention onto the psychological phenomenon itself. Hence Sartre’s label for this exercise: “reflective consciousness of emotion”. Reflective self-awareness involves objectifying one’s psychological state by conceptualising it. Hence the possibility of verbally reporting psychological states. The key problem with the reflective act is that, according to Sartre, it changes our conception of, say, an emotion from its original form as an experiential response to a situation, to conceiving of it as a self-enclosed state of mind with no obvious relation to the situation within which the emotion arises. Sartre then argues that the performance of the reflective act entails losing sight of the essential characteristic of emotions of being directed towards the world: ‘emotional consciousness is primarily consciousness *of* the world’ (34). Indeed, Sartre stresses that we distort the very nature of an emotion if we severe its relationship with the object or situation it is a response to: “the emotional subject and the object of emotion are united in an indissoluble synthesis. Emotion is a specific manner of apprehending the world” (35). Sartre’s notion of non-positional self-awareness is therefore needed to capture the manner in which we are originally conscious of emotions as responses to a worldly situation: “fear does not begin as consciousness of being afraid, any more than the perception of this book is consciousness of perceiving it. The emotional consciousness is at first non-reflective” (34).

Once Sartre has equipped himself with the notion of non-positional self-awareness, he proceeds to describe what is involved in being conscious from a first-person perspective of emotions as a purposeful response to a concrete situation. He does so by drawing an analogy with the activity of writing (36-38). In writing the chapter of a book, we are aware of our end, namely the completion of the chapter. We are also aware of the activity of writing words on a sheet of paper. Yet we are neither necessarily focused on the ending of the chapter nor on the actual activity of writing. Rather, we are primarily focused on the words that appear on the sheet of paper. At the same time, we are not merely unconscious of our end and of the activity we are performing. Indeed, we are aware that our activity is very much guided by our end. In Sartre’s terminology, we are non-positionally conscious of our end and of the activity of writing as being guided by our end. Importantly, Sartre notes that the words do not appear as mere signs on a blank sheet of paper. Rather, we apprehend the words as “potentialities that *have to be realised*” (37) where “I simply feel the pull they exert: I feel their exigence objectively” (37-38). By contrast, if I were to look at my neighbour writing, his words would not appear as exigencies that demand my activity precisely because I do not share my neighbour’s end.

The crucial point to extract from Sartre’s analogy with the activity of writing is that the manner in which we are non-positionally aware of an end we are pursuing is by apprehending the objects we confront as exerting demands on us to be acted upon in a certain way: “unreflective conduct is not unconscious conduct. It is non-thetically [non-positionally] conscious of self; and its way of being conscious of self is to transcend and apprehend itself out in the world as a quality of things” (38). Analogously, we are non-positionally aware of the finality of emotions by experiencing the situation we confront as demanding us to act in a certain way, that is, as providing us with various paths to follow: “the final aim of an emotion is not posited by an act of [reflective] consciousness in the midst of the emotion itself. Its finality is not for all that unconscious, but it is ‘used up’ in the constituting of the object” (52). In metaphorical terms, we can read the meaning of the finality of our emotions off of the way that we experience the objects confronting us. We can now gain a better understanding as to why Sartre’s two key claims that drive his account of the emotions are intimately related. In order to disclose the meaning of our emotions, namely their finality, we need to look at their lived conscious aspect, since it is in their lived conscious aspect that we conceive of them as responses to concrete situations. And it is precisely because the finality of the emotions is constitutive of our emotional consciousness of the world that we find the significance of the emotions in emotional consciousness itself.

*4.2 Emotions as Transformations of the World: Belief and the Body*

At last, Sartre writes:

We can now conceive what an emotion is. It is a transformation of the world. When the paths before us become too difficult, or when we cannot see our away, we can no longer put up with such an exacting and difficult world. All ways are barred and nevertheless we must act. So then we try to change the world; that is, to live it as though the relations between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes but by magic (39-40).

We need, therefore, to distinguish two moments in the generation of an emotion. First, the subject apprehends a situation as confronting her with an insurmountable difficulty. Such apprehension is described as a sort of perceptual act. The difficulty is “apprehended objectively, as a quality of the world” and it is given as a potentiality to be realised (41). Second, this apprehension then motivates an emotional reaction on behalf of the subject with the goal of changing the manner of apprehension of the situation so as to “quiet” the difficulty and afford the subject with a way out of the difficulty. The emotion is the behaviour that the subject adopts towards the situation in order to change its experienced features. The emotion does not “delete” the feature of the situation that is apprehended as an insurmountable difficulty. The object is still apprehended as exerting a demand on us. Rather, the emotion projects another quality upon it in order to “quiet” the difficulty and this is affected by adopting a different, indeed emotional, behaviour towards the situation: “Emotional behaviour seeks by itself, and without modifying the structure of the object, to confer another quality upon it, a lesser existence or a lesser presence” (41). The subject adopts an emotional behaviour in order to change the force exerted by the demand of the object “to-be-realised”.

Sartre illustrates his theory by means of several examples, only one of which will be addressed here, namely Janet’s patient. Recall, the patient is a girl who throws herself in fits of despair every time she is confronted with the situation of having to confess to her therapist (44-45). The girl perceives the confession as “having-to-be-made” but since she cannot bring herself to make it, she bursts into fits of despair. Thus, these fits diminish the demand of having to confess by projecting on the act of confessing the quality of being distant: so long as she cries, she cannot confess. We are here able to distinguish between the sort of perception of the potentiality to be actualised, namely the confession having to be made, and the conferral of a “new” quality on the confession i.e. being too distant. Again, notice that the emotion does not change the fundamental status of the demand as a demand, namely having to confess, since it is still there to be actualised even when the subject reacts emotionally. Rather, the emotional behaviour “lessens” the exigency of the potentiality.

By now turning to Sartre’s account of the relationship between beliefs and the body we will gain a better sense of what the adopted emotional behaviour consists in and the precise nature of the way that it “transforms” the world. First, Sartre writes that “If emotion is play-acting, the play is one that we believe in” (41). Sartre draws a distinction between real and false emotions (48-49). Whereas a real emotion embodies a play-acting that involves the genuine belief in the quality that one projected onto the object in order to lessen the original demand; a false emotion embodies a play-acting that does *not* involve such belief. For instance, when someone merely pretends to be joyful when receiving a gift she does not like, the emotional behaviour she manifests is a play-acting that does not involve the genuine belief in the gift’s beauty. This is a case of false joy. By contrast, according to Sartre, the emotional behaviour of, say, true despair, as in the case of Janet’s patient, involves the genuine belief that the confession is too “distant” to be made. Notice that in both cases “through such [emotional] behaviour we magically “will” certain qualities upon real objects: but those qualities are false” (49). It’s the presence of a genuine belief in the reality of those (false) qualities that characterises the sort of emotions that Sartre focuses on, namely real emotions. Notice also that this allows Sartre to argue that emotions are not reducible to the behaviour as experienced from a third-person perspective, since a real and a false emotion could in principle share exactly the same behavioural manifestation yet only the former involve the sort of belief that characterizes a real emotion (48).

This last example also helps us to see how the body is involved in belief. Sartre places a great emphasis on the embodied dimension of our experience of emotions. Unsurprisingly at this stage, by the “embodied dimension” Sartre means the body as consciously experienced from a first-person perspective, see Chapter 18. Sartre argues that what allows the subject to adopt an emotional behaviour as a response to a false quality of the object is the experienced bodily changes: “we can understand the part played by the purely physiological phenomena; they represent the *genuineness* of the emotion, they are the phenomena of belief” (50). For instance, in the case of Janet’s patient, the awareness of the physiological changes involved in the girl’s fits of despair, such as her muscles tensing, her sobs, the pain provoked by her falling on the floor, and indeed the overall feeling of the bodily postures adopted by her display of despair, constitute the very genuineness of her belief in the unreachable distance of her confession. Thus, the girl convinces herself that she cannot confess and this conviction lessens the demand exerted by analyst’s demand that she confess. In contrast to James’ “peripheric” theory, Sartre conceives of bodily feelings as an integral part of an organised structure that is (non-positionally) conscious of its finality: “during emotion, it is the body which, directed by consciousness, changes its relationship with the world so that the world should change its qualities” (41). So now we are in a better position to characterise emotional *behaviour*: it involves a genuine belief in the reality of a projected (false) quality on the feature of a situation that is originally perceived as an insurmountable difficulty, where the genuineness of the belief is actualised by living the physiological changes in one’s experience, as if they were reactions to a real quality of the object: “to *believe* in magical behaviour one must be physically upset” (50) since our bodies are the “instruments of incantation” (47).

We can now reformulate in more detail Sartre’s worry over his elimination of the unconscious from our explanation of emotions that we discussed at the end of Section 3. On the one hand, Sartre wants to argue that the subject is (non-positionally) conscious of the finality of the emotion, namely of the projection of false qualities onto the situation that “quiets” the experienced insurmountable difficulty. On the other hand, Sartre wants to argue that what characterizes a real emotion is the presence of a genuine belief on the part of the subject regarding the object as actually possessing the (false) quality, which, thus, allows her to experience it as exerting a lesser demand. In other words, the subject is both aware that the quality she supposedly responds to is false yet she genuinely believes in its reality. How is this possible? To illustrate. Sartre wants to argue that Janet’s patient’s is (non-positionally) aware of her projection of the quality of despair onto the situation in order to quiet down the demand of having to confess. At the same time, Sartre wants to argue that her despair is characterised by a genuine belief that the situation is indeed a despairing one. But how can Janet’s patient both be aware of her projection and nevertheless hold a genuine belief in that the situation does indeed have the (false) quality projected by her? This problem goes right at the heart of Sartre’s theory since it embodies its two key claims: the finality of the emotions and their conscious aspect.

*4.3 Magic*

Sartre is aware of the need to explain the possibility of emotional behaviour involving both a genuine belief in the projected quality and an awareness of its falsity (52-53). Sartre explains that the reality constituted by emotional behaviour captivates us to the extent that we truly belief in the false qualities that we project into our difficult situation (53). Although Sartre does not reject the possibility of escaping our captivity, he thinks that it would take an incredible effort on the part of the subject in the form of a “pure reflection” (as opposed to “impure” reflection, which is the sort discussed above) that would allow the subject to apprehend her emotional behaviour for what it is, namely a form of self-deception (53), for pure vs. impure reflection see Chapter 6. But for the most part, we are unable to do so because of the strength of the make-believe involved in our emotional behaviour. It is precisely to describe the strength of this make-believe that Sartre argues emotional behaviour is “magical” and a form of self-deception.

As we have already seen Sartre’s definition of emotion draws a contrast between the deterministic world and the magical world. Crucially, by “world” Sartre means an “individual syntheses in mutual relations and possessing *qualities*” (54). That is, when Sartre speaks of a “world” he refers to the reality we experience as having a coherent and therefore meaningful structure which is rendered possible by the experienced *relations* between the objects, including people, constituting the experienced reality; and the *qualities* that these objects are experienced as possessing. (Notice the close relation with the Gestalt notion that the meaning of a situation is experienced as such due to the organisational principles of our perceptual faculties). The contrast between a deterministic and a magical world, then, is a contrast between the way that we experience the *relations* between objects and between people constituting the respective “worlds” and their *qualities*. The deterministic world, as the word suggests, refers to a reality constituted by objects and people that are experienced as related by deterministic laws, that is, by laws that *cannot* be changed. That is why the insurmountable difficulty that motivates our emotional behaviour is found within the deterministic world: it is an object whose relationship with us, in the form of a demand to act in a certain way, is experienced as unchangeable. By contrast, a magical world refers to a reality constituted by objects and people that are experienced as magically related, that is, as related in ways that *can* be changed. Importantly, Sartre stresses that our experience of magical relations is not the experience of relations that are at the service of our every wish, as if we could change anything by a sudden stroke of a magic wand. Rather, magical relations preserve a certain amount of “passivity,” that is, resistance to our wishes. That is why Sartre writes that “There is an existential structure of the world which is magical” (56). Although we are *non-positionally* aware of the finality of our emotions and therefore aware of the changes that the relations of the objects undergo, these changes are not experienced as the outcome of our explicit wishes but rather as part of the *world*.

It is against this background of magical relations that involve both spontaneity and passivity, that is, both the finality of emotions as the source of magic and the experience of magical relations as resistant to our desires, that we should understand Sartre’s distinction between “two forms of emotion” (57). The emotions discussed by Sartre so far are behaviours adopted for strategic purposes when we are confronted by a difficulty that we experience as insurmountable. In these cases, “it is we who constitute the magic of the world to replace a deterministic activity which cannot be realized” (57). By contrast, the second form of emotions distinguished by Sartre are ones whose finality is not obvious and therefore we are not the source of the experienced magic. Rather, the source of magic comes from the world itself (58). Sartre employs the example of horror at the sudden sight of a grimacing face outside a window to illustrate the second form of emotion. Sartre argues that the experience of horror as such involves the “annihilation” of the actual distance and physical barriers between us and the grimacing face. In being horrified, we feel as if there is no distance or barriers: the face is *here* with us, even though we perceive it as outside the window (59). There is therefore a transformation of the deterministic world into a magical world. According to Sartre, however, it is not clear that this shift is effectuated by the finality of our emotion of horror, since there is no obvious end that we want to achieve by being horrified, that is, by “annihilating” the distance and barriers between us and the grimacing face. To the contrary, it seems as if this is just the opposite of what we saw earlier where emotions alleviate a perceived difficulty. The experience of horror causes a difficulty. Therefore, the finality of our emotion cannot be the source of magic. Sartre then argues that the source of magic derives from the world and from other people. Otherwise put, what determines the sort of magical relations that take over the deterministic world is not our desires to overcome what we apprehend as insurmountable but rather the meanings that we perceive out there in the world. In the example of the grimacing face, the magical “annihilation” of the distance and barriers is not determined by the finality of our emotions but rather by the horrifying aspect of the face itself. Sartre is therefore emphasizing the social, or as he calls it, the “interpsychological” (56) aspect of our emotional involvement with the world. Indeed, Sartre stresses that these two forms of emotion are normally mixed in our everyday life and rarely found in isolation (58).

It is important not to confuse the second form of emotion with the perceptual act apprehending demands in the world which in turn motivates an emotional behaviour. The perception of the demand exerted by the object experienced as an insurmountable difficulty takes place in the deterministic, not magical, world. The quality perceived as a demand in the deterministic world is putatively a feature of the object. This means that the perceptual act of apprehending the demand is potentially accurate and therefore can be a form of *disclosure*. By contrast, the second form of emotion, even though it involves the act of apprehension that potentially discloses a feature of the object, such as the horrifying quality of the grimacing face, is nevertheless a transformation, and therefore a *misrepresentation*, of the world. Therefore, (*pace* Richmond 2010, 2014), what distinguishes this second form of emotion from the first one is not that it potentially represents its object accurately, while the first one misrepresents it. The second form of emotion is, precisely, an *emotion* and thus also misrepresents it objects. Thus, misrepresentation cannot distinguish the two as different kinds of emotion. Rather, the difference lies in what determines the manner in which the deterministic relations between objects are changed. While in the first form of emotion it is the finality of the emotion, in the second form of emotion it is the quality perceived in the object. It also follows, (*pace* Hatzimoysis (2014), that the second form of emotion, such as the feeling of horror in the example above, is precisely a *second* form of emotion to be distinguished from the first one and therefore we should not attempt to merge the two.

Although Sartre does not do so explicitly, his description of emotional behaviour as involving a magical transformation of the deterministic world provides us with the explanation we needed at the start of this Section. Recall that Sartre promised to explain the possibility of emotions involving both an awareness on behalf of the subject of the emotion’s finality and the subject’s genuine belief in the meaning of the situation resulting from the emotion’s finality. Sartre argues that emotional behaviour is not a matter of being explicitly conscious of the finality of one’s emotion and then wishfully changing the relations between objects in order to satisfy one’s desires. Rather, emotional behaviour involves a restructuring of the “existential stratum” of the world as we experience it, that is, a re-construal of the relations governing reality as we experience it. This is effected on the non-positional plane. If so, then the possibility of emotional behaviour involving a captivity that leads to self-deception becomes clearer. If correct, the sort of self-deception involved in emotional behaviour should not to be understood as the result of holding two contradictory beliefs. Rather, self-deception is to be understood as the phenomenon resulting from the following two elements. First, the confrontation with a world structured by the amalgam of being non-positionally conscious of the finality of our emotions and experiencing others as constituting the magic in the world. Second, the genuine belief that the relations governing that (magical) world are veridical. The key difference is that while the emotional re-structuring of the world occurs on the non-positional plane, the genuine belief in the structure of the world occurs on the positional plane. Insofar as Sartre argues that the structure of emotions is one that involves both the non-positional awareness of one’s finality and the genuine, belief in the resultant structure of the world, the structure of emotions involves self-deception.

Sartre’s explanation also shows us why he is allowed to keep both key claims of his theory of the emotions, namely that the emotions are guided by finality and that consciousness is essential to understand the emotions. That is because Sartre shows the possibility of being non-positionally conscious of one’s finality while genuinely believing in the reality of a false and projected quality of the object. Moreover, by characterising the intensity of the believing attitude as involving physiological changes, Sartre explains why we experience emotions as not in our control. We suffer emotions insofar as we suffer the physiological changes. Sartre has now delivered on his promise, namely to study the emotions within their significance. The significance of the emotions is nothing less than ‘the totality of the relations of the human-reality to the world’ (63). Emotions are not an alienating disturbance on our everyday lives. Rather, they are an organised behaviour pursuing a goal that refer us to the meaning of the concrete situations within which they arise. It is only by studying emotions as a constitutive component of our conscious, embedded and embodied lives that we can grasp their meaning.

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Short Author Biography:

Depending on whether the book will be published before or after October 2018. If before, keep first sentence. If after, keep second sentence in brackets.

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