

Intrinsic Awareness in Sartre

Frederick B. Mills

Bowie State University

This essay argues that Sartre offers a version of the intrinsic theory of inner awareness that is based on a feature of the internal negation that determines the relation between the for-itself (consciousness) and the in-itself (the world and objects in the world); non-positional awareness. Non-positional awareness is the implicit consciousness of being conscious of an object that is a component of every conscious mental state. For example, the perceptual experience of this table is directed towards the table, but at the same time it is an awareness of itself, though not as an object. Sartre's ontology, and his account of the structure of intentionality, provide the theoretical foundation for a coherent account of how non-positional awareness lights up consciousness of an object without itself being either a subject or object of experience.

Key Words: Sartre, intrinsic theory, inner awareness

This essay argues that Sartre offers a plausible intrinsic theory of inner awareness. An intrinsic theory of inner awareness, according to Natsoulas, accounts for "the immediate cognitive attention each of us has of some of his or her own mental-occurrence instances as they take place" (2004a, pp. 187-188). Sartre's non-cognitive version of inner awareness can be understood, in part, as a development of Brentano's notion of incidental awareness.

Brentano (1911/1973) distinguished between what may now be referred to as appendage theories versus intrinsic theories of how there is inner awareness of conscious mental states.¹ Appendage theories argue that the inner awareness of conscious mental state M that has intentional content IC can be explained by the occurrence of some other higher-order numerically distinct mental state M[^] that has M as its intentional content IC[^]. Intrinsic

Requests for reprints should be sent to Frederick B. Mills, Ph.D., Department of History and Government, Bowie State University, 14000 Jericho Park Road, Bowie, Maryland 20715.

¹I am indebted to Natsoulas's (2001, 2004b) discussion, especially on appendage versus intrinsic theories of inner awareness. See also Natsoulas (2003) for remarks on Brentano's version of intrinsic theory.

theories argue that the inner awareness of conscious mental state M that has intentional content IC is an aspect of some feature of that very same mental state M.

Brentano, an intrinsic theorist, maintained that while the existence of inner awareness (Brentano preferred the term "inner perception") was immediately evident through introspection, its structure was not.

There is no need to justify our confidence in inner perception. What is clearly needed instead is a theory about the relation between such a perception and its object, which is compatible with its immediate evidence. (1911/1973, p. 140)

Brentano argued that at least one version of appendage theory fails because it entails an epistemological impasse. For if conscious mental state M required a further, numerically distinct, representation of itself by mental state M^\wedge in order for there to be an inner awareness of M, then in order for there to be an inner awareness of mental state M^\wedge , another numerically distinct mental state M^* would be required to represent mental state M^\wedge and so on ad infinitum (pp. 121–122). Without resorting to the hypothesis that there are unconscious intentional acts, Brentano avoids the regress problem by describing the inner awareness and the directedness towards an object of conscious mental states as parts of a single mental act. Brentano argued that every conscious mental act "includes within it a consciousness of itself" (p. 153). One and the same mental act, then, has two objects: a primary and secondary object. The primary object is the intentional content posited by the act. The secondary object is the mental act itself.

The presentation of the sound and the presentation of the presentation of the sound form a single mental phenomenon; it is only by considering it in its relation to two different objects, one of which is a physical phenomenon [the primary object] and the other a mental phenomenon [secondary object], that we divide it conceptually into two presentations. In the same mental phenomenon in which the sound is present to our minds we simultaneously apprehend the mental phenomenon itself. What is more, we apprehend it in accordance with its dual nature insofar as it has the sound as content within it, and insofar as it has itself as content at the same time. (1911/1973, p. 127)²

The secondary object is not posited in the same manner as the primary object; for it is only "incidentally" that one is aware of one's own mental activity (pp. 275–276). This secondary object is "not a reference but a mental activity" that is "included along with the primary one" (p. 276).

²Natsoulas (2003), commenting on this passage, points out that "inner awareness makes one not simply aware, in some respect, of the particular mental-occurrence instance; also, one apprehends its being conscious, or, as Brentano stated, its having itself, too, as content" (p. 302).

Zahavi (1999) argues that Brentano's notion of incidental awareness should be understood as an unthematic (implicit or subliminal, but not unconscious) observance of the secondary object. One is aware (unthematically) of the hearing of a tone by way of one's thematic awareness of the tone, i.e., "it is only by intending the primary object [the tone] that we are aware of the secondary object [the hearing]" (p. 30). This interpretation is born out by Brentano's insistence that "we can observe the sounds we hear, but we cannot observe our hearing of the sounds, for the hearing itself is only apprehended concomitantly in the hearing of sounds" (1911/1973, pp. 128–129).

There are other passages, however, where Brentano appears to view inner awareness as an objectivating intention. For example, Brentano argues that the "mental act of hearing becomes at the same time its own object and content, taken as a whole" (1911/1973, p. 129; see also pp. 91, 153–154). While Brentano generally invokes the unthematic and intrinsic nature of inner awareness to resolve the infinite regress problem without resorting to unconscious intentional acts, he has not completely freed himself from the use of objectivating language to describe inner awareness. However one resolves this issue in the interpretation of Brentano (which task is not within the scope of this essay), Brentano's version of intrinsic theory raises important questions about the nature of both incidental awareness and its secondary object. Can inner awareness be rendered a thematic, that is, explicit conceptual awareness of itself as an object? And correlatively, is the secondary object a substantial ego, a transcendental ego, an impersonal consciousness, or a bundle of impressions? By virtue of what feature of the structure of intentionality is there inner awareness of conscious mental states?⁷³

Sartre's version of intrinsic theory addresses these questions by deploying pure reflection, a mode of self-revelation that does not intend a conceptual content with regard to inner awareness, though it does employ concepts that are adjacent to and point the way towards the structure of inner awareness. Pure reflection overcomes the tendency to objectify the content of inner awareness through two strategies. The first strategy is to engage in an unreflective memory to reveal the inner awareness that belongs to pre-reflective awareness. By consulting unreflective memory, one also grasps both the intentional content and the modality of presentation of a past conscious mental state. The second strategy is to engage in a phenomenological epoché to reveal the non-egological and transcendental features of pre-reflective consciousness. Both strategies together disclose the structure and being of

⁷³The distinction between modality of presentation and intentional content, discussed in Kriegel (2003), and Natsoulas (2004a, 2004b), does not provide an exact alternative for the location of inner awareness in Sartre's intrinsic theory, though for Sartre inner awareness is clearly not part of the transcendent object, as this object is precisely what the *for-itself* (self-consciousness) is not.

inner awareness. These strategies will be tacitly at work throughout this essay and explicitly addressed in the last sections. The methodology employed here distinguishes impure reflection from pure reflection and rehearses pure reflection on inner awareness in a progressively more detailed manner.⁴

Sartre's Pure Reflective Approach to Inner Awareness

Sartre critiques a version of the appendage theory that equates consciousness with knowledge. For Sartre, if consciousness of being conscious of an object were a form of knowledge, a knower-known dyad would be introduced into inner awareness, and the only way to stop an infinite regress would be to introduce a consciousness that was non-self-conscious, which, for Sartre, is absurd. Thus both Brentano and Sartre express similar reservations about grounding inner awareness in a consciousness (or knowledge) extrinsic to a given conscious mental state. Sartre concludes, "if we wish to avoid an infinite regress, there must be an immediate, non-cognitive relation of the self to itself" (1943/1956, pp. lii–liii).⁵ The possibility of phenomenological access to this non-cognitive relationship requires that the right kind of reflection be directed upon inner awareness.

Sartre argues that reflection on conscious mental states can be either impure or pure, depending on whether, in the former case, it falsifies the nature of such states or, in the latter case, it correctly apprehends the nature of such states. In particular, impure reflection relies on ordinary but mistaken objectivating intuitions that treat conscious mental states as emanating from an ego, while pure reflection grasps such states as they really are, that is, as instances of non-egological consciousness (inner awareness) of being conscious of a transcendent object (see Sartre, 1936/1957, 1943/1956, pp. 155–161, 199). When impure reflection attempts to grasp inner awareness in act, inner awareness escapes its cognitive grasp. For Sartre then, an account of inner awareness is plagued by just this feature of impure reflective thinking: it objectifies and in that very process modifies that towards which it is

⁴Sartre attempts to overcome impure reflection, especially in *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936/1957), and to attain a pure reflection on that feature of intentionality responsible for inner awareness. The existential phenomenology of *Being and Nothingness* is arguably the result of pure reflection on the relationship between consciousness and the world. In a conference presentation, "Consciousness of Self and Knowledge of Self" (1948/1967), Sartre's main focus is on inner awareness and the possibility of pure reflection. In *The Psychology of Imagination* (1940/1991), Sartre discusses the transcendental features of consciousness and the role of the epoché in revealing transcendental consciousness. These four works then, are the primary sources for this essay.

⁵See also Sartre, 1948/1967, pp. 121–123 on the regress problem.

directed.⁶ But this conceptual obstacle on the path to phenomenological access to inner awareness is not insurmountable.

A path towards pure reflection can be cleared by analyzing the structure of intentionality within the context of ontology (Sartre, 1943/1956). For the structure of the relation of consciousness to itself and to transcendent objects is determined by fundamental relationships between categories of being (the in-itself and the for-itself). It is to Sartre's analysis of intentionality in the context of his ontology that I now turn.

Intentionality in Sartre

Sartre's analysis of intentionality is grounded in the ontological relation of the for-itself (consciousness) to the in-itself (whatever is identical to itself, e.g., "the world, spatiality, permanence, matter") [1943/1956, p. 183]. As a first approximation, intentionality is both the directedness of the for-itself towards a transcendent object (a being in-itself) and the directedness of the for-itself towards itself, the latter directedness constituting an inner awareness of the intentional act. Although intentionality, as Kenevan (1981) points out, is bi-directional, the two directions emerge within one and the same intentional structure and can be distinguished by their modes of fulfillment.

The directedness of the for-itself towards a transcendent object is what Sartre calls its positional character. As a first approximation, there are two features of the positing act that are especially relevant to this discussion. First, an object is posited by the intentional act through a negation, that is, positional consciousness transcends and is directed towards the object by not being the object (Sartre, 1943/1956). Second, the positing act is also thetic, that is, it determines the modality of presentation of the object.⁷ Though Sartre rejects Husserl's transcendental ego, he recognizes transcendental features of positional consciousness (see, e.g., 1936/1957, pp. 35–36). Sartre (1940/1991) explains that "to perceive, conceive, imagine: these are the three types of consciousnesses by which the same object can be given to us" (p. 9). These "types of consciousness" are "constitutive" of the modality of presentation of their objects (p. 16; see p. 33).

⁶Wider (1997) maintains that in Sartre, "*the very act of reflection* causes the non-thetic self-awareness of pre-reflective consciousness to become thetic consciousness of self" (p. 76). If this were the case, pure reflection, and its rehearsal here, would not be possible.

⁷Webber (2002) points out that for Sartre the thetic feature of intentionality determines not only the way an object is presented but also the manner in which the world is determined to be a network of instrumental relations that relate to the "aims and projects of the perceiver" (pp. 47–48). Natsoulas (2004b, p. 107) points out that Husserl's concept of thetic character is used by some theories of inner awareness to refer to the modality of presentation.

The distinguishing mark of the directedness of the for-itself towards itself is its non-positional character. As a first approximation, non-positional consciousness corresponds roughly to Brentano's incidental awareness of the secondary object. Similarly, for Sartre, the non-positional form of directedness of consciousness towards itself does not reach an object; its content, as Webber (2002) points out, is non-conceptual. Since the content of non-positional awareness is non-conceptual, the negation involved in non-positional self-awareness is qualitatively (though not numerically) different from that involved in positional awareness. The key to understanding the structure and non-conceptual content of non-positional awareness is an interrogation of the negativity of the for-itself, in particular, the concept of internal negation.

Internal Negation and the For-itself

Negation constitutes the principle activity of consciousness because the "for-itself is perpetually determining itself not to be the in-itself. This means that it can establish itself only in terms of the in-itself and against the in-itself" (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 85; see also p. 175). Since that which is determined in its being by a relation to some other being is, by definition, internally related to that other being, one fundamental feature of intentionality is internal negation:

In itself the For-itself is not being, for it makes itself be explicitly for-itself as not being being. It is consciousness of _____ as the internal negation of _____. The structure at the basis of intentionality and of selfness is the negation, which is the internal relation of the For-itself to the thing. The For-itself constitutes itself outside in terms of the thing as the negation of that thing; thus its first relation with being-in-itself is negation. (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 123)⁸

By negating the in-itself, the for-itself both withdraws from the in-itself in order to posit the in-itself as an object and determines itself to not be the sort of being that is a being in-itself, that is, it determines itself to be the sort of being that does not coincide with itself.

How is it that the for-itself can determine itself in relation to an in-itself with which it does not yet have epistemological contact? Wider (1997) argues that "the for-itself has to be self-conscious at the pre-reflective level to negate the in-itself. That is, it has to be conscious of itself as *not being* the object of which it is conscious" (p. 63). But in what manner is the for-itself conscious of itself (at the pre-reflective level) as not being the intended object? Would not the for-itself have to already be acquainted with the in-itself in advance, and by comparison determine that as a for-itself it (the for-

⁸See Catalano (1974), and Desan (1960), for discussions of internal negation in Sartre.

itself) is not an in-itself, all this prior to negating the in-itself? The answer is arguably no. Sartre cautions:

Here we must rid ourselves of an illusion which may be formulated as follows: in order to constitute myself as not being a particular being, I must have ahead of time in some manner or other knowledge of this being; for I cannot judge the differences between myself and a being of which I know nothing. (1943/1956, pp. 175–176)

The sort of negation involved in the original upsurge of the for-itself is not an empirical judgment that requires advance knowledge of what is to be negated (1943/1956, p. 176). The for-itself determines itself as not being the in-itself in the very act of negating the in-itself. Or else we end up with the absurd position that the for-itself is acquainted with itself as not being an in-itself in advance of determining itself to be a sort of being that is not a being in-itself. Pre-reflective self-consciousness does not find but rather presupposes the original internal negation of the in-itself by the for-itself.

The remaining critical feature of the for-itself's negativity is inner awareness. As Sartre explains, “it is by means of that of which it is conscious that consciousness distinguishes itself in its own eyes and that it can be self-conscious . . .” (1943/1956, p. 173). The negation of the for-itself by which it grasps itself as not being the object of consciousness constitutes the for-itself's inner awareness. This negation of the for-itself in relation to itself, however, does not result in a subject–object dichotomy. Sartre insists, “the object must be absolutely denied by the for-itself as the being of the for-itself” (1943/1956, p. 178). In summary, not only does the for-itself withdraw from the in-itself in order to grasp and thematically determine the in-itself as a transcendent object, it also negates itself and through such negating is present to itself.⁹ Sartre's ontology then, provides an account of how two qualitatively different types of negation, resulting in different modes of fulfillment of two qualitatively different aspects of the bi-directional intentional act, arise from one act of internal negation.

It is in the context of the bi-directionality born of the internal negation performed by the for-itself that Sartre introduces that feature of the intentional structure responsible for inner awareness:

Consciousness is aware of itself *in so far as it is consciousness of a transcendent object*. All is therefore clear and lucid in consciousness: the object with its characteristic opacity is before consciousness, but consciousness is purely and simply consciousness of being consciousness of that object. This is the law of its existence. We should add that this consciousness of consciousness . . . is not *positional*, which is to say that consciousness is not for itself its own object. Its object is by nature outside of it, and that is why consciousness *posit*s and *grasps* the object in the same act. (Sartre, 1936/1957, pp. 40–41)

⁹See Wider (1997), especially p. 53: the for-itself negates “both itself and the in-itself of which it is conscious.”

The critical distinction that Sartre refers to in this passage is between positional and non-positional consciousness. The latter is inner awareness. It is time to examine this distinction in more detail.

Insofar as consciousness intends the object that it is not, it explicitly posits the object; this is positional consciousness. Insofar as consciousness is self-aware of being consciousness of an object, it is an inner awareness. Consciousness is aware of itself, however, without taking itself as an object. The term "itself" here, then, is used only because language constrains us to provide a reference for both terms of a reflexive relation (Sartre, 1943/1956, p. liv). Sartre explains the non-discursive nature of non-positional (non-thetic) awareness:

The nonthetic consciousness arrives at itself without recourse to discursive thought or implications, for actually, it is consciousness, but one must not confuse it with knowledge. To arrive at one's self is to be luminous for oneself, but this is in no way a thing that can be named, or expressed to oneself. The problem is not that of seeking the existence of the nonthetic consciousness of self; everyone is it at each instant; everyone enjoys it . . . (Sartre, 1948/1967 p. 123)

Non-positional self awareness is immediate and enjoyed (in the sense of lived) and exists even at the pre-reflective level. Thus, for example, when there is a perception of this table, there is, at the same time, an inner awareness of having a perceptual experience intrinsic to this perceptual experience. As Sartre explains, "spontaneous consciousness of my perception is constitutive of my perceptive consciousness. In other words, every positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself" (1943/1956, p. liii). In what manner is inner awareness constitutive of the consciousness (in the present case a perceptual consciousness) of an object? This question can be answered by interrogating the relation between non-positional and positional consciousness.

The Interdependence of Positional and Non-positional Consciousness

Sartre argues that inner awareness and consciousness of an object are interdependent. This interdependence is founded upon the internal negation, as discussed in the previous section. On the one hand, inner awareness can only arise if consciousness posits a transcendent object, or else inner awareness would be aware of a consciousness of nothing, that is, it would be unconscious. Presumably, even if one were to engage in the sort of meditation that attempts to release oneself from attention to objects, some residue of what it is like to be in a world, for example an experience of the state of one's body or the indistinct experience of the ground upon which a figure may appear would remain.

On the other hand, any consciousness of an object must at the same time be consciousness of itself, because, as Sartre argues:

The necessary and sufficient condition for a knowing consciousness to be knowledge of its object, is that it be consciousness of itself as being that knowledge. This is a necessary condition, for if my consciousness were not consciousness of being consciousness of the table, it would then be consciousness of that table without consciousness of being so. In other words, it would be consciousness ignorant of itself, an unconscious — which is absurd. This is a sufficient condition, for my being conscious of being conscious of that table suffices in fact for me to be conscious of it. (1943/1956, p. lii)

Sartre is arguing here that inner awareness is necessarily intrinsic to the consciousness of an object. Grene (1973) grants that the notion of an unconscious consciousness is contradictory and therefore absurd, but questions whether inner awareness is a necessary condition for consciousness of an object:

Why must a consciousness conscious of something other than itself, as . . . Sartre agrees all consciousness is, be, because ignorant of itself, not conscious at all? Consciousness is defined as other-directed; that doesn't make it unconscious. On the contrary, it is just its vectorial character, its consciousness of what is not itself, and therefore, one might suppose, its lack of consciousness of itself, its "ignorance" of itself if you will, that *makes* it conscious. (p. 120)

Grene's objection goes to the heart of the concept of non-positional awareness, for if Grene is correct, positional awareness itself would be a sufficient condition for consciousness of an object.¹⁰ There are, however, some problems with Grene's objection. Consciousness cannot be defined *a priori* as only other-directed, nor can it be defined *a priori*, as Sartre suggests, as intrinsically self-aware.¹¹ The theory of inner awareness is not to be determined by stipulating the meaning of consciousness; this is an issue that needs to be decided by the phenomenological evidence, which evidence appears to undermine Grene's suggestion. I refer here to the qualitative experience one has of being in a conscious mental state. If there is something it is like (Nagel's sense) to feel a pain, to taste the wine, and to see the ocean, then such intentional acts cannot be merely other directed and ignorant of themselves. As Zahavi (1999, p. 214) points out, there is nothing that it is like for a person to have an unconscious experience. Nor, within Sartre's ontology,

¹⁰Caws sees a similar defect in Sartre's argument: "There is an obvious flaw in this argument, which consists in the move from 'consciousness ignorant of itself' to 'unconscious', [sic] when the strongest conclusion the premisses warrant would be 'unselfconscious'" (1979, p. 63).

¹¹Gurwitsch (1985) argues that it is a "necessary condition" and that "it is *a priori* condition for consciousness" that it "carries self-awareness with it" (p. 5).

can qualitative experience be conceptually moved to the intentional content, as this content is ontologically determined as what consciousness is not.

Could an appendage theory be used to account for the inner awareness of intentional acts that are only other directed and ignorant of themselves? Assume that intentional act M , ignorant of itself, is the object of a higher-order intentional act M^A . Of course, the secondary intentional act will be ignorant of itself and only directed towards M . Thus there will then exist two intentional acts, each ignorant of itself and directed toward its respective object. As Zahavi points out (1999, p. 18), it is not clear how inner awareness can arise out of a relation between two mental states that are each ignorant of itself. There is phenomenological evidence then, for Sartre's argument that inner awareness is intrinsic to the consciousness of an object.

Sartre refers to what it is like to be in a conscious mental state in terms of the presence of the for-itself to the object. A conscious experience of any kind, for example, perceptual awareness, is not merely a directedness towards an object; it is also the appearance of an object to a lived presence to that object. As Wider (1997) points out, "to be present to a being, one must be *conscious of oneself* as not being the being to which one is present. So only a self-conscious being, only a for-itself, can be present to being" (p. 55). Since consciousness only exists as consciousness of itself as not being the being to which it is present, there is no consciousness of an object that is not self-aware. This property of consciousness extends even to pre-reflective consciousness, since "a consciousness has no need at all of a reflecting consciousness in order to be conscious of itself. It simply does not posit itself as an object" (Sartre, 1936/1957, p. 45).

We are now in a position to answer the question raised in the last section: In what manner is inner awareness constitutive of the consciousness (in the present case a perceptual consciousness) of an object? Inner awareness is constitutive of a perceptual intention because it is intrinsic to all intentional acts; the positing of the object and the consciousness of this positing are interdependent. Since pre-reflective consciousness is a positional consciousness of an object, it is also directed towards itself (non-positional). The theoretical challenge now is to describe inner awareness at the pre-reflective level, that is, without modifying it in the very act of reflection.

Phenomenology of Inner Awareness

Inner awareness has thus far been provisionally described as the immediate, lived dimension of the for-itself's presence to the in-itself. Broadly, there is something it is like to be present to a world. And in particular, there is something it is like to be present to an object on the background of the world (see Sartre, 1943/1956, pp. 180–184). Inner awareness has been revealed as

ontologically founded by the internal negation of the for-itself in relation to the in-itself, and as being already present in pre-reflective awareness. Also, it has been determined to be neither a positional (thematic) nor an unconscious consciousness, but an intrinsic feature of the consciousness of an object. I will try to elaborate somewhat on Sartre's notion of immediate awareness presently.

Inner awareness is present prior to reflection on a conscious mental state. As Priest (2000) points out, "pre-reflective consciousness is our ordinary typical awareness of the objects and people which surround us and it is this awareness which is implicitly or subliminally an awareness that it is an awareness" (p. 46). We can encounter it simply by an act of reflection on our current state of awareness. Thus Sartre remarks

It is there; right now while I am talking to you, absorbed in talking to you, I am yet nonthetically conscious of myself. This need not be expressed in terms of knowledge, but it is a full possession of self, all the same. It is therefore something of which I have experience. (1948/1967, p. 141)

References in this passage to "I" and "myself" should not be taken as indicating that pre-reflective awareness apprehends an ego.¹² Sartre's point here is that inner awareness is always available to pure reflection.¹³ What obscures inner awareness is the tendency to slide into an impure reflection that emphasizes the separation over the unity of inner awareness.

Wider (1997) argues that at the same time Sartre wishes to maintain that the for-itself is not identical to itself, he also wants to maintain that non-positional awareness is a unity. How can the for-itself be a unity and at the same time attain sufficient withdrawal from itself to constitute an inner awareness? Wider also argues that "Sartre's account of self-consciousness at the pre-reflective level as a duality within a unity fails . . . because to maintain the duality, he introduces cognitive elements into pre-reflective consciousness" (p. 88). Sartre's account, however, does not fail if one interprets the structural unity of pre-reflective self-awareness as derived from the for-itself's negation of itself in time.

The temporalizing feature of the for-itself brings coherence to the idea of difference within unity. The for-itself does not divide itself into two numerically distinct entities in the act of negating of itself. What the for-itself surpasses in the non-positional sort of negation is, to be sure, itself, but the surpassing is never a complete severing of the for-itself from itself (see Sartre, 1943/1956, p. 155; cf. p. 77). The for-itself is not identical to what it has

¹²See Priest (2000) for a detailed discussion of Sartre's critique of egology.

¹³I owe this observation to Zahavi (1999, p. 58); see also Gurwitsch (1985, p. 5).

been, and in the present, the for-itself immediately surpasses itself towards that which it will become. Like Heraclitus's stream, "there is never an instant at which we can assert that the for-itself is, precisely because the for-itself never is" (1943/1956, p. 149). There is, however, an experience of the present that is informed by both the past and the future because "consciousnesses must be perpetual syntheses of past consciousnesses and present consciousness" (1936/1957, p. 39).¹⁴ Consciousness also projects itself towards its future possibilities, each realized possibility being surpassed as it is realized. These syntheses are grounded in the transcendental function of consciousness itself and do not presuppose a transcendental ego.

The structure of pre-reflective awareness maps on to this constant self-transcendence and self unification of the for-itself. Thus, for example, the perception of a table involves a synthesis of retained memories of perceptions of the table, including perhaps memories of different faces of the table that are not immediately visible. It is also possible to recollect inner awarenesses as having been present non-positionally in each past perception of the table. Of course, the phenomenological evidence for this and preceding analyses of inner awareness depend on whether there is some mode of access to pre-reflective consciousness and its self-unification that does not objectify inner awareness.

As noted above, pure reflection has available to it an unreflective memory of unreflected consciousness and Sartre's radical version of the epoché. Both modes of pure reflection together, by interrogating concepts that are adjacent to inner awareness, provide an occasion for a non-conceptual grasp of inner awareness. I will now briefly engage each mode of access to inner awareness in turn.

Unreflective Memory

Non-positional awareness gives itself to an unreflective memory as that which was already there.

Every unreflected consciousness, being non-thetic consciousness of itself, leaves a non-thetic memory that one can consult. To do so it suffices to try to reconstitute the complete moment in which this unreflected consciousness appeared (which by definition is always possible). For example, I was absorbed just now in my reading. I am going to try to remember the circumstances of my reading, my attitude, the lines that I was reading. I am thus going to revive not only these external details but a certain depth of unreflected consciousness, since the objects could only have been perceived by that consciousness and since they remain relative to it. That consciousness must not be posited as object of a reflection. On the contrary, I must direct my attention to the

¹⁴See Gurwitsch (1985) on the "temporal structure which is essential to every act of consciousness" and "is included in the inner awareness which we have of the act . . ." (p. 9).

revived objects, but *without losing sight of the unreflected consciousness*, by joining in a sort of conspiracy with it and by drawing up an inventory of its content in a non-positional manner. (Sartre, 1936/1957, p. 46)¹⁵

This passage refers to a recollection of both the unreflected consciousness and its object. The sort of memory described here is a form of pure reflection on pre-reflective awareness, as it gives us access to non-positional awareness without turning that awareness into an object.¹⁶ As Stawarska points out, “the form of recollection proposed by Sartre involves the past perceptual consciousness as much as the object perceived yet does not turn past consciousness into an object to be investigated but espouses it, acts with it or as a reproduction of it” (2002, p. 102).¹⁷ The reading example is intended to illustrate how one may access memories of reading and the intrinsic inner awareness that accompanied the reading prior to reflection.

Even if it be the case that a type of unreflective memory can reveal non-positional awareness as having been there, in some pre-reflective state, all along, it is not clear exactly how such a memory can avoid some degree of thematization of this antecedent non-positional awareness.¹⁸ Sartre’s solution is to supplement unreflective memory of inner awareness with a phenomenological reduction.¹⁹

The Epoché and Non-egological Inner Awareness

Like Husserl, Sartre’s epoché puts out of action that which cannot be phenomenologically verified and “keeps to the given” by being “merely descriptive” (Sartre, 1936/1957, p. 64). Unlike the later Husserl, the transcendental ego does not survive the more radical Sartrean epoché. Sartre describes this moment of the epoché:

¹⁵Compare with p. 48; see 1948/1967, p. 123 where Sartre refers to the reading example again. See also Sartre’s example of counting cigarettes, which also explores the transition from pre-reflective to reflective awareness (1943/1956, p. liii).

¹⁶Sartre is not here arguing that inner awareness only occurs subsequent to a remembrance of a conscious mental state. For Sartre, the unreflective memory discloses an inner awareness that was already there. See Natsoulas (2004c) for a critique of O’Shaughnessy’s remembrance conception of inner awareness.

¹⁷See also Priest (2000) for a discussion of memory of pre-reflective consciousness.

¹⁸Brentano viewed the recollection of the secondary object as an act that turns the secondary object into a primary object for the recollection (1911/1973, p. 129).

¹⁹I follow Busch (1990) in taking Sartre’s epoché as a serious attempt to understand the form itself.

One might ask why the I appears on the occasion of the *Cogito*, since the *Cogito*, correctly performed, is an apprehension of a pure consciousness, without any constitution of states or actions. To tell the truth, the I is not necessary here, since it is never a direct unity of consciousnesses. One can even suppose a consciousness performing a pure reflective act which delivers consciousness to itself as a non-personal spontaneity. Only we must realize that phenomenological reduction is never perfect. (1936/1957, p. 91)²⁰

Purified of the ego or any extrinsic causal principle, consciousness is revealed as an “*impersonal* spontaneity” (p. 98; see also p. 92) and a “Transcendental Field” (p. 93) that is a “*creation ex nihilo*” (p. 99). How is one to further describe such a transcendental field of impersonal spontaneity? It appears that traditional categories used to describe human reality break down here.

Here, there is a phenomenon of being which we can no longer describe with our ordinary categories, which are the categories applied to being in-itself. We shall say, on the contrary, that when we arrive at what we are, we must utilize a more supple vocabulary, since we establish that consciousness is at the same time that which it is not . . . and that, at the same time, it is not what it is. (Sartre, 1948/1967, p. 127)

This more supple vocabulary will presumably refer to the structures of the for-itself. In particular, inner awareness is a feature of the spontaneous, impersonal, negativity which lights up both the object intended and itself.²¹ In the following two passages, Sartre appears to move closer to an immediate non-cognitive grasp of inner awareness:

There is something distressing for each of us, to catch in the act this tireless creation of existence of which *we* are not the creators. At this level man has the impression of ceaselessly escaping from himself, of overflowing himself, of being surprised by riches which are always unexpected. (1936/1957, p. 99)

Now, presence to self presupposes a slight distance from self, a slight absence from self. It is precisely this perpetual play of absence and presence, which it may seem hard to think of as existing, but which we engage in perpetually, and which represents the mode of being of consciousness. So this mode of being implies that consciousness is lacking in its own being. It is a lack of being. The for-itself is a lack of being-itself. (Sartre, 1948/1967, p. 127)

Pure reflection reveals the constant flight of the for-itself from any self founding, any self identity. For as soon as the for-itself would grasp itself, it is already beyond itself and this new consciousness, being also a power of negativity, is itself surpassed in a “tireless creation of existence.” In this constant

²⁰Sartre does not deny that consciousness has a transcendental function. After performing the epoché, Sartre maintains, we find ourselves “in the presence of the transcendental consciousness” (1940/1991, p. 259).

²¹Sartre qualifies his earlier rejection of the impersonal nature of consciousness, but still rejects a unifying ego (1943/1956, p. 103).

failure to coincide with itself in the manner of the in-itself that it negates, the for-itself can grasp itself as constantly self-transcending and self-transcended. The unifying and temporalizing functions of consciousness, discussed above, may create the illusion that inner awareness emanates from a transcendental or substantial ego and that it therefore has a conceptual content. It is by way of the content that it is not (the posited object) that the for-itself becomes aware of itself as a lived presence to a world and objects in the world.

Conclusion

Sartre's existential phenomenology of the for-itself includes an implicit intrinsic theory of inner awareness. By developing Brentano's concept of incidental awareness and emptying Brentano's concept of secondary object of any vestige of the characteristics of being in-itself, Sartre was able to clear the path for the intuition of inner awareness as the lived experience of being present to a world and things in the world. Sartre's version of intrinsic theory accomplishes this by employing the concept of non-positional consciousness as an essential feature of the complex but unitary structure of intentionality. An unreflective memory of non-positional awareness and a radical epoché leads us to the heart of inner awareness and the pure reflection on its structure. This pure reflection reveals, concisely, that at the same time the for-itself negates and thereby posits a transcendent object, it also becomes, by means of this negation, luminous to itself. This inner awareness that consciousness of an object has of itself however, is not the same sort of activity as the explicit positing of an object that is typically performed by the positional feature of intentionality. Inner awareness is rather the lived self-surpassing of the for-itself in relation to a world and objects in the world, the negation/transcendence of which establishes the very being of the for-itself.²²

²²This addendum is to acknowledge that after finishing this article I read Rocco J. Gennaro's (2002) excellent article, "Jean Paul Sartre and the HOT Theory of Consciousness," which also addresses the issue of intrinsic awareness in Sartre and the "unity problem" raised by Wider (1997). Gennaro employs a contemporary analytic perspective to offer what he calls the wide intrinsicality view (WIV) of inner awareness. WIV maintains that "first-order conscious mental states are complex states containing both a world-directed mental state and a (nonconscious) meta-psychological thought (MET)." WIV is developed as a plausible alternative to the HOT theory of consciousness and Sartre is interpreted as formulating a theory of conscious mental states that is consistent with WIV. While Gennaro argues that Sartre is logically committed to some form of nonconscious meta-psychological mental states, I interpret Sartre as denying that such states exist, even at the level of non-positional awareness. We both agree, however, that Sartre's view of inner awareness entails Nagel's sense that there is something it is like to be in a conscious mental state. While Gennaro makes a plausible case that the principle of identity should apply to the structure of conscious mental states taken as