

9. *Existentialism and the Theory of Literature*

Philosophical change, if not progress, may be measured by the nature and frequency of its embarrassments. An earlier age in Anglo-American thought was dominated by a passion for the Absolute. Questions concerning the nature of Man, the Cosmos, Life, and Death were familiar and valid. Even those, like William James, who thumbed their noses with pluralistic fingers were at home with big issues. Today the scene has changed. Anyone who went about the smoker of the American Philosophical Association asking members what their philosophy was would be considered a crank, a fool, or at best, someone who wasn't interested in a job. If some extraordinarily considerate philosopher were to venture an answer, it would probably be something of this sort: "If you mean by 'my philosophy' some grand metaphysical system, I'm afraid I don't have one. But I can tell you something about the way in which I approach what I take to be the issues of philosophy." And what would follow would be an inquiry into the rather strange question posed in asking about "your philosophy." It would not be surprising if the questioner were told that his question was a misformulated one, or even a meaningless one.

I'm not sure that our questioner would fare any better on the Continent, but I believe he would feel more at home in his disgrace. In any event, the kinds of questions raised by some contemporary European thinkers might well appear to him closer to the spirit of his question. He might be confused by the language of phenomenology and existentialism, but he would sense in that language a concern for major themes. Whatever the achievements of contemporary French and German philosophy, they have at least led to new embarrassments. Explanations for the new mode of philosophizing are abundant.

Existentialism, for example, is often treated as a side-effect of the second World War, as a philosophical equivalent of Dada or Futurism, as, in the words of Louella Parsons, the product of the failure of the French to read their Bible, or simply as a disease. Fortunately, existential philosophy in its technical achievement is sufficiently known today to make further comment on these animadversions unnecessary. It is to the more serious reactions to existential philosophy that we must turn. And here the difference between Anglo-American thought and the philosophy of the Continent is striking in its disparity. A distinguished British philosopher told me not long ago of a conference he had joined in France devoted to phenomenological problems and attended chiefly by European phenomenologists. "They are very sweet people," he said, "but quite hopeless philosophically." Soon after I had a report from the other side. "He's a very nice man," it was said of the Englishman, "but philosophically naive." The score sheet for such a misencounter could only read "scratched."

Whatever other reasons may account for the astronomic distance between the parties involved here, there is, I think, one very basic difference between them which is worth attending to: the qualitative difference in their very sense of reality. In reading Heidegger, Sartre, and Marcel, I am presented with a world that is essentially dramatic, a world in which people suffer and dream, in which they triumph and die. Whatever is given is fringed with the ambiguities of a life involved in radical choice, tormented commitment, despairing allegiance. Vanity, pride, deceit, despair, creation and faith are endemic features. Reality is forceful in its impositions and disguises. Above all, the quality of existence is alchemic; its substance is magic. A much tidier reality seems to be given to Anglo-American philosophers. Reading Ayer, Austin, and Ryle and then their Continental opponents is like going from a matinee of *The Importance of Being Earnest* to an evening performance of *The Lower Depths*. The point is made neatly by Iris Murdoch when she says of a book by Gilbert Ryle, "The 'world' of *The Concept of Mind* is the world in which people play cricket, cook cakes, make simple decisions, remember their childhood and go to the circus; not the world in which they commit sins, fall in love, say prayers or join the Communist Party."¹

My problem now is to probe the sense of reality which existential philosophy articulates. But before I begin, I must pause for a breath of explanation. This paper will have as its central concern the implications

¹ Murdoch, I., *Sartre: Romantic Rationalist*, New Haven, 1953, 35.

of Jean-Paul Sartre's contributions to aesthetic theory. In particular, I wish to explore his ideas on the nature of literature. The more generalized theme involved here is the relevance of a phenomenologically grounded existential philosophy for the theory of literature, understood as a fundamental rationale for literary art. Although I am deeply indebted to a remarkably conceived and brilliantly executed essay on "Phenomenology and the Theory of Literature" by an earlier investigator, the present paper is intended as an independent contribution.

If we turn to literature for an expression of the sense of reality, the distance between alternative philosophical attitudes is apparent, indeed unavoidable. But even within an existentially oriented literature the differences are striking. The work of Camus possesses a Mediterranean horizon, a presence of the sea, an indication of lands split off by air which gives his art an openness into which corruption can empty without limit. His is essentially a Milesian world. Celine, whose existential relevance is dubious but nevertheless interesting to consider, hammers out an Eleatic plenum replete with the evilly condensed bitterness of a world of malintention, small-time greed, pent or exhausted virulence: the full measure of our insolence, gossip, antagonism, and being toward craft and guile. Whatever interstices might be caught in this world are plugged instantaneously with a gummy venom that saturates the whole. The sense of reality here is unredeemed by even the hope of love or the memory of friendship. If the absurd can be transcended for Camus, it can only be endured for Celine as the inwoven fabric of our being. As his titles tell us, existence is a journey to the end of night and life is death on the installment plan.

These considerations provide a focus, perhaps, for our theme of the sense of reality, but they hardly constitute an inroad into the philosophical issues. It is the sense of reality itself which must be existentially interpreted. Perhaps the best place to begin is where I am. I shall speak for myself. The world I inhabit is from the outset an intersubjective one. The language I possess was taught to me by others; the manners I have I did not invent; whatever abilities, techniques, or talents I can claim were nourished by a social inheritance; even my dreams are rooted in a world I never created and can never completely possess. The texture of this social reality is familiar to me; it seems to have always been close to me, a necessary companion. I cannot recapture in its original quality the familiarity of the world which I

experienced as a child; but *that* I experienced it is so. The forbidding problem that arises here is when and how the familiarity of the world became thematized for me as an explicit object of reflection and concern. Here autobiography can give way to a phenomenology of discovery. However philosophy began, a philosopher begins in that privileged moment when the experienced world achieves explicit thematization in his consciousness, when he for the first time self-consciously experiences his own being in the world.

Becoming aware of the texture of existence as possessing the underlying, implicit quality of being given in a certain way to consciousness is at least part of the meaning of wonder. And to say that philosophy begins with wonder may be transposed into the claim that the philosopher begins as philosopher when his own being becomes a distinct theme for self-examination. Why there is philosophy at all is a curiously disturbing question. The attitude of daily life is almost antiphilosophical in its general tenor. The man who says at a moment of crisis or despair, "We must take things philosophically" is really saying that the ordinary run of daily life need not be taken philosophically, that it is only the atypical which requires profound explanation. The underlying style of daily life, then, involves an unconscious suspension of doubt.² But more than this, common sense projects a world that is reassuring in its typicality. The very objects of that world are seen in the horizon of the familiar. An illustration from the realm of painting may help.

As I write this, I am looking at a set of reproductions entitled "A Norman Rockwell Album." The Editor of *The Saturday Evening Post* introduces the sketches with these words: "It is no exaggeration to say that Norman Rockwell is the most popular, the most loved, of all contemporary artists." I am sure he is, and looking over these examples of his art tells me why. The legends under each painting are cross sections of mundane existence typically apprehended. "Thanksgiving, 1951" depicts a woman and child seated in a cheap restaurant, sur-

² We are indebted here to Alfred Schutz. In his article "On Multiple Realities" in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, V, June 1945, on pp. 550-551 he writes: "Phenomenology has taught us the concept of phenomenological *epoché*, the suspension of our belief in the reality of the world as a device to overcome the natural attitude by radicalizing the Cartesian method of philosophical doubt. The suggestion may be ventured that man with the natural attitude also uses a specific *epoché*, of course quite another one than the phenomenologist. He does not suspend belief in the outer world and its object but on the contrary: he suspends doubt in its existence. What he puts in brackets is the doubt that the world and its objects might be otherwise than it appears to him. We propose to call this *epoché* the *epoché of the natural attitude*."

rounded by truck drivers and working people who stare at them as they pause, their hands locked together, saying a silent prayer of thanksgiving. "The Inexperienced Traveler" presents us with a little boy seated alone in the diner of a railroad train, ordering for the first time probably, while the colored waiter stands by with a loving smile. "The Satisfied Swimmer" tells us the story of the salesman who has stopped his car by a stream one hot August day and has taken a dip, just as he must have done at the old swimming hole of childhood. The other titles tell their own stories: "Off to College," "The Facts of Life," "The Sick Dolly," and a weary so on. Each item depicted is as clear as Mr. Rockwell's signature on the painting. His technical skill returns us to the fat blackness of the physician's medical bag, the creases in the leather of his old-fashioned high shoes. Nor is there any chance for misunderstanding. We know that he is a physician because the signs of his profession are directly given: his stethoscope, his diploma, his medical books. Similarly, we are able to identify the "satisfied swimmer." His car shows the emblem of the company he represents, his bow tie and eyeglasses and cigar are clearly in view. And if everything else failed to place him, that grin of his would recall the sunny face of every salesman we ever met. Mr. Rockwell's talent gives us the world we look at but never see. The simplest element of that world, the slightest detail is seen for us, not by us. These faces are the nonchalant equivalent of figures from a wax museum nobody would ever knowingly enter, for there are no stinkers in Mr. Rockwell's world.

If the realm of anonymity will not do, how then *is* the reality of our lives given? Philosophy and art, in some of their forms at least, have suggested an answer. The challenge is to be shrewdly naive, to learn to stop looking and to begin seeing. We must, in the language of phenomenology, return to "the things themselves" of our experience. Whatever else Husserl means by this advice, he is suggesting that the given in experience cannot be gotten at second hand, through the lens of the family camera or through borrowed binoculars. It is necessary to rediscover the given for yourself in its immediate quality, *as* given, as presented directly in the focus of awareness. Consciousness as a movement toward, as a directionality, is the root concept of phenomenology, and it provides as well the key to Sartre's form of existential philosophy. The sense of reality, the rediscovery of what is given in experience, is made explicit in Sartre's description of consciousness. That description will lead us ultimately to the formulation of his aesthetic.

In his essay on "The Transcendence of the Ego," Sartre presents what has been termed a "non-egological" conception of consciousness. Stripped of phenomenological jargon, his argument amounts to this: there is no self behind the activity of consciousness. The ego is located as out there, in the world, and my ego is encountered in the same way that I encounter the ego of another. Consciousness is directional in its very nature because it hurls from its vortex the meanings, attitudes, interpretations, and qualities we then claim to be "ours." I discover myself in my acts, and if I try to knock on my own door with the expectation of being greeted by an interior resident, I am destined to disappointment. "When I run after a streetcar," Sartre writes, "when I look at the time, when I am absorbed in contemplating a portrait, there is no I. There is consciousness of *the streetcar-having-to-be-overtaken*. ... In fact, I am then plunged into the world of objects; it is they which constitute the unity of my consciousness; it is they which present themselves with values, with attractive and repellant qualities – but *me*, I have disappeared; I have annihilated myself. There is no place for *me* on this level. And this is not a matter of chance, due to a momentary lapse of attention, but happens because of the very structure of consciousness."³ The I or ego arises only through a reflexive act, as the result of reflecting on the original directional activity of consciousness. It is as though I unexpectedly encountered my face in a wall mirror and said, "Oh, there you are!" Prior to the ego, then, is an original activity of consciousness which is the condition for the possibility of reflection and the peculiar quality of our being in the world.

The lucidity of consciousness, however, is fundamentally betrayed not only by the typifications of common sense but by an epistemic disjunction: the break-up of awareness into a subject-object dualism. As soon as a here-there sort of attitude filters into a philosophic perspective, everything is organized into a self as subject and the thing known as object. And when this happens, a fatal gap divides awareness into a double camp. For Sartre, the directionality of consciousness means above all that this dualism is not only dispensable but false. The object is not at distance from me, it does not subsist over there. These threats I hear announced are not apart from me, the thousand living movements of the world, its scandals and treasures are not messengers from the outside; they are all known, observed, comprehended, entertained as an integral part of my awareness. They are *mine* precisely

³ Sartre, J.-P., *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 48-49.

because they manifest themselves as moments of consciousness, as *meant* unities in the flow of my temporal being. In a word, Sartre has erased the distance between consciousness and the world. Henceforth, solipsism and realism are coparts of a single untruth; existentialism transcends them both.

Reality, then, is given by way of consciousness. There is no need to attend to the relative contributions of mind and matter because the fused world Sartre presents antedates both categories. It makes possible, for the first time perhaps, a full realization of the existential sense of reality. Returning to "the things themselves" means attending to the given in experience precisely *as* it is given, neither altering for the sake of appearances nor forgetting for the sake of propriety. The task is to see even the barest fragment of our lives in utter nakedness, to see it "in person." Such seeing is the beginning of art. The astonishments of van Gogh and Cezanne, of Dostoievski and Kafka are phenomenologies of the world unbetrayed by sensibility or understanding. They move tropistically toward the given. This movement toward reality, this insistence on attending to the sheer quality of the achievement of consciousness is the victory of a phenomenologically grounded existential philosophy, but it has been sensed by a variety of writers. I hope that both Husserl and Sartre would recognize their deepest motives in the rhetoric of James Agee. "For in the immediate world," he writes, "everything is to be discerned, for him who can discern it, and centrally and simply, without either dissection into science, or digestion into art, but with the whole of consciousness, seeking to perceive it as it stands: so that the aspect of a street in sunlight can roar in the heart of itself as a symphony, perhaps as no symphony can: and all of consciousness is shifted from the imagined, the revisive, to the effort to perceive simply the cruel radiance of what is." ⁴

The phenomenological sense of reality arises in existential literature in several ways. First, we are presented with reality as the magical product of consciousness situated in the world; second, there is a kind of metalinguistic reflection or commentary on the affairs of consciousness. The given is both presented and reflexively considered. The contrapuntal effect attained in this way leads to an internal questioning of the literary work. This self-interrogation finds its stylistic form in the confession, the diary, the embattled monologue. *Notes from Underground* is the clearest expression of this mode of self-exami-

⁴ Agee, J. and Evans, W., *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Boston, 1941, 11.

nation. What is at issue here is not the paradoxalist, but the trembling status of every particular he encounters. Once the horizon of typicality has been abandoned or transcended, each fragment of experience takes on multiple possibilities for interpretation. Signs of the world proliferate and darken; their very being wavers and the given turns problematic. But rather than an endless manufacture of particulars, it is their underlying essences which become manifest. To put the matter phenomenologically, the "irrealization" of the particular is the condition for the possibility of seeing the universal.

The logician's distinction between token and type may serve as an illustration of what is meant by irrealization. Your copy and my copy of the same edition of Euclid's *Elements* have, we say, the same geometrical figures on the same pages. The triangle that appears on the upper right hand portion of page 89 is the same triangle that appears on the corresponding part of the page in your copy. Obviously, there are two triangles being compared, yet we commonly say that they are the same triangle. They are tokens of the same type. Just as we must not confuse the token with its type, so we must not confound the printed illustration of the type with the ideal object it represents. We cannot, strictly speaking, draw triangles at all. The visual aids we use are merely graphic conveniences. Yet we do not, or at least should not see the tokens as tokens when we do geometry. As an eidetic scientist, the geometrician sees through the token to the type. He manipulates tokens in order to comprehend the relations of types. We may say that he irrealizes the token in apprehending the type.

Is there an analogue of this procedure in existential literature? I am suggesting that self-interrogation, the reflexive concern of the existential hero is a comparable activity. The paradoxalist strikes the particular from its pedestal of typicality and confronts the ruins of his act. Seeing through the multiple facets of the given he creates, the interior questioner exposes their essential features. But even more than this, he irrealizes the world and constitutes the realm of the imaginary. Again, existential literature both presents this remarkable action and provides a commentary on it. The commentary will lead us back to the act. But first of all, what do we mean by the "imaginary"?

Sartre, in the tradition of phenomenology, distinguishes three related but quite different structures: memory, anticipation, and imagination. Something remembered, something anticipated, and something imagined are not three variations on the same perceptual theme; they

are radically different modes of awareness. When I remember, I recapture a state of affairs that is real in the mode of the past: what I remember happened, and it is that happening, now past, which I search for in memory. The past event is not an unreality but a reality whose mode of being is its being past. "The handshake of Peter of last evening in leaving me," Sartre writes, "did not turn into an unreality as it became a thing of the past: it simply *went into retirement*; it is always real but past. It exists *past*, which is one mode of real existence among others."⁵ But if I anticipate shaking hands with Peter tomorrow, the anticipated handshake is not there waiting for me to join up with it; rather, it is *not* there. To anticipate that handshake means to posit it as though it were here, to treat it as here in a fugitive sense. This subjunctive presentation is close, in some of its forms, to the constitution of nothingness. Anticipation involves the detachment of the future from the present to which it is bound and presenting it to myself.⁶ In imagination, however, I posit nothingness, I posit Peter as an unreality. It is only by a fundamental negation of the real that I imagine shaking hands with him. Imagination is an act of wrenching oneself from the reality of the world; it is a disengagement from my being-in-the-world made possible through a simultaneous affirmation of that world. "In order to imagine," Sartre writes, "consciousness must be free from all specific reality and this freedom must be able to define itself by a 'being-in-the-world' which is at once the constitution and the negation of the world; the concrete situation of the consciousness in the world must at each moment serve as the singular motivation for the constitution of the unreal."⁷

It is this simultaneous affirmation and negation of being-in-the-world which so much existential literature illustrates and explores. The particulars given in a situation are exploded by consciousness into a kind of shrapnel. Each character not only interprets the fragments of his experience but causes them to be. By irrealizing their ordinary mundane signification, the existential hero brings into being their essential qualities. These qualities arise against the background of the world, but that world is negated in the moment in which it is affirmed and is affirmed in the moment of its negation. The characters of the novel cause their world to be. In positing the unreality of their acts, they secrete the imaginary. It would seem from these remarks

⁵ Sartre, J.-P., *The Psychology of Imagination*, New York, 1948, 263.

⁶ *ibid.*, 264-265.

⁷ *ibid.*, 269-270.

that a kind of literary solipsism is being advanced, that novels write themselves and read themselves and then put themselves away. To be misled here would mean that the imaginary has been treated apart from the imagining consciousness of the author and reader. This is not the case. What has been said so far about the imaginary is a shorthand for a full account of the relationship of the reader to the literary work. Without that relationship, in fact, the microcosm of literature would collapse. The being of the characters in the novel has all along been our being; their world is our responsibility. "The literary object," Sartre writes, "has no other substance than the reader's subjectivity; Raskolnikov's waiting is *my* waiting which I lend him. Without this impatience of the reader he would remain only a collection of signs. His hatred of the police magistrate who questions him is my hatred which has been solicited and wheedled out of me by signs, and the police magistrate himself would not exist without the hatred I have for him via Raskolnikov. That is what animates him, it is his very flesh." ⁸

The reader, too, is limited in his creativity. If the microcosm of *The Trial* depends on his participating consciousness, it is no less the case that participation must be along restricted lines. Everything will not do. Sartre tells us that the degree of realism and truth of Kafka's mythology is never given. "The reader must invent them ... in a continual exceeding of the written thing." ⁹ But "to be sure," he adds, "the author guides him." ¹⁰ Thus Kafka demands that we become responsible for his world, but that world remains *his*. The text of *The Trial* may be understood as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the constitution of the art work. In order to see how we are at once free yet restricted by the novel, we must attend to its status as an aesthetic object. All of our considerations so far have led to this problem. In approaching Sartre's aesthetic we are at the same time exploring a possible line of connection between philosophy and literature. Or to put the matter in a different way, we shall be interested in the relevance of aesthetics for the theory of literature.

Suppose we get a rough summary statement of Sartre's aesthetic before us. It is something like this. The novel is an aesthetic object in so far as the reader moves from the descriptions given in the book to the imaginary microcosm toward which they point. The story by itself is not enough to reach the fictive world it promises. The characters,

⁸ Sartre, J.-P., *What is Literature?*, New York, 1949, 45.

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ *ibid.*

events, general action are all *analogues*, in Sartre's language, which may lead us to the aesthetic object. It is always possible to read fiction as a report of real events, or to read an historical account as fiction. The pronouncements, questions, and wonderings of Joseph K. are merely clues or guides to the microcosm of *The Trial*. If I take the descriptions of the life of Joseph K. as a report of true happenings or if I simply note what is said in the way in which adults at breakfast may read the messages to children on the backs of cereal boxes, then an imaginative consciousness is not functioning. The movement toward the aesthetic object is short-circuited. I find myself merely with a book in my hands.

The necessary condition for the constitution of the aesthetic object is that an imaginative consciousness posit it as unreal.¹¹ "It is self-evident," Sartre writes, "that the novelist, the poet and the dramatist construct an unreal object by means of verbal analogues; it is also self-evident that the actor who plays Hamlet makes use of himself, of his whole body, as an analogue of the imaginary person. ... The actor does not actually consider himself to be Hamlet. But this does not mean that he does not 'mobilize' all his powers to make Hamlet real. He uses all his feelings, all his strength, all his gestures as analogues of the feelings and conduct of Hamlet. But by this very fact he takes the reality away from them. *He lives completely in an unreal way.* And it matters little that he is *actually* weeping in enacting the role. These tears ... he himself experiences – and so does the audience – as the tears of Hamlet, that is as the analogue of unreal tears ... The actor is completely caught up, inspired, by the unreal. It is not the character who becomes real in the actor, it is the actor who *becomes unreal* in his character."¹² Such, in outline, is Sartre's account of the constitution of the aesthetic object. It is, of course, unfair to refer simply to his "aesthetic"; he offers no aesthetic, merely some nuclear hints which, if developed, would lead to a systematic theory. But these hints are enough, if taken in the context of his total position, to warrant serious consideration. How much of lasting value does Sartre offer here?

The central achievement, it seems to me, is the phenomenological uncovering of the imaginary as the informing structure of the literary microcosm. The imaginary is not found but constituted by consciousness. And the essential character of imagination consists in its negation

¹¹ *The Psychology of Imagination*, 277.

¹² *ibid.*, 277-278.

of mundane existence. My being-in-the-world carries with it all along the possibility of its nihilation. In different terms, the imaginary is the implicit margin surrounding the horizon of the real. Just as the child is destined to discover his gift for dreaming, so the adult lives in a world whose limits will be announced by his imagination. But the condition for the imaginary is the paramount reality of worldly existence. It is because the imaginary is unreal that it can be deciphered. The decoding presupposes the natural language from which it was translated and transposed. Without the real the unreal is unthinkable, indeed unimaginable. Art, the province of the imaginary, returns us to reality and to the theme with which we began, the sense of reality. It is time to close the accordion.

The sense of reality, being-in-reality, the irrealization of the particular, the return to "the things themselves" are all problematic aspects of an aesthetic whose dominant concern is the constitution of the aesthetic object. If, as reader, I cause there to be the imaginary by disengaging mundane existence, then I assume an epistemic responsibility for the art work. "You are perfectly free to leave that book on the table," Sartre writes, "but if you open it, you assume responsibility for it."¹³ The true meaning of responsibility here, however, is founded on the directional activity of consciousness. Causing there to be the imaginary means that I move from the world to the horizon of its unreality; I discover the limits of the mundane, and in transcending those limits I affirm the very reality I have outdistanced. It is consciousness which holds the clue to reality; consciousness is the secret of ontology. Again Sartre's debt to phenomenology is great. His conception of consciousness can be understood only if we return once again to Husserl.

The non-egological theory of consciousness which Sartre advances denies Husserl's doctrine of a transcendental ego supporting or directing the acts of awareness. All knowledge is still knowledge *of* something, all memory is memory *of* something, all anticipation is anticipation *of* something, and all imagining is imagining *of* something. But the full weight is given over to the act within whose structure the meant object is located. The object of the act of consciousness is regarded neutrally; I neither affirm nor deny its real being, its objective status, its causal relations. In concerning myself phenomenologically with the act of awareness, I make a decision to attend only to what is presented, *as* it is presented. My ordinary believing in the world, my knowledge of its

¹³ *What is Literature?*, 48.

historical past, its scientific explanation, are all set aside for present purposes. In virtue of this reflexive attention I decide to pay to the stream of my own awareness, I uncover a pure field of essential relations. The objects given in that field comprise my phenomenological data. What Sartre has done with this Husserlian doctrine is to reject its transcendental condition in affirming its sovereign status. The data of consciousness are intrinsic aspects of the directionality of consciousness. My responsibility for the given is absolute. It arises and is sustained through my epistemic fiat. And since, according to Sartre, the "I" or ego is found in and through the acts of consciousness as a product of reflection, in the same way in which a fellow man is located, I am thrown out of the vortex of consciousness into the being of the world. Sartre quotes Rimbaud with approval: "I is *an other*." ¹⁴

The total result, then, of Sartre's version of a phenomenology of consciousness is to rid mind of a transcendental agent and make the acts of awareness the sole domain of our being-in-the-world. Consciousness is worldly to begin with, and its activity is thrown outward in the midst of the human condition. It is the doctrine of the directionality of consciousness which alone can account for the existentialist's sense of reality. Sartre has removed us from our place in the endless waiting line of the Hegelian Absolute, stamped our ticket, and put us on the train. With him we are *en route*. Far from phenomenology leading to a philosophical idealism, an avoidance of the brute features of existence, Sartre maintains that the victory of phenomenology is in a completely different direction. "The phenomenologists," he writes, "have plunged man back into the world; they have given full measure to man's agonies and sufferings, and also to his rebellions." ¹⁵

It might seem that phenomenology and existentialism offer a very long way around to their final point. Is it really necessary to provide a theory of consciousness in order to read novels and plays and poems with full sensitivity? Even in the literature of the existential writers, is it necessary to study *Being and Nothingness* as an endless footnote to *Nausea*? Must there always be categories? This complaint has a cousin who asks similar questions: Is a theory of literature really necessary? Why can't we read a poem as a poem, and let it go at that? A just answer to these criticisms would require first that we have a solid formulation of the problems of the theory of literature. We don't. The only defense possible here must proceed along other lines. It seems to

¹⁴ *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 97.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 105.

me that what must be defended is the relevance of philosophy for literature. And the only way of doing this is to explain the nature and necessity of theory.

When a blunt, robust, and fair-minded critic waves away abstractions and urges us to attend to the concrete work of art, how are we to follow his advice? Is the poem the printed token that appears on my copy or his? Should I recite the lines or listen to somebody else read them? Will diligent study locate a normative structure of some sort which we will agree is the poem as the author meant it, or as it might be understood, or as it must be interpreted? Can we wave these cautions aside as abstractions, too? With all the good will and fairness of mind I can muster, I must confess that the critic's directions confuse me. But worse, I cannot discuss these confusions in his presence; he will not hear of them. The critic who does attend to my worries attends to my theorizing, and the discipline which tries to formulate, clarify, and resolve these torments is the theory of literature. Abandoned by the man who will not hear of categories, I find some intellectual solace in reading Wellek and Warren. Perhaps, as Marcel remarks of Jaspers, "I can only proceed in this kind of country by calling out to other travelers." ¹⁶

Unfortunately, the situation in contemporary philosophy is equally unsettling. The philosophical problem of communication, the problem of intersubjectivity, has given way to the conversational silence held between analytically oriented philosophers and those sympathetic to phenomenology and existentialism. We are back to that conference of phenomenologists which the English philosopher attended. It is curious that most attempts to explain the gap between the opposed camps rely on psychology. Differences in temperament are noted; some even turn to psychoanalysis for guidance. But the psychology of philosophers, however interesting and fruitful it might prove to be, cannot satisfy us. Splits in philosophy are themselves philosophical problems. If I cannot account for the division today between so much of Anglo-American and Continental philosophy, I can at least describe a few of its features.

Much analytic philosophy attends very seriously to the formulation of philosophical assertions. Language has become a leading concern, and the ordinary language of everyday discourse has been analyzed in remarkable detail. Whatever the results of this analysis, it can at

¹⁶ Marcel, G., *The Philosophy of Existence*, London, 1949, 29.

least be said that it is guided by certain suspicions. The great treatises of Bradley and Bosanquet have given way to more modest, less Germanic ventures; the style is crisp, the sentences clearly structured, the movement of the argument distinctly articulated. Although literary styles vary among analytic philosophers, some of them seem to strive for an almost schoolboy effect: titles are quite short, illustrations are often bits of casual dialogue, the manner is tart. We cannot ask, What manner of men write these works?, but we must pose another question: What sense of reality informs these writings? Instead of generalizing, I prefer to restrict myself to one analytic philosopher of great distinction who has said something about his way of regarding the world. I can think of no better way of pointing to everything phenomenology and existentialism are not than to quote G. E. Moore when he writes: "I do not think that the world ... would ever have suggested to me any philosophical problems. What has suggested philosophical problems to me is things which other philosophers have said about the world ..." ¹⁷ This is not intended as an admission but as an affirmation. It must surely be considered one of the remarkable embarrassments of our age.

¹⁷ *The Philosophy of G. E. Moore* (ed. by Paul Arthur Schilpp), The Library of Living Philosophers, IV, Evanston and Chicago, 1942, 14. I note that this quotation, cited more fully, and the one from Iris Murdoch referred to above appear also in Walter Kaufmann's *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, New York, 1958.