2. Totalizing Action and Praxis-Process

2.1 Introduction

This chapter develops a unified account of human action and existence as a *praxis*-process in Sartre's philosophical works by combining action-theoretical thoughts from *Being and Nothingness*, *Search for a Method*, and *Critique*.[1]

Chapter 1 indicated the fundamental role of human action in the larger theoretical framework of Sartre's philosophy. Whereas Sartre's earlier philosophical focus mainly considers the internal dialectic of action, the later Sartre tries to account for the fact that human existence is a mediation of internal and external dialectics through action. This is due to a claim by Sartre that human existence becomes only truly intelligible based on how it dialectically processes through societal constellations based on its ontological freedom. Sartre refers to these constellations as practical ensembles. However, from these assumptions, it has not yet become clear how such a conception of action—as the practical mediation of internal and external dialectics—presents itself on the action level, i.e. in the concrete structural course of action.

The previous chapter introduced Sartre's early conception of free action and his later conception of *praxis*. Both, although initially similar, emphasize different aspects of human action. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes action as the ontologically free, intentional, material arrangement of means to ends. These ends arise in human desiring (*désir*) as a relation between human beings and the world. This perspective on action is predominantly focused on the internal dialectic of human action because it accounts for what it means to act, experience, and engage the world from a perspective on the synthetic relationship of being and consciousness. Based on this earlier conception of action, human existence appears to be fundamentally grounded in itself as a free project.

In *Critique*, in contrast, Sartre focuses on the historical *praxis* of individuals, which is best understood as an active, material modification of a state of the world

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1   For a more condensed version of Sartre's dialectical conception of action as totalization, see Siegler (2022b).

that was deemed unsatisfactory into a potentially satisfying state of the world based on human needs (*besoin*). Although Sartre highlights the material aspects of human action and experience in his later work, his perspective on historical *praxis* captures human action as a mediation of the internal and external dialectics of human existence. It accounts for what it means to act as a goal-directed and intentional biological organism, necessarily confronted with and reliant on other such organisms and material entities, and for what it means to engage with often-times recalcitrant physicochemical surroundings in the long run. In contrast to his earlier conception of action, Sartre's later conception presents human existence as an inherently dependent, material, and, most importantly, socially determined process.

However, both the early and late perspectives highlight different yet inherently intertwined aspects of what it means to act, and these must be incorporated into a unified account of action in Sartre's philosophy. Among these aspects are the ontological freedom of human agents; the intentionality of their actions; the specific experience of the state of the physicochemical surroundings in the outset of action in relation to the motivational role of requirements, wants, and wishes; the relationship itself between needs as *besoins* and desires as *désirs*; the fact that human beings are biological organisms with an embodied consciousness; and the influence of sociocultural and material conditions on the course of actions. Notwithstanding the complex interrelations between these factors and the aforementioned mediation of internal and external perspectives on action, a unified account of human action in Sartre's philosophy is not only possible but also necessary for understanding human action as the foundation of his philosophical system in general, and for understanding his theories on the dialectics of technology and society in particular.

The key to developing such a unified account of action in Sartre is the functional principle of totalization. As mentioned in section 1.4, for Sartre totalization is the underlying dialectical principle of human action and experience. The later Sartre uses the principle of totalization to capture the internal dialectical dynamics of human existence that he mentioned in *Being and Nothingness*, while further developing those dynamics by adding a materially dialectical and external perspective. Through totalization as the underlying principle of human action and experience, human existence becomes intelligible throughout Sartre's works as a mediation of internal and external dialectics. In this regard, Sartre's philosophical works must be considered inherently complementary. By combining this unified account of action with Sartre's understanding of existence as a *praxis*-process, every situated action can be either understood on its own, as a material and totalizing process or as a structural moment in the larger totalization of human existence as a *praxis*-process.

To develop a unified account of action—as the ontologically free, intentional, sociomaterially dependent, material arrangement of means to ends based on *besoins* and *désirs*, through which human beings totalize themselves and their world—it

must be shown to what extent human action and existence themselves represent totalizations. This means that the unified conception of action must not only account for the external synthetic relation between material agents and the world. It must also account for the internal synthetic relation between being-for-itself and being-in-itself. Consequently, the course of action must represent a mediation of action and experience that is entangled with the agent's corporeality and physico-chemical surroundings. In this way, the ontological freedom and intentionality of action, the motivational role of requirements, wants, and wishes, the materiality of these agents themselves, and the situatedness of these agents in sociocultural and material constellations can all be accounted for. However, this means that some of Sartre's more existentialist thoughts about the different modes of being of humans and non-human things must be taken into consideration as well. Also, it means that some of the concepts that were introduced in Chapter 1 must be brought up again and reinterpreted. This conception of action will be integrated into Sartre's understanding of existence as a *praxis*-process.

To lay the foundations for developing a unified conception of action, the chapter begins with a theoretical preface about Sartre's understanding of modes of being, and a focused reconstruction of the principles of *totalization* and *totality* in the context of human experience.

2.2 Modes of Being and their Synthesis

The overall aim of this section is to prepare the theoretical ground for the rest of the chapter. The section first introduces Sartre's thoughts on the different modes of being of humans and non-human things. Then, the section explicates Sartre's basic dialectical principle of totalization along with its implications by demonstrating how this principle plays out in the way humans experience the objective world.

Modes of Being

A fundamental point for understanding Sartre's philosophy is his basic differentiation between the modes of being for human beings and those for non-human things. The human mode of being is treated first. As discussed in section 1.2, human beings constitute meaningful relations with being *for* themselves, as ends in themselves, in virtue of their goal-directed relations with the world. For this reason, Sartre refers to the human mode of being as *being-for-itself* or *for-itself*. Sartre's phenomenological considerations are important for understanding this mode of being. Sartre claims that, unlike non-human things, humans are not only conscious of the world around them, but they also necessarily practically relate to and encounter it. For Sartre, consciousness is not a contemplative state of analyzing the world. Rather, consciousness

has to be understood as an immediate connection between humans and other entities that are outside consciousness. This connection can be physical or mental.

Proponents of this view include Brentano and Husserl, the latter being the main representative of the phenomenological school. Husserl claims that consciousness is mainly characterized by its directedness toward something else. This directedness is referred to as *intentionality*. In Husserl's traditional transcendental phenomenology, the intentionality of consciousness is analyzed to draw conclusions about the conditions of the possibility of experience. Husserl's focus is on the structure of human experience as a result of perception and awareness. Hence he uses the terms *subject* and *object* as fixed points to describe how humans relate to things. Although a relation between subject and object—from active to passive—seems unidirectional at first, Husserl means quite the opposite. Within this conception of consciousness, subjectivity is possible only on the grounding of objectivity, and vice versa. There is no experiencing instance without an appearing one. Phenomenology derives its name from this appearing instance, the *phenomenon* (Greek *phainomenon*, a thing appearing to view). Sartre mostly follows this approach. However, he is less interested in the conditions of the possibility of experience. Combined with his ontological thinking, Sartre tries to uncover the conditions of the possibility of human existence (see section 1.2). With the introduction of his later concept of *totalization*, Sartre intends also to uncover the intricacies of how forms of human world-relatedness are constituted.

In Sartre's philosophy, every relation humans maintain to the world is itself a directed reference between subjective consciousness (for-itself) and the positive givenness of the objective phenomenal world (in-itself). Sartre does not proclaim a separation between body and mind. According to him, "[i]t is in its entirety that being-for-itself has to be body, and in its entirety that it has to be consciousness: it cannot be *joined* to a body" (Sartre 2021, 412, emphasis in original). Human existence is necessarily embodied and manifested in the materiality of being. Seeing, hearing, analyzing, categorizing, and acting, among others, are directed processes of human consciousness that produce subjective meaning by rendering meaningful the relations between subject and object. This directedness is not a choice; it is the structural characteristic of consciousness. To put it bluntly, human beings cannot decide not to see, hear, feel, or process information. They can merely decide to close their eyes and ears, to avoid tactile sensation, or to direct their awareness to something else. In this regard, the mode of being-for-itself is inherently characterized by transcendence. Human consciousness is "a project of itself beyond" (Sartre 2021, 53) as it reaches toward the world and envelops it in its spatiotemporal becoming. On the basis of materiality, consciousness represents a radical openness to the world. Furthermore, the structure of consciousness means that the for-itself also represents a relation to the world in a receptive, directed, and focused way. This

will become clearer as it concerns human corporeality, as the focal point of human existence (see section 2.3).

Sartre's approach toward the phenomenal structure of human consciousness is innovative in that he differentiates between two modes of consciousness: the pre-reflective consciousness of something, and a second-order, reflective consciousness of one's consciousness of something. Intentional relations toward objects are constituted by pre-reflective consciousness. Depending on the level of technological mediation, these relations are relatively immediate. Touching, writing, and observing are typical pre-reflective relations of embodied consciousness. During writing, for instance, the act of writing itself is usually neither reflected upon nor said to be *performed*. One is simply writing (see section 3.2). Similarly, reflecting on a metaphysical concept means being pre-reflectively conscious of this concept. Reflective consciousness is pre-reflective consciousness of one's intentional processes. This means that human consciousness is always directed toward something, even if it does not reflect upon this directedness (Sartre 2021, 9–10).

Sartre argues that the processes of human consciousness have a double character. He states that "any positional consciousness of an object is at the same time a non-positional consciousness of itself" (Sartre 2021, 11). Among intentional relations, human consciousness pre-reflectively posits itself as the subject within its relation toward an object. Reflectively, consciousness is directed to its intentional directedness toward something. Although Sartre differentiates between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness, they together constitute a unity. The knowledge of pre-reflective relations is possible only on the grounding of reflective consciousness, and vice versa. As a consequence, Sartre concludes that human beings are self-conscious and that this self-consciousness is mediated as such through the interrelation between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness. Human beings relate to themselves by virtue of relating to their relating-to-the-world (Sartre 2021, 11–12). The *look* of others and the various ways in which human beings objectify themselves in the material world are significant for how humans may reflect their existence (see section 4.3).

Human existence structurally exists as both self-consciousness and embodied directedness. It is never contained in itself, but always outside itself, always engaging the material world. Due to the transcendent character of their existence, human beings are always in the process of existing. Even though they can be neither identical with nor completely free from being, they can modify their relation with being (Sartre 2021, 60–61). Sartre identifies this modifiability as ontological freedom—freedom of attitude, stance, or bearing. It is not a property of human consciousness, but a condition of human existence (Barata 2018, 125–126). By existing, human beings necessarily relate to being. Even though they are self-conscious, their self is defined as "a constantly unstable equilibrium between identity as a state of absolute cohesion without any trace of diversity, and unity as the synthesis of a mul-

tiplicity" (Sartre 2021, 126). In Sartre's existentialism, human existence must be understood as a temporal, future-oriented process comprising the various ways human beings exist in the world with and against the full givenness of being (see section 2.3). Within the process of existing, human beings realize themselves through their experiences and actions. However, they can never fully become the selves they strive to be. A fully synthesized being-in-and-for-itself would mean that directed consciousness for-itself ceases to exist (Sartre 2021, 143). Human existence must project toward itself over and over again. Human beings are, therefore, condemned to be free (Sartre 2021, 577). This *condemnation* is a constitutive aspect of the lived contradiction that human existence represents (see section 1.4).

In contrast to humans in the mode of being-for-itself, things are not self-conscious. Sartre mentions that "the constant reflection that constitutes any 'itself' merges into identity" (Sartre 2021, 27) in the case of things. Things thus exist in the mode of being-in-itself. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre identifies three distinct characteristics of being—*Being is, Being is in itself, Being is what it is.*

For human beings to relate to being, being itself must have a certain structure. Sartre then argues that being is neither active nor passive. According to him, because activity and passivity are human categories, being can appear only as active or passive within the scope of human experience or action. Being is also beyond affirmation, because *affirmation* would suggest an affirming act carried out by human consciousness. Yet Sartre claims that being *is*, even independent of human reality.

Because being cannot be the product of any activity, Sartre deduces the first characteristic: "*being is in itself*" (Sartre 2021, 27, emphasis in original). Since being neither self-reflects nor acts with intention, it cannot constitute a self in any meaningful way. It follows that its structural integrity is not a product of deliberation, but is given as it is. From this fact, Sartre derives the second characteristic: "*being is what it is*" (Sartre 2021, 27, emphasis in original), and nothing else. Because being is what it is, it "can neither be, nor be derived from, the possible, nor can it be equated with the necessary" (Sartre 2021, 28). It is given in pure contingent positivity, devoid of time or meaning. Sartre expresses this in the third characteristic: "being-in-itself *is*" (Sartre 2021, 28, emphasis in original).

Owing to these three characteristics, Sartre considers things in the mode of being-in-itself to be transcendent, much like being-for-itself (Sartre 2021, 21–22). It seems that Sartre's conception of the transcendent being of objective phenomena is deliberately ambivalent. Things must be what they are and must be how they appear. To conceptualize them as transcendent implies something toward which they transcend. But unlike the transcendent for-itself, being-in-itself can be understood as transcendent in that it appears the way it does due to the characteristics of being and not as a directed and focused consciousness. In Sartre's case, this means that things present themselves as they are. Sartre criticizes various epistemological approaches that propose a "dualism of being and appearing" (Sartre 2021, 2). Rather than assum-

ing that a phenomenal thing "indicates behind its shoulder some true being" (Sartre 2021, 2) that is somehow concealed, such as Kant's *thing-in-itself*, Sartre concludes that how things appear discloses their being. He writes that the essence of the objective world is an "'appearing' that is no longer opposed to being but which is, on the contrary, its measure" (Sartre 2021, 2). This does not mean that things only exist insofar as they appear (Sartre 2021, 22), but that the objective world can be experienced in its phenomenality without missing any essential features. In the case of things, existence *is* essence. In the case of humans, existence *precedes* essence. In section 2.3, this is shown to be the most crucial difference between humans and things.

The ontological foundation of the materiality of being is omnipresent in Sartre's early philosophy and has been shown to carry over to his later philosophical works (see Chapter 1). Even in his later philosophy, Sartre implicitly incorporates the modes of being-in-itself and for-itself into his considerations. From Sartre's considerations about the different modes of being of humans and non-human things, his primacy of the human perspective, and his considerations about the significance of experience and action as the analytical ground for understanding history, it follows that humans typically are the active parts of human-world relations, whereas things represent the passive parts. However, under specific circumstances, the dynamics between humans and things can change (see section 4.3). As Sartre remarks, both modes of being may be analyzed on their own as *moments of a synthesis*. But a more complete comprehension of both is made possible only by analyzing how they interrelate.

The Basic Principle of Totalization

Distinguishing between the modes of being-for-itself and being-in-itself can be misleading, in that both modes of being seemingly refer to fixed and initially separated object areas in which human subjects remain on one side of the relationship and the objective world on the other. In the case of Sartre's philosophy, however, such a separation cannot easily be made. Being-for-itself and being-in-itself must not be considered as initially separated but instead as moments of a synthesis (Sartre 2021, 34), or, more precisely, as *relata* within an actively processing interrelation. In *Critique*, Sartre refers to this actively processing and synthetic interrelation as *totalization*, a process that produces totalities. With this view, Sartre stands in a thought tradition of philosophers concerned with the ideas and assumptions surrounding the concept of *totality*.

The concept of *totality* is one moment in a long history of assumptions, observations, and intuitions concerning the idea of a somewhat organized and self-contained whole: a *holon*, a *Ganzheit*, a composition larger than the sum of its parts, a system exhibiting more qualities than the mere sum of its elements would imply, etc. This concept has troubled thinkers throughout the entire history of philosophy.

In *Marxism and Totality*, Jay (1984) reconstructs the history of the concept of *totality* in Western thought, along with the never-ending struggle to formulate a coherent idea of what it means. In the aftermath of Hegel and Marx, the concept of *totality* rose to special prominence in Western Marxism. Among the most prominent thinkers who concerned themselves with totalities was Georg Lukács. For him, *totality* represents the "eigentliche Wirklichkeitskategorie" (Lukács 1923, 42)—the actual category of reality—through which a dialectical method can acquire an understanding of the complex interrelation between society and a capitalist mode of production. Following Marx, Lukács argues that the contradictions of capitalist societies can only be properly unveiled when society itself is understood through the category of *totality*. Processes of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption cannot be understood only as affecting each other. Rather, the fact that a process is understood as one of production or consumption is possible only when it is understood dialectically, as a moment in the processing of a capitalist society considered as an all-encompassing totality (Lukács 1923, 44; Burmann 2018, 22). The category of *totality* thus represents the condition of possibility for a dialectical understanding of society and history.

In *Search for a Method*, Sartre broadly criticizes the Western Marxist understanding of the concept of *totality* as a misattribution of cause and effect in historical processes. Rather than attempting to understand how totalities—such as individuals, specific societal constellations, or societal processes—come about through the actions of historically situated individuals, Sartre criticizes the Marxist understanding of totality as "heuristic; its principles and its prior knowledge appear as regulative in relation to its concrete research" (Sartre 1963, 26). Sartre's solution for this problem is his own modified version of Lefebvre's *regressive-progressive method* (see section 1.3). This methodology allows him to dialectically deconstruct and then reconstruct how specific totalities, like individuals, larger groupings of individuals, societal subsystems, and even society as a whole, have become what they are through the synthetic activities of human beings. These synthetic activities, such as experience and action, fundamentally follow the dialectical principle of *totalization*. To grasp this principle, Sartre employs a broader, more fluid, and most importantly, more open conception of totalities. He states:

> A totality is defined as a being which, while radically distinct from the sum of its parts, is present in its entirety, in one form or another, in each of these parts, and which relates to itself either through its relation to one or more of its parts or through its relation to the relations between all or some of them. If this reality is *created* (a painting or a symphony are examples, if one takes integration to an extreme), it can exist only in the imaginary (*l'imaginaire*) [...] Thus, as the active power of holding together its parts, the totality is only the correlative of an act of imagination [...] In the case of practical objects – machines, tools, consumer goods,

etc. – our present action makes them seem like totalities by resuscitating, in some way, the *praxis* which attempted to totalise their inertia [...] the *totality*, despite what one might think, is only a regulative principle of the totalisation (Sartre 1978, 45–46)

Things like a painting or a hammer can only be considered totalities through the synthetic act of experiencing, apprehending, or practically utilizing them. The meaning and practical significance of these things are not given per se but through the totalizing interrelation between humans and their material surroundings. According to Sartre, this totalizing interrelation fundamentally represents a synthesis of being-for-itself and being-in-itself. The synthesis plays out in the interlocking of human experience and action in relation to the corresponding socioculturally structured, material surroundings.

Unfortunately, Sartre does not provide a clear and all-encompassing definition of *totalization*. In *Critique II*, he states that a totalization is "simply a praxis achieving unity on the basis of specific circumstances, and in relation to a goal to be attained" (Sartre 1991, 3), which more or less equates totalization with a successful goal-directed activity. Throughout *Critique*, Sartre points out that totalizations, such as requiring something, experiencing specific environmental features, or realizing oneself through action, represent dialectical activities that play out as a succession of the three dialectical moments discussed previously (Sartre 1978, 47, 60, 80, 85, 89). Need, for instance, represents "the first totalizing relation between the material being, man, and the material ensemble from which he is part [...] it is through need that the first negation of the negation and the first totalisation appear in matter" (Sartre 1978, 80). In its abstractness, need projects toward a future state of the world in which an agent's requirements, wants, and wishes are satisfied. When an agent practically realizes this project by satisfying their need through action, this action fundamentally represents a sublation of this need for the acting subject. Also, totalizations proceed through an interlocking series of exteriorizations of interiority and interiorizations of exteriority between humans and their surrounding matter. To stay within the example of need and its projection toward an end, Sartre states:

The *project* [...] is merely the exteriorisation of immanence; transcendence itself is already present in the functional fact of nutrition and excretion, since what we find here is a relation of univocal interiority between two states of materiality. And, conversely, transcendence contains immanence within itself in that its link with its purpose and with the environment remains one of exteriorised interiority. (Sartre 1978, 83, emphasis in original)

Sartre's understanding of dialectical totalization can be illustrated by how he conceives the process of experience. Experience is inherent to all forms of human world-relations. It is a unifying and synthetic activity of embodied self-consciousness in

which the meaning of an initially exterior phenomenal object is constituted for an experiencing subject based on a relationship that also constitutes object and subject in the first place. In this way, human beings constitute themselves as subjects within an objective world that corresponds to their horizon of reality and possibility. According to Sartre, the process of experiencing is dialectical. Subject, object, and meaning are outcomes of a synthesis of being and consciousness.

Structurally, the synthetic process of experiencing consists of directed human consciousness, i.e. being-for-itself, and phenomenon, i.e. being-in-itself with its aforementioned three characteristics. This being is transcendent in that it appears just as it is. It is given in the full positivity of its being. On its own, it is inert matter without any meaning whatsoever. From a phenomenological point of view, being cannot even be considered an object without a directed subject, and vice versa. This pure givenness of being-in-itself is a material presupposition for the experience. By virtue of its structure, being is posited as it is. It is present in its entirety as what it is. This positing is the first moment of dialectical totalization.[2]

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2   In this regard, Sartre's understanding of being-in-itself differs from that of Hegel. For Sartre, being-in-itself represents a material positing for consciousness owing to the phenomenal structure of both matter and consciousness. For Hegel, being-in-itself is already a positing of consciousness. The difference here between Sartre's and Hegel's understanding of being-in-itself might be traced back to the slightly different intensions of Hegel's concept *An sich* and its French translation *en-soi*. In English, both concepts are simply translated as *in-itself*. The Hegelian concept *An sich* refers to an immediate and more general way in which an object is given so as to be potentially identified as something. The potential character is important here, as it represents the condition of possibility for any form of identification in the first place (Hubig 2016, 139). Sartre's understanding of *en-soi*, however, as proposed in *L'être et le néant*, does not refer to the potential character of an object but to the inner structure of the being of that object. It is more focused on what is *within* being that provides the condition of possibility for experience and action. The English translation of both concepts simply as *in-itself* obscures this difference in meaning. However, this difference has consequences for Hegel's and Sartre's philosophical outlook. Since *An sich* already represents a positing of consciousness, Hegel's dialectic takes place as a conceptual development within the human mind. In Sartre's case, being posits itself *en-soi*—within and through its material givenness—and is encountered by human consciousness. Consequently, Sartre's dialectic takes place as a synthetic process of being and consciousness within matter through experience and action. Therefore, Hegel can be called an idealist whereas Sartre must be called a materialist in this regard. Similarly, the translation of Hegel's German *Für sich* as *pour-soi* in French alters its Hegelian meaning and stresses a more proactive mode of being. In German, the term *Für sich* generally refers to something that is taken on its own. In Hegel's use, *Für sich* refers to the human mind which remains somewhat analytical as the instance that qualifies objects *An sich* through determination. Sartre's *pour-soi* is practical and engaged in the world *for* (French *pour*) its own sake. Again, the English translation of *Für sich* and *pour-soi* as *for-itself* obscures this slight yet crucial terminological difference. The author's appreciation goes to Christoph Hubig for these insights.

Embodied self-consciousness can encounter this positing of being-in-itself through its sensory organs. Initially, this encountering is an external relation. Within such a sensory relationship, consciousness can be regarded as subjective in relation to being-in-itself, which in this regard can now be called an object. Given that this object is transcendent and thus appears to a subject, the object can be considered a phenomenon in phenomenological terms. In this phenomenological relation, subjective consciousness both interiorizes and identifies certain characteristics that derive from how the phenomenal object appears based on its being. This object is not a sum of individual qualities. Rather, it is "simply experienced [...] as having a structure" (Føllesdal 2010, 10). This means that the object is an entity that nevertheless appears as having different interrelated characteristics. Depending on how consciousness relates to this object, some of these characteristics can be experienced and thus interiorized through its sensory organs. The embodied self-consciousness can see, feel, and hear among others. Its eyes are directed toward color and shape, its ears are directed toward sound, and so on. This leads to a series of concrete appearances of the object for the subject. After careful perceptive examination, for instance, the phenomenon may appear as colored, blue, far away, polished, with a handle, and cold. When the embodied self-consciousness interacts with the thing or reflects upon its practical use, practical implications of the thing in question can be found. It may turn out to be suitable for holding liquid, or that it breaks when it falls off the table. Moreover, because all these experiences take place in larger socioculturally structured material constellations, additional information can be gathered about the phenomenon. Depending on factors like culture, conventions of language, education, level of reflection about one's consciousness of the thing, and others, a common term can be derived that describes the phenomenon as a *cup* that is used for holding warm or even hot liquids. Sartre mentions that the being of this *cup* is transphenomenal. This means that it is present in relation to other phenomena, to which the *cup* refers: it is in the kitchen, next to the coffee maker, and so on (Sartre 2021, 23). In short, it has a specific location within *hodological space*, i.e. the space of relations in which a person finds the phenomenon in relation to themselves (Sartre 2021, 415, 432). The relations between objects constitute this person's *field of equipmentality* (see section 3.2). This Heideggerian concept describes the sum of a person's practical relations to the things that a person may use as means toward their ends.[3]

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3 What is described here in terms of material objects works in similar ways for immaterial things. For instance, in their everyday lives humans may encounter the concept of *justice*. These humans may come to know that this concept describes certain ways of distributing wealth, social benefits, opportunities, possibilities, etc. This concept comprises a somewhat fixed object area, in that it describes a very special set of practices as well as the (moral) judgement regarding actions. Owing to how it presents itself in the corresponding actions, human consciousness can reflect on what the concept means for it by singling out what character-

This process of interiorizing and identifying individual aspects of the phenomenal object is rooted in the intentional structure of being-for-itself. Sartre claims that it is impossible for the full positivity of being to be present to consciousness (Sartre 2021, 20–23). According to him, human consciousness necessarily abstracts from the full positivity of objective being. Sartre identifies this relation between for-itself and in-itself to be a negation. Human consciousness introduces nothingness into being (Sartre 2021, 58–59). No single determination ever completely captures the full, positive givenness of being; within the intentional structure of human consciousness, any determination is perspectival and one-sided. Determinations as uttered in sentences like "This thing is blue," "This thing is polished," "This thing is a cup," or "The concept of X means…" might be appropriate for specific aspects of being, but they necessarily negate or stand against, other equally suitable determinations. None of these determinations, however, exhausts the full positivity of the thing in question. At this point of the totalizing process, experience is not yet a complete totalizing synthesis. Rather, it remains an opposition between two poles—so far, there is merely the givenness of being as a material positing and its pure negation carried out by consciousness without any refined representation of meaning. This is merely the second moment of experience as dialectical totalization.

It was mentioned before that in Sartre's philosophy, meaning is neither a quality of things nor a product of pure consciousness. Rather, how things appear as objective phenomena and how subjective consciousness is directed toward them constitutes meaningful relations as such. Meaning is the product of singling out aspects of the phenomenon and thus determining what the phenomenon as a determined one means for consciousness. From the visual perception of a polished, blue, faraway thing, to its practical implementation as a suitable container for holding liquids, and then to the name *cup*—the different ways of experiencing and handling this object represent possible determinations of being-in-itself. As such, these possible determinations abstract from and thus negate the full positive givenness of being. Such determinations become meaningful in that they may correspond to the object's essence or not. For Sartre, the essence of non-human things "understood as the principle of a series, is no more than the connection between the appearances—which means it is itself an appearance" (Sartre 2021, 3). This means that phenomena in the mode of being-in-itself can be determined from the outside. Their essence is their existence. How phenomena appear implies their essence as that which is meaningful for consciousness based on the being of these phenomena. Although Sartre is not a strict essentialist who considers things to have a human-independent essence, certain things still have intrinsic features or result from constitutive processes that give

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izes a just act and what does not. Sartre exemplifies this with the color concept *red*, which can be experienced in the ways consciousness encounters things that reflect red light in the physicochemical world (Sartre 2021, 2–3).

the things shape. Sartre's concept of *essence* is linked to the conditions of the possibility of experience, which can be found in consciousness and the materiality of being. For him, essence is the sum of possible ways of conceiving and apprehending phenomenal objects.[4]

Yet, there are no ways of conceiving an object in such an essential way unless it is determined for consciousness within human reality. Every determination of being-in-itself is simultaneously a negation of positivity and a negation of that very negation. Determining thus means abstracting from—i.e. negation—the positivity of being-in-itself by affirming—i.e. negation of the negation—the phenomenon's being as that which manifests meaning in the form of an organized totality of qualities within human reality (Sartre 2021, 6–7). Regarding the title of Sartre's first major work, phenomena can be understood as the *nothingness* of positive being for human consciousness.

In this context, the inherent dialectic of experience becomes apparent. Rather than considering meaning to be *in* things or *in* consciousness, meaning must be understood in terms of a *meaningful relation* between things and consciousness, through which respective structures of subjectivity and objectivity become what they are in the first place. Human beings have meaningful mental conceptions of things because humans impart meaning both by how they relate to things and how things appear to them based on the things' material characteristics. Within these relations, action, and experience are closely linked. According to Sartre, there is no such thing as a purely contemplative consciousness. If there were, it would fail to reveal the practical implications of objects. Such a consciousness would not be able to make a practical connection between, for instance, hammers and nails, or between the physical symptoms of a lack of water in the organism and a glass of water (Sartre 2021, 432) (see Chapter 3).

Human beings affirm both the structure of their relatedness and the way this structure corresponds to the structure of being in every one of their relations to the phenomenal world. Within the lived experience of individual human beings, a phenomenal object is a cup because this object has a material structure that appears in a certain way, so that it may be used as the thing that is known and used as a cup. In dialectical terms, such a constituted meaningful relation is the ongoing sublation of the contingency of being and the negating determinations for human consciousness. Furthermore, this meaningful relation is either pre-reflectively or reflectively interiorized by human consciousness. In this third moment of dialectical experience, the negation of negations represents an affirmation of being as a manifested

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4   This conception is somewhat reminiscent of a variant of Peirce's *pragmatic maxim*: "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (Peirce 1878, 293).

meaning for consciousness. Both subject and object, human and thing, exist relative to how they relate and transcend toward each other. With this affirmation, the process of experience as totalization has resulted in both a subject-totality, an *I*, and an object-totality, a *this*.

Object-Totality and World

The dialectical totalization of subject and object occurs in every relation between humans and things. It is at once a subjectification of for-itself and an objectification of in-itself. In the act of experience, the specific subjectivity of being-for-itself is constituted within its interrelation with specific phenomenal entities as objects. In this way, both subject and object are moments of a synthesis and both are constituted as totalities. To quote Sartre's definition of a totality again:

> A totality is defined as a being which, while radically distinct from the sum of its parts, is present in its entirety, in one form or another, in each of these parts, and which relates to itself either through its relation to one or more of its parts or through its relation to the relations between all or some of them. (Sartre 1978, 45)

The dialectic of totalization outlined above now allows slightly modifying Sartre's understanding of *totality* in comparison to that of Lukács. For Sartre, *totality* is a category describing entities understood as produced through a synthetic activity, or, more precisely, as results of a totalization. They are externally organized and have meaning only within human reality. *Totality* is thus a category that is onto-phenomenological, dialectical, and material. Sartre's example is electric current. He describes it as the "collection of physicochemical actions [...] that manifest it" (Sartre 2021, 2). Comprehending electric current as a totality means uniting various manifestations, effects, and other aspects and synthesizing them in the concept of *electric current*. This concept again instantiates its aspects.

The aforementioned cup can also be understood as a totality. It is the product of a totalization of relating human consciousness manifested in a material entity. The *parts* of the cup, i.e. its color, shape, weight, and utility, are manifested in the same being. The cup is more than the mere sum of its parts; it is not only blue, far away, with a handle, and so on. Each appearance of the objective phenomenon coincides with a subjective impression throughout consciousness from which information is deduced beyond what is presented. Within human reality, the cup is also *not* red, *not* coarse, *not* close, etc. Being thus does not include its negation within itself. Rather, this negation is an abstracting capacity of human consciousness. Within cup-being, each *part* relates to other parts. The *blue* of the cup has a specific extension, human beings have a specific distance to the cup's shape and weight, and so on. All of these appearances are manifested in the same being to which a meaningful relation

is constituted.[5] However, this meaning does not change the cup's being—rather, it changes how human beings relate to it. In this regard, the object-totality *cup* exists as the correlative of an act of imagination within human reality. Its ontological status is that of being-in-itself (Sartre 1978, 45).

It Is important to note that Sartre's conception of *totality* must be understood as "only a regulative principle of the totalisation" (Sartre 1978, 46). Human beings refer to things as totalities *as if* these totalities were self-contained, completed, or completely independent of human activities or purposes. Once the totalizing subjects vanish, the interiorized meaning of the object vanishes as well. In this case the totality again is "reduced to itself, it reverts to the multiplicity of inertia" (Sartre 1978, 46).

Because object totalities are constituted through how human beings relate to them in their practical lives, object totalities represent totalized byproducts of human self-totalization. Object-totalities appear in spatiotemporal relation to each other. This adds an aspect of externality both to any object-totality within the ongoing totalization of consciousness and ultimately to the unification of external object-totalities into an organized whole. This organized whole can be referred to as *world*. As such, it is the synthetic unity of a subject-totality's meaningful relations to totalities that are experienced and thus totalized as in relation to each other.

Human beings are not outside a world that they examine from afar. Rather, human existence can be grasped only as an inherently dialectical totalization of a world comprising meaningful relations with constituted totalities. Humans engage with the world based on the meaning that they confer on it through their actions, whether these actions are perceptive, reflective, or practical. In this regard, human beings constitute their world as an organized totality to encounter. Human reality is thus a practically qualified reality (Sartre 2021, 127), a totality of human-world relations. It is the product of a dialectical synthesis between the full positivity of being and the negating structure of consciousness as that which determines this sheer positive givenness. In that regard, Sartre claims that "[m]an and the world *are* relative beings, and relation *is* the principle of their being" (Sartre 2021, 415, emphasis in original). To be in-the-world is to be an embodied self in confrontation with "things-which-exist-at-a-distance-from-me" (Sartre 2021, 415).

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5   Sartre exemplifies this relation with the taste of a lemon and that of a cake: "[T]he lemon's yellow is not a subjective mode of apprehension of the lemon: it is the lemon. And nor is it true that the object-X appears as the empty form that holds the disparate qualities together. In fact, the lemon extends throughout its qualities, and each of these qualities extends throughout each of the others. It is the lemon's acidity that is yellow, and the lemon's yellowness that is acidic; we eat the color of a cake, and the taste of that cake is the instrument that discloses its form and its color to what we may call our 'alimentary intuition' (Sartre 2021, 263).

This confrontation between human beings and the objective world is the starting point for the next section. To identify human action both as a free and materially conditioned endeavor, the existential relation between facticity and freedom is analyzed.

2.3 Action as Totalization

This section unites Sartre's early understanding of action and his later understanding of *praxis* and develops a conception of *totalizing action* as a constant mediation of the internal and external dialectic of human existence. To do so, the section builds on the previous findings and reconstructs the consummation of action as a totalizing process in which human beings realize themselves by seeking to practically attain the ends that arise from their inherent needfulness.

Human beings realize themselves through their actions the ends of which arise from certain forms of need and desire (section 1.4). These actions follow the basic principle of totalization. Similar to how consciousness abstracts from the positivity of being, thus singles out certain concrete aspects of things, and imparts meaning to them as totalities, an action abstracts from the positivity of a person's facticity as situated in a socioculturally structured material milieu, strives toward an individual project as a certain concrete possibility of a person's future self, and modifies said person's material state of things to realize this individual project. The root for this totalizing process, that engages in the external dialectic of human existence, can be found in the internal dialectic of human existence.

Human Existence Between Facticity and Freedom

According to Sartre, human existence is a lived contradiction between being-for-itself and being-in-itself, and this contradiction is the first and most fundamental moment in the totalization of human existence. It is represented by the synthetic relation between the givenness of materiality as a material positing and a negating human consciousness.

Section 2.2 already mentioned that, structurally, the being of humans is the same being as that of things—it has the same tripartite structure. According to Sartre, this means that human existence is contingent to the extent that no human being can choose the conditions of their existence before actually existing. Human beings can neither choose their place of birth, nor whether they want to be born small or tall, with blond or black hair, in France or Germany, working- or upper-class. Despite the totalizing capacity of human consciousness, no change of relation or reflection toward their being can enable humans to fly by flapping their arms or to use their lungs for breathing under water. Because human consciousness is

necessarily embodied, the human condition is ineluctable and at the same time without any necessity whatsoever, because it is founded in the contingency of being. The limitations that *a priori* define the situation of human beings consist of how the being of human existence is fundamentally structured (Sartre 2021, 133–134; Sartre 2005).

However, unlike things in the mode of being-in-itself, human consciousness is relational and can never exist in full identity with its contingent being (Sartre 2021, 61). Human beings always relate to themselves and their contingency in every single intentional relation, whether pre-reflective or reflective. Consequently, every relation of human consciousness is also a self-relation (see section 2.2).

Nevertheless, Sartre claims that this relation, although a presence to being, is an empty distance. The self is a constant, albeit at times pre-reflective, relation with, and therefore determination of, itself as *manifested* in its being. In Sartre's own words, "[t]he for-itself is the being that determines itself to exist, insofar as it is unable to coincide with itself" (Sartre 2021, 128). Embodied human consciousness thus exists as a still contingent and embodied self-relation without any necessity or meaning. Section 1.4 introduced this contingency of being-for-itself as *facticity* (Sartre 2021, 133).

Facticity not only includes the human condition and the bodily limitations of birth but also one's entire past. For Sartre, "'[f]acticity' and 'the past' are two words to refer to one and the same thing" (Sartre 2021, 178). By being an empty distance to themselves, human beings simultaneously exist and do not exist as their past. On the one hand, human beings represent the living embodiment of all their past decisions and actions. Everything they did comprises their past and has led to the way their existence is structured in the present. On the other hand, human beings can never fully *be* their past in the mode of being-in-itself. Owing to the temporal structure of embodied self-consciousness, human beings necessarily relate to their decisions and actions in retrospect. This means that they always relate to themselves as past selves.

Sartre admits that a human essence can be identified in retrospect. He accepts Hegel's statement: "*Wesen ist was gewesen ist*" (Sartre 2021, 180, emphasis in original), which translates to *essence is what has been*. In Sartre's interpretation of this statement, human essence can be conceived as the whole of actions and decisions according to which human existence was structured up until the present moment in which an action may take place. This givenness of being-in-itself as human facticity is the first moment of dialectical existence. It is the positing of human existence as a material fact, an "unjustifiable *presence to the world*" (Sartre 2021, 135), that already surpasses itself toward the future.

Inseparably rooted within this facticity is the seed of its constant transformation. As embodied self-consciousness and as empty distance, human beings can never exist in the factual state of being. They cannot be reduced to their physical

and social origin, their sex or gender, the living limitations of their facticity. Rather, each human being exists as a self-relational attitude toward these factors. More precisely, contingent facticity appears only as a positing with regard to this self-relational attitude.

Sartre considers this self-relational attitude to be a negation of the givenness of being. Positing through facticity, and negating through consciousness, are simultaneously given. Human existence is constantly directed toward its being without the chance to fully identify with it. In referring to their past, human beings may only understand themselves as who they were and no longer are. Any attempt to identify with this past essence is a case of what Sartre calls *bad faith*. It is a vain attempt to stop existence in a fixed state of past identity and is a denial of ontological freedom. Claiming to *be* their facticity renders human beings entities in the mode of being-in-itself, i.e. a closed and timeless totality. Such claims are tantamount to a denial of the ontological freedom of human existence (Sartre 2021, 88–89).

However, according to Sartre, humans can never truly *be*. This is rendered impossible by the structure of their self-relational consciousness. Therefore, humans are condemned to actively *become* someone or something that they are not, solely by virtue of being. In this regard, any claim to unchangeably *be* someone or something is a false belief about human freedom. Nevertheless, this false belief is necessarily a human attitude toward being in that "consciousness is what it is not and is not what it is, in its being and simultaneously" (Sartre 2021, 117).

This internal contradiction of being and consciousness, of materiality and meaning, of facticity and freedom, manifests in human existence as a *lack of being*. It is a dynamic self-relation that results in an intricate interplay of requirements, wants, wishes, emotions, moods, possibilities, and their realizations in the world through goal-directed activity—that is, through the employment of available means to attain specific ends. This lack of being, a lived simultaneity as both lacking and lacked, transcends toward completion on account of the relationship of being and consciousness (Sartre 2021, 137).

The Lack of Being Toward Completion: Needs, Desires, and Ends

The most obvious way this lack of being manifests in human existence is in the form of certain material requirements, wants, and wishes that derive from human physicality, psychology, and sociality.

Chapter 1 has already mentioned that Sartre reconceptualizes the significance of these requirements, wants, and wishes between his earlier and later works. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre conceptualizes them as desires (*désir*) and reflects on what it means to act in concrete action situations based on these desires. He does so by accepting the facticity of certain structures of desire in human existence (Sartre 2021, 140–143) while granting that these structures themselves are understood as socially

dependent. In *Critique*, Sartre reflects on the underlying structures of these desires themselves through the concept of need (*besoin*). He does so to reveal the conditions of possibility for human action, sociality, and historical transformation. In accordance with the materialistic and Marxist focus of his later works, the later Sartre attempts to analyze the most basic relations between human organisms and their material surroundings from the perspective of *need* to incorporate the common ground of all societal classes (Cannon 1992, 133).

Sartre states that "value arrives in the world" (Sartre 2021, 147) through human existence. Through the dialectic of need and desire, human beings are disclosed as incomplete totalities that should be brought into being (Anderson 2013, 198). The process for doing so is self-totalization through action. Action thus represents a (temporal) sublation of need or desire through the practical realization of the ends that are projected toward by certain requirements, wants, and wishes. Consequently, owing to their needs and desires, human beings are directed toward completion for their own sake (Sartre 2021, 140). In so doing, they pre-reflectively and/or reflectively recognize themselves as ends in themselves (Sartre 2021, 157–159). This means that human beings either non-consciously strive toward satisfaction or consciously reflect on how to act for themselves.

Whether needs are socialized into desires through engaging with the world, or whether needs are always socialized with regard to future needs and their surroundings, in Sartre's philosophy both perspectives represent two sides of the same coin. Both must be seen in a dynamic interrelation to an agent's socioculturally and materially structured societal constellations. In such constellations, new abstract needs arise while other already concretized desires are satisfied. Human beings can have undirected feelings of physical and mental lacks that can be redirected and overwritten with other, concrete plans for action.

Still, no matter how efficiently or enduringly human beings may satisfy their needs and desires through action, they exist as an imbalance that is impossible to smooth out. Lacks of being, such as the requirement for food and water or other practical wants arise again and again, in slight variations, because the human condition is ineluctable. Consequently, the inherent contradiction at the heart of human existence can never be fully resolved. Referring to section 2.2, humans can never sublate themselves so as to exist as being-in-and-for-itself. Human reality, according to Sartre, is thus "in its nature an unhappy consciousness, without any possibility of surpassing its state of unhappiness" (Sartre 2021, 143). With regard to Hegel's concept of the *unhappy consciousness* (Hegel 1986, 163–165), Sartre emphasizes that the only constant of human existence is a constant struggle, which facilitates an equally constant change. Structurally, this constant struggle derives from the lived contradiction at the heart of human existence and grounds its fundamental needfulness. It is due to this fundamental needfulness that human existence engages the world for itself.

In *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger interprets the fact that being-in-the-world is always engaged in the world for itself as *care* (German *Sorge*, French *souci*). According to Heidegger, being-in-the-world is always in a *movement of concern* about itself (German *Besorgen*) and others (German *Fürsorge*). Heidegger's conception of *care* is ontological. He states that *care* represents the basic state of being-in-the-world which grounds all other human modes of being. Because *care* is the state of Being of *Dasein*, humans project toward the future and act for themselves (Heidegger 2006, 191–214; Merker 2015). Sartre, however, rejects Heidegger's ontological conception of *care*. He holds that "positive terms for *Dasein* [...] disguise implicit negations" (Sartre 2021, 53, emphasis in original) that take place in human existence. This means that a conception of being-in-the-world as *care* already ontologizes and thus synthesis the lived contradiction of positing being and negating consciousness at the heart of human existence. Sartre argues, that this contradiction is irresolvable. It is what grounds the ontological freedom of human existence as the condition of possibility for agents to commence actions for themselves. Sartre does not explicitly use Heidegger's conception of *care* in his works. However, the broader scope of Heidegger's thoughts concerning this concept is implicitly there, especially in *Being and Nothingness*. It can be argued that due to Sartre's focus on the lived contradiction at the heart of human existence and the negating character of human consciousness, he is more interested in the way human needfulness affects how human beings realize themselves than he is with *care* itself.

Human beings realize themselves by relating to the world through their actions. However, to satisfy their needs and desires, not just any random action will suffice. Thirst has to be satiated by seeking, finding, and drinking water; knowledge gaps have to be filled through reflection and communication. Even moods like boredom demand some sort of change in the way people encounter the world. Sartre remarks that "need [...] is in fact the lived revelation of a goal to aim at" (Sartre 1978, 90). This means that the modes of need and desire project toward certain goals or ends. Because they demand action, needs and desires thus have a specific existential urgency. Furthermore, they also provide an outline of the course of their associated actions. Because action is thus characterized by finality, which is "causality in reverse" (Sartre 2021, 187), it is first necessary to examine the existential urgency and motivational force of needs and desires.

The early and later Sartre differ in the nature of this existential urgency. In Sartre's early works, all ends as goals of action are relative to human beings as ends in themselves. In *Being and Nothingness*, human existence is considered as always striving for self-realization. What these human beings lack through their needs and desires is themselves as satisfied selves. In Sartre's later philosophy, the fact that human beings represent ends in themselves is less prominent. It is more important here that the needs of these human beings are ineluctable. Human beings thus always have specific ends that they attempt to attain through their actions.

Ends derive their urgency from how needs and desires both pre-reflectively and/or reflectively motivate human beings to attempt to attain those ends. Pre-reflectively, needs and desires may appear as *mobiles*, a French term.[6] These are subjective facts that consist of "the collection of desires, emotions, and passions that drive me to perform a certain act" (Sartre 2021, 586), and which urge human beings to perform actions. These subjective facts include physical feelings like thirst and hunger, but also other psychic phenomena (moods or emotions) like boredom. Human beings may *fear* starving, *yearn* for affection, be *ashamed* for not knowing something, *physically require* nutrition, or simply *want* to show off. In any of these cases, needs and desires manifest in these human beings in such a way that they pre-reflectively feel the urge to engage in goal-directed activities.

Reflectively, needs and desires may appear as *motifs*, a French term that can be translated as *reasons* for action. These *motifs* must be understood more objectively as "the set of rational considerations" (Sartre 2021, 585) that justify certain acts for agents themselves. Here, Sartre has in mind a more conscious way of tackling requirements, wants, and wishes. Whereas *mobiles* belong to human passions, *motifs* belong to human will, which Sartre understands as positing itself "as a reflective decision in relation to certain ends" (Sartre 2021, 582). By virtue of their will, human beings can reflect their needs and desires rather than just being affected by them. This is due to the relation of positing being and negating consciousness.

For Sartre, an *ideal rational action* would be one "whose motives are practically non-existent and whose sole inspiration is an objective assessment of the situation" (Sartre 2021, 586). However, similar to the relation between needs and desires, a clear distinction between *mobiles* and *motifs* can hardly be made. In the same way that ends are revealed through both needs and desires, concrete *mobiles* and *motifs* that eventually lead to action must be understood as correlative (Barata 2018, 128). According to Sartre, an affective act is a "purely unreflected [i.e. pre-reflective] consciousness of its reasons, through the pure and simple project of its act" (Sartre 2021, 591), whereas a voluntary act "requires the appearance of a reflective consciousness that grasps its motive as a quasi-object" (Sartre 2021, 591). As a consequence, there can be no *ideal rational act*. Every action is structured according to a dynamic hierarchy of personal preferences, emotions, and experience and the structure of ends. What is important to note, however, is that human beings can be understood as agents through

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6   In Barnes' English translation of *L'être et le néant*, the French terms *mobile* and *motif* are trans-
     lated as *motive* and *cause* (Sartre 2003, 467). In Richmond's translation, on which the current
     work mainly relies, these terms are translated as *motive* and *reason*. Richmond remarks that
     the French terms *mobile* and *motif* represent a pair of terms in French academic discourse
     where *mobile* refers to subjective motivational forces and *motif* to objective motivational
     forces (Sartre 2021, xlix). Owing to the action-theoretical implications of terms like *cause* and
     reason, and to keep the broader distinction between subjective and objective motivational
     forces in mind, the original French terms are used.

how their needs and desires mobilize or motivate them to attain certain ends based on being ends in themselves.

Needs and desires and the associated *mobiles* and *motifs* can have a rather spontaneous nature. Sartre exemplifies this with regard to sexual desire in *Being and Nothingness*. He writes that "[d]esire is a lived pro-ject that does not require any preliminary deliberation; rather it carries its meaning and its interpretation within itself" (Sartre 2021, 521). The structure of this desire determines how it must be satisfied. Because humans manifest this desire, they project toward specific ends in relation to it. With other structures of need and desire, these humans would project toward different ends. An example of a less spontaneous motivation would be the recognition of a knowledge-gap. Here, knowledge is not just missing in the structure of human consciousness. With the recognition of missing knowledge, the structure of consciousness is now shown to be incomplete with regard to a certain topic. It lacks itself as a more complete consciousness of the topic in question. A person may be ashamed about this, feel a sense of competition and eagerness to learn, experience a mixture of both, or react in some other way. Nevertheless, they must actively seek knowledge by interacting with the world and with other people. This example shows that the need to know something about the world can hardly be separated from the desire to know something. The motivation is itself a merger of *mobiles* and *motifs*.

Conceptions of Action

The structure of ends, and the way they pre-reflectively and/or reflectively mobilize and motivate human beings, give a sometimes clear and sometimes obscured outline of the course an action demands to attain these ends. It was mentioned before that action is the temporal sublation of needs and desires through the practical realization of the very ends these needs and desires project toward. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes this practical realization as follows:

> to act is to modify the way the world is *figured*, to arrange the means in view of an end; it is to produce an organized, instrumental structure such that, through a series of sequences and connections, the modification brought about in one of the links brings in its wake modifications in the entire series and, in the end, produces some foreseen result […] The point we should note at the outset is that an action is, by definition, *intentional*. (Sartre 2021, 569, emphasis in original)

According to this definition, action is an intentional process in which an agent aims to modify and thus transform their exterior material world through the production of operational chains and the arrangement of instrumental means. These agents do so to attain certain previously set interior ends. Without needs and desires, there is no *foreseen result*, i.e. no end or goal, and thus no necessity for action nor an outline of how to act to attain the end. Given that, an agent's world is a totality comprising

the material structure of being and the way agents relate to it, the action to modify it cannot only be understood as physical activity. It is also any mental modification of a world-relation through reflection, consideration, or any other activity of human consciousness.

However, owing to his conception of human existence as embodied self-consciousness, there is no clear distinction between physical and mental activities in Sartre's earlier conception of action. Physical and mental activities either happen within an agent's material relation to the world or they build on this relation. In Sartre's philosophy, there are no higher-tier immediate and reflective activities without a material base. Every action is a process in which physical and mental activities are performed in correspondence with the material, social, and cultural surroundings to transform them in accordance with certain ends projected by needs and desires. On account of human existence being a mediation of both internal and external dialectics, experience and action are inherently intertwined (Bonnemann 2009, 16–17). Every action is itself a complex process of sub-actions, in which embodied self-consciousness enacts the course of action in a *series of sequences and connections* toward a projected end (see section 2.4).

In this earlier definition of action, Sartre already briefly mentions both the *arrangement of means in view of an end* and the production of an *organized, instrumental structure* through which desired effects are caused. He states that "[w]e should understand *acts* as all of a person's synthetic activity, i.e. every ordering of means in view of ends" (Sartre 2021, 233, emphasis in original). In his earlier conception, Sartre observes that human action primarily instrumentalizes various things, which are practically located in an agent's field of equipmentality (section 3.2). In this regard, all human action is mediated through matter, either through the agent's own inert body or through the inertia of material objects. This emphasis on the exteriorities of a person's action becomes more evident in his later conception of action as *praxis*.

Section 1.4 mentioned that Sartre redefines his conception of action between *Being and Nothingness* and *Critique*. In his later works, action—now understood as historical *praxis*—is defined as "an organising project which transcends material conditions towards an end and inscribes itself, through labour, in inorganic matter as a rearrangement of the practical field and a reunification of means in the light of the end" (Sartre 1978, 734). Despite the later changes, all the necessary components of Sartre's earlier conception of action can be found in his definition of *praxis*. Action remains a transformative endeavor through which agents modify their material conditions, according to their ends, through a reorganization of their field of equipmentality. However, the later Sartre adds the fact that such an action leaves material traces both in an agent's material surroundings and in their bodily inertia.

Sartre's conception of *instrumentalization* can be derived from his earlier and later conceptions of action. As briefly mentioned in section 1.4, Sartre claims that

every action is "primarily an instrumentalisation [French *instrumentalisation*] of material reality" (Sartre 1978, 161; Sartre 1960, 231). Given Sartre's materialist focus (see section 1.4), every action is understood as a relation between material agents and the material world. An agent's ends result from the intention to attain their needs and desires relative to themselves as ends in themselves. Consequently, agents use material things, such as their bodies or instrumental means, to act on matter. Accordingly, instrumentalization means the purposeful unification of matter by, through, and, most essentially, for the agents themselves. How actions are mediated through the body or instrumental means directs the somewhat abstract and theoretical course of action into concrete paths. It thus changes the way agents encounter the world. It also changes how needs and desires project toward certain ends, and how the world appears to these agents based on those ends.

From Sartre's action concepts, it follows that action is itself a complex totalizing endeavor. It is a complex existential engagement with the world that unites physical and mental aspects by causing certain effects through instrumental means to transform the world according to certain ends. This causation necessarily has a temporal course that can be understood as a practical transition from a present lacking to a future satisfied state of things, abstractly determined by an intended end.

Freedom

Disregarding whether needs and desires are more subjective, emotional, and affective *mobiles*, more objective, consciously reflected and volitional *motifs*, or something in between, they project toward ends. With this in mind, it could be argued that agents are materialistically determined by how forms of need and desire consciously or non-consciously cause these agents to attempt to perform goal-directed activities, according to Sartre. However, the opposite is true. Sartre is neither a determinist, a compatibilist, nor a libertarian with regard to the freedom of agents. Barata mentions that for Sartre "freedom as an ontological concept is rather removed from the idea of free will. Consciousness is free regardless of human will. Freedom is a transcendental condition for conscious being" (Barata 2018, 126) (see section 1.2). According to Sartre, this ontological *freedom of the acting being* represents the first express condition that must be given so that human behavior can be identified as an action (Sartre 2021, 570).

Even though human life is inevitably grounded in its past and its bodily and social limitations, it is a *relation to itself*. Agents only recognize themselves in this self-relation; if not as originators, then as authors of their existence. This is the source of the ontological freedom of human existence. Sartre himself emphasizes this by distinguishing his *technical and philosophical* concept of freedom from what he calls the *empirical and popular* concept of freedom. He says that "'to be free' does not mean 'to obtain what one wanted' but 'to be determined in one's wanting' (in the broad

sense of 'choosing') by oneself" (Sartre 2021, 631). Sartre advocates for a freedom that is synonymous with the *autonomy of choice* regarding a resisting world (Sartre 2021, 631).

Existence is not a mechanical process. Needs and desires do not force agents to satisfy them, and they do not make agents behave like automatons. Rather, needs and desires have a revealing function in that they project toward what agents require, want, or wish for themselves. According to Sartre, whether agents act passionately or out of will is itself a matter of choice, which is taken through action based on ontologically free existence. Only after attempting to perform certain actions can agents know whether *mobiles* or *motifs* had more motivational force with regard to their ends. It is also only after action is taken that agents know whether they realized the intended ends or not. Nonetheless, whatever agents realized or did not realize, the product of their action belongs to their facticity. This is because agents already surpass the result of their actions toward themselves in the future. Nothing can mechanically determine them to act again in the same way because their negating consciousness is characterized by its *relation to* and not its *identity with* being. Human freedom is as such not the freedom of will, but the condition of possibility for agents to commence actions for themselves. Freedom is thus identical with existence, in that it is "the foundation of the ends that I will try to accomplish either through my will or through my impassioned efforts" (Sartre 2021, 583).

Intention

Regarding this first condition, every goal-directed activity, whether passionate or volitional, must be understood as intentional, because the agent's "intention, by choosing the end that announces it, makes itself be" (Sartre 2021, 623). In the very instant in which ends are given as goals for actions, the intention is also given to attain these ends against the backdrop of human existence. Sartre believes that ends are "state[s] *of* the world to be obtained, and not already in existence" (Sartre 2021, 624, emphasis in original). However, with regard to the intention of action, projected ends and intended actions have to be distinguished from ends realized through action.

The ends that agents initially strive toward, and the intention to perform these actions, do not depend on their actual realization. Sartre claims that "since any choice [to act emotionally or willingly] is identical to some *doing*, it presupposes, in order for it to be distinct from a dream or a wish, that its actualization has begun" (Sartre 2021, 631, emphasis in original). Intentions are thus relative to human existence as self-totalization, i.e. self-realization through action. Sartre exemplifies this with the relation between an *attempted* meal and *actually* eating the meal. He states:

> my *end* may be a good meal, if I am hungry. But this meal, projected […] can only be grasped as the correlative of my […] project toward my own possibility of eating this meal. In this way, through its twofold but unitary arising, the intention lights up the world on the basis of an end that does not yet exist and which defines itself through the choice of its possible. My end is a specific objective state of the world, and my possible is a specific structure of my subjectivity. (Sartre 2021, 624, emphasis in original)

Both projected ends and realized ends are relative to their possible realization. Here, Sartre seems to borrow from Hegel's conception of action. *Subjective* or *abstract* ends and the associated *intended* actions must be distinguished from *objective* or *concrete* ends and the actual, *realized* actions themselves. This means that intended ends, as abstract ends, are relative to their possible attainability as concrete ends. Furthermore, intended actions are relative to their possible realizability as realized actions (Hubig 2006, 125–135).

Applied to Sartre's conception of intention, ends are the traces of an agent's intentions; this, in Sartre's case, means that both ends and intentions are correlative. This connection again illustrates Sartre's dialectical conception of human existence. The positing of contingent facticity is negated by consciousness. Agents thus exist as an ontologically free synthetic unity of being and nothingness. This unity manifests as a lack of being in the form of needs and desires, which again project toward ends and the associated actions to attain them. These ends exist based on agents who are both the ones needy and/or desiring and the ones intentionally striving toward satisfaction.

Sartre's second express condition for action—the *intention of action*—is seen here. Ends imply the intention to attempt to attain them (Sartre 2021, 573).

Sartre's conception of the dialectical interplay of needs, desires, requirements, wants, wishes, *mobiles*, *motifs*, actions, and ends, in connection to the *freedom of the acting being* and the *intention of action*, has enough explanatory strength to illuminate the whole spectrum of intriguing and contradictory aspects of human life. It allows one to conceive human existence as self-preservation because it illustrates how needs and desires motivate human beings to attempt to exteriorize their interior intentions by performing certain actions. It also explains instances in which agents can directly act against their self-preserving impulses. They can willingly stare into the sun, for instance, or sacrifice their lives for others. Sartre's thoughts also highlight indeterminate areas of human action and intention. Although agents want something and could possibly attain it, they can still reflect on their actions and decide not to. A problematic point here, though, is the fact that the ontological freedom of human existence is not always congruent with how agents experience and even recognize themselves as free. In more concrete terms, the problem boils down to the fact that agents sometimes feel forced to do something, or they believe

they lack alternative options for action. This feeling relates to an agent's aware-ness regarding the situatedness of their actions and the nature of their situation. This conjunction—between what is objectively given and how this given is subjec-tively and socioculturally structured and interiorized—will be further investigated throughout this work.

Sartre's first express condition, *freedom of the acting being*, was shown to be the fundamental condition of the possibility of action. The second express condition, the *intention of acting*, is necessarily given as an outcome of his first condition. Action is not a determined or purely material process but an intentional and goal-oriented engagement with the world.

The Lacking State of Things

When agents intentionally attempt to attain the ends that their needs and desires project toward, they transform how they totalize themselves and the world. In this context, needs, desires, and the associated ends must not only be understood as pure self-relations; they must also be taken as totalizing relations between agents and the larger societal constellations they are situated in. Sartre states that

> need is a link of *univocal immanence* with surrounding materiality in so far as the or-ganism *tries to sustain itself* with it; it is already totalising [...] for it is nothing other than the living totality, manifesting itself as a totality and revealing the material environment [...] as the total field of possibilities of satisfaction. (Sartre 1978, 80, emphasis in original)

By intending to practically attain the ends toward which needs and desires project, agents mentally anticipate the world-directed action through which they may re-alize themselves as satisfied selves. In this regard, the intention itself already rep-resents a totalizing relation with the world. In the course of action, the agents' in-tention to act for themselves constitutes these agents as fixed entities in relation to their world as their objective counterpart. This relation subjectifies these agents as needy or desiring in a specific way, with the intention to satisfy their requirements, wants, and wishes in relation to the world. At the same time, the world as totality, i.e. as synthetic unity of an agent's subjective relations to object-totalities, is objec-tified and thus determined as a specific *lacking state of things*. In this way, agents dis-cover themselves to be in a state of *exigency*,[7] which requires action to be transformed

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[7]   In *Critique*, Sartre uses the term *exigency* in two distinct ways. First, it can refer to entities and actions that are needed, desired, demanded, required, or must otherwise be taken care of as result of situational factors. When thirsty, for instance, water represents an exigency. In case of fire, both a fire extinguisher and the fire itself represent exigencies. Second, exigency can also refer to a certain needy, desiring, demanding, or requiring state in which human

(Sartre 1978, 165). This state of exigency represents the external correlate of the existential urgency of human existence that was mentioned above. For these agents, their world, as a meaningful totality of material things and subjective relations, represents a concrete lacking state of things regarding the satisfaction of their needs and desires (Sartre 1978, 90).

This *discovery of the world as a lacking state of things* represents the third express condition of action. However, neither agents nor the world alone constitute this state. Rather, the world's meaning is theoretically transformed through the agent's intention to attain their ends. This also means that needs and desires only generate their motivational force in relation to the agents' world.

The Practical Field of Possibilities

Correlatively, through the revelation of ends, the world as "surrounding matter is endowed with a passive unity" (Sartre 1978, 81) in which agents seek to find potential sources of satisfaction. Without any intention to attain ends, the world (as a totality of object-totalities and subjective relations) appears in-itself as structured by being. Agents impose meaning on it by how they practically relate to and thus totalize being (see section 2.2). However, the way this totalization occurs is transformed through ends. Depending on the concrete structures of need and desire, an artifact is totalized as a water fountain, which, for instance, may appear as a potential water source, a potential place to sit and rest, a potential landmark to use as orientation for a city trip, and so on.

Through needs and desires, agents interiorize their exterior surroundings as a practical field of possibilities for their attempted actions (Sartre 1978, 71). These surroundings become a "practical field with a quasi-synthetic unity" (Sartre 1978, 90) that serves as the foundation and mediating milieu of possible satisfaction. Although the water fountain or any other thing affords to be used in a certain way, the possibility of this specific use arises from how agents interiorize the exterior world through their needs, desires, and ends. Sartre explicates what this means in an analogy. He mentions that

> [t]he possibility of being stopped by a fold in the carpet belongs neither to the
> rolling marble nor to the carpet: it can arise only within a system in which the mar-
> ble and the carpet are organized by a being who has an understanding of the pos-
> sibles. But this understanding cannot come from *outside,* from the in-itself, and
> it cannot be limited to being only a thought, as a subjective mode of conscious-

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beings and non-human entities find themselves. In both cases, exigencies point to the fact that urgent action is required to transform the situation in which they arise.

ness: it must coincide with the objective structure of the being who understands possibles. (Sartre 2021, 155, emphasis in original)

Agents intend to perform actions based on how their needs and desires project toward their ends; once again, this transforms their world so that they apprehend it as both exigency and as a practical field of possibility for their actions against the background of the world's materiality. Hence it becomes clear that agents are neither the sole originators of their actions nor are they the originators of the specific structure of their ends. Their mediating milieu and the things within it do not play this role alone either. Instead, both agent and milieu constitute and possibilize each other. They do so within the totalizing interrelation of projected, attainable ends, in relation to available means in the practical field of possibilities, based on surrounding materiality.

The ends that agents seek to attain, the needs and desires that project toward these ends, the course of associated actions to satisfy these needs and desires, the relation between agents and the world as an exigency, and the apprehension of the world as a practical field in which agents may realize themselves by realizing their actions, are all direct outcomes of human existence as an ongoing, materially dependent process of totalization. In the course of this totalization, agents unify vastly different yet interrelated material, social, and cultural factors for and through themselves. Through their interior physical and psychological urges, convictions, and expectations, agents are ready to act to tend to whatever they require, want, or wish for themselves. In getting or being ready, agents already totalize their world as a state of exigency, because it is the very world in which these agents manifest as requiring, wanting, or wishing.

Simultaneously, these agents interiorize the world as a practical field of possibilities to tend to their lacks of being. Although the agents may be the ones who initiate the associated actions to tend to these lacks, the lacks themselves, as well as their satisfaction and the specific structure of their ends, determine the course of actions in the form of practical constraints and physical or mental stimuli. As a consequence, action-specific possibilities become objective realities that affirm the agent's surroundings to be the whole of the conditions necessary for action. In this way, contingent being first becomes the agent's possibility, and then the necessary presupposition for their intended actions. Action is, therefore, an active, practical, and transformative engagement with the world, as well as the recognition of the world as the necessary horizon of action. The actual action, as the practical realization of the intended and anticipated result, is thus a totalization that then "*practically* makes the environment into a totality*" (Sartre 1978, 85, emphasis in original). Given that human beings exist as material entities within a physicochemical universe, this practical realization necessarily involves their bodily inertia as a material mediator.

Corporeal Inertia and Materiality

Sartre assigns a central position to the human body in action. According to Sartre, human existence is the practical, spatiotemporal perpetuation of a self-totalizing synthetic unity, i.e. a totality of body and consciousness. Human beings are not fleeting, abstract existences but material entities, *sectors of materiality* in an exterior relation to other material entities (Sartre 1978, 95). Self-totalization takes place in goal-directed and thus intentional engagement with the world based on bodily materiality.

Needs and desires manifest in human existence based on the human body and must be engaged through more or less intense interaction with the world's materiality. Basic physical requirements like hunger, thirst, or safety translate into abstract needs for food, water, or shelter, and then into concrete desires for a piece of bread, a glass of lemonade, or a warm room. How agents interiorize the world as a practical field of possibilities depends on how their physicochemical surroundings are equipped.

Especially in the case of physical requirements, the "living body [*corps vivant*] is [...] *in danger* in the universe, and the universe harbours the possibility of the *non-being* of the organism" (Sartre 1978, 81–82, emphasis in original; Sartre 1960, 167). As a consequence, agents always encounter nature in a humanized form as a *false organism* (Sartre 1978, 81), i.e. as synthetic world-totality, that is revealed as either abundant or scarce regarding certain needs and desires. The world is thus structured according to the agents' practical field of possibilities (see section 4.2). In this regard, material agents are subject to all the forces that govern the physicochemical universe.

Sartre believes that the human body is the very medium through which agents interface with their surrounding materiality. Through their bodily actions, agents totalize themselves in their interrelation with matter. They do so in virtue of their bodily inertia, which is *used* "to overcome the inertia of things" (Sartre 1978, 82), and to cause modifications so that desired effects (and, necessarily, side effects) may be caused. Agents thus actively mediate between the present exigent material state and the future satisfying one. Sartre argues that:

> The man of need is an organic totality [...] [that] acts on inert bodies through the medium of the inert body *which it is* and which it *makes itself*. It *is inert* in as much as it is already subjected to all the physical forces which reveal it to itself as pure passivity; it *makes itself* inert in its being in so far as it is only externally and through inertia itself that a body can act on another body in the milieu of exteriority. (Sartre 1978, 82, emphasis in original)

Their bodily inertia not only renders agents "visible, tangible and audible, such that we exist for others" (Crossley 2010, 215), but it also enables them to see, feel, hear, and

communicate with others. In short, it allows them to *modify how the world is figured* based on situational factors, and thus mediate between present and future. Sartre mentions that human beings exteriorize their interiority into the materiality of the world in the course of their actions. Matter, in this regard, is ambivalent in this practical interrelation. It supports and necessarily constrains human action at the same time (Hartmann 1966, 98). Sartre states that

> [w]ithin praxis [...] there is a dialectical movement and dialectical relation between action as the negation of matter (in its present organisation and on the basis of a future re-organisation), and matter, as the real, *docile* support of the developing re-organisation, as the negation of action. (Sartre 1978, 159, emphasis in original)

Because they must abide by exterior forces, principles, and laws of nature, agents can be efficacious in acting through and for themselves as an inert medium. Their situated actions represent the intentional negation of their needs and desires, as well as the practical transcending of a present exigent state of the world toward a future satisfying state through material transformation and re-organization. The human body reflects light for others to see, and when agents see in return, reflected light enters their eyes. There it stimulates light-sensitive neurons in the retina, which then transmit the signals through the optic nerve and to the brain to be processed and interpreted. Because of this process, agents can see the phenomenal world and give meaning to it. They use their hands to grasp things, manipulate levers, push buttons, and work with tools. Agents sit in their cars and push the pedals with their feet while manipulating the steering wheel to keep the car on track. Other actions, such as drinking, are relations between agents as biological organisms and concrete organizations of matter in the form of water. Agents reach for a glass or form a bowl with their hands, bent toward the water source; they fill their vessel and guide it to their mouth to quench their thirst. In this way, agents use their inert bodies either to grasp a thing or to become a vessel themselves.

Bodily movement occurs through a combination of shifting one's weight, moving the legs, and creating friction between feet and ground. Another example is spoken language. Seen against the background of materiality, it is a direct and guided manipulation of air pressure as a result of a complex interplay between the lungs, diaphragm, vocal tract, and various parts of the brain to create specific sounds. These sounds are inert language, traveling in the medium of air through which they are received by the ears of other people before being transduced into electric signals. These are transmitted through nerves to the brain, then interpreted and comprehended as a means of communication. This engagement with materiality through the body also includes mental processes. Thinking, for instance, takes place within the central nervous system of a human being who interprets themselves and the world based on their embeddedness within larger societal constellations. In connec-

tion to Sartre's understanding of instrumentalization, the human body represents a *tool* (French *outil*) (Sartre 1943, 360; Sartre 1960, 167; Sartre 1978, 82; Sartre 2021, 434) that is instrumentalized as a means to certain ends based on an agent as an end in themselves (see section 3.2).

In the context of the human body, the term *inertia* suggests that the body does not change its inherent features when it interacts with matter through action. Although repeated interactions may leave hands callous or backs bent, the human body is fit with a relatively high structural integrity and plasticity to withstand intense forces. In this regard, inertia must be understood as positive passivity in terms of material stability, durability, and permanence when facing outside forces (Hartmann 1966, 100). A similar approach can be found in James' thoughts about the plasticity of inert material objects and the central nervous system in terms of habit formation. He states: "*Plasticity* […] in the wide sense of the word, means the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once" (James 1890, 105, emphasis in original).

Human beings act on the inertia of their material surroundings inasmuch as this inertia works on them. In the course of their material lives, their material surroundings slowly but steadily take the shape of their practical effects and products and thus of themselves. This materiality bears a human mark because humans are the medium that modified it (Hubig 2006, 128). At the same time, these humans bear the mark of the world. They materially adapt to repeated interactions through growing muscles, muscle memory, and calloused hands. They also develop certain bodily skills and mental routines as action dispositions by interiorizing their use of certain objects in the form of *hexis* (see section 4.5). To frame this in more Sartrean terms, the human being-in-the-world is the product of its mutually consumptive, material interrelation with the material things it instrumentalizes and thus appropriates for itself within its bodily inertia.

The Dialectical Course of Action

To bring Sartre's thoughts on action into a unified form it can be exemplified and generalized how the motivational role of needs and desires, the ontological freedom and intentional goal-directedness of agents, their specific experience of the state of the physicochemical surroundings in the outset of action, and these agents' corporeality all interplay in the course of action.

Chapter 1 already introduced Sartre's example of how thirst arises within the human organism and the concomitant actions to satiate this thirst. This is a fitting example in that it allows one to very generally depict how a concrete need and a potential action to satisfy it arise in the totalizing mediation of the internal and external dialectic of human existence. A human organism's biological requirement for water makes itself known through a series of interior physical symptoms. These symptoms

represent positings of being qua the human organism as a material entity. These positings are given owing to the interior processes of human physicality. Simultaneously, because these symptoms manifest within humans' physicality, these humans necessarily relate to their symptoms owing to the ontological freedom at the heart of human existence. Such a relating can take place either pre-reflectively—by recognizing unpleasant feelings or lust for water—or reflectively—by identifying their symptoms as a lack of water in their body. Either way, to a dialectical understanding, in striving toward satisfaction for themselves, a person negates the posited givenness of their lack of being by transcending the current state of their self toward a future self that is free of these physical symptoms. Their interior lack of being mobilizes or motivates these people to exteriorize themselves by engaging their material exteriority. In this way, requiring organisms totalize themselves as thirsty and potentially acting subjects. These subjects relate to their physicochemical surroundings with the intention to satiate their lack of water by exteriorizing their intention through realizing it in the course of action.

However, it is not only these agents that are in the process of totalization. In relating to their exterior milieu (Sartre 1978, 82), some of the material properties and characteristics of this milieu, including the material entities within it, are again dialectically interiorized. Similar to the interior physical symptoms of thirst, the physicochemical surroundings are posited as a materially exterior fact based on being for these potential agents. Upon interiorizing the properties of the physicochemical surroundings, the intention to satiate their thirst represents a negation of the positing of these properties and characteristics. Their material surroundings are thus also enveloped in a totalizing process. With the lack of water and the intention to attempt to satiate that lack of water, agents totalize themselves and their surroundings as an exigent, lacking state of things that already projects toward, and thus posits, a future state of things in which these agents are potentially satisfied. Their world is thus relative to the structure of those requirements, wants, and wishes in virtue of which agents have become engaged in it and in which they *seek their being* by acting with and through it (Sartre 1978, 81). Consequently, the lack of being that manifests itself in needs and desires is not just a mere negation of posited interiorities of being; rather, it represents a negation of the negation as it expresses itself as a commitment to dissolve itself (Sartre 1978, 83). It reveals an agent's surrounding as their practical field of possibilities that serves as a mediating milieu through which they can act for themselves as ends in themselves (Sartre 1978, 90).

Through this revelation, a water fountain or a glass of water become instrumental means because their material features enable them to be instrumentalized as potential sources of satisfaction. It must be noted that the concrete structures of subjectivity and objectivity of both agents and their surroundings are relative to each other through the concrete end of getting water, which itself arises in this concrete

form within the interrelation between the two. Both their concrete subjectivity and objectivity would be structured differently if the lack of being were, for instance, a lack of food, information, or a place to sleep. Within each course of action, the concrete shape of subjectivity and objectivity depends both on the interplay between how needs and desires project agents toward ends and on what the surroundings offer those agents.

Thirst, in this regard, only ever arises as a need in the form of a *besoin* in an infant state (see section 1.4). An infant's need for nourishment is not essentially determined to be satiated by their mother's breastmilk alone. When the infant's mother's milk, for whatever reason, is not available, the infant can be nourished by other people who are capable of breastfeeding, by a bottle, or by other means. In this understanding, the infants' thirst expresses itself in an abstract and undirected mode of relating to their physicochemical surroundings. They cry and struggle because they feel thirsty. When their abstract thirst as *besoin* is repeatedly satiated in certain ways by a caregiver, infants become familiar with these strategies and cultivate certain individual preferences in interrelation with the forms of societal constellation they situate themselves in through their actions. After that, thirst arises as a desire in the form of a *désir* and this desire represents the synthesis of physical symptoms and a longing for something that satisfies them.

At this point, however, there is merely the intention to act and a fuzzy outline of a course of action, not the actual realization of an intention through concrete action itself. Consequently, to actually realize an intention to act, an agent must manipulate matter "through the medium of the inert body *which it is* and which it *makes itself*" (Sartre 1978, 82, emphasis in original).

By crying, asking for water, accessing a water fountain, throwing coins into a vending machine to buy a bottle of water, or turning faucets to fill glasses—and, finally, by drinking something—agents materially transform their exigent state of the world into a potentially satisfying state. In so doing, agents again exteriorize their formerly interiorized relation to the world as a transient state based on their needs and/or desires. They thus *practically make their surrounding materiality into a totality* (Sartre 1978, 85). Exteriorizing interiorities by realizing intended ends necessarily transforms the structure of those ends in relation to the material properties and characteristics of the physicochemical surroundings.

The transformed state of things in which agents find themselves represents a practical sublation in the dialectical course of action. This means that the antecedently posited state of things is simultaneously overcome and contained by being practically transcended and elevated in relation to the actually realized state of things. As such, it represents another positing qua being in matter for the agents to re-interiorize.

This re-interiorization is necessary for several reasons. It allows one to recognize whether an action was realized in the exterior world in the first place and whether

this action has actually yielded intended or unintended results. Building on this, the assessment also allows for an identification of the degree to which the realized action corresponds to the agent's intentions, satisfies their requirements, wants, and wishes, and thus sublates their needs and desires. Furthermore, the assessment allows one to analyze how the practical realization of intended ends in the course of action was shaped by sociocultural and material factors, such as social norms or values, instrumental means, body techniques, or *hexeis* (see sections 3.2, 4.3, and 4.5). By re-interiorizing the material modifications they have caused, agents can reflectively or pre-reflectively compare their *outset* of action with their *endpoint* of action, so to speak. They may, for instance, still feel thirsty and desire more water or a different drink, or even learn that they have flooded their kitchen while drinking water, which affords them the opportunity to clean it up, and so on. In this regard, re-interiorizing the modifications they have caused in their surrounding socioculturally structured materiality represents another positing from which other actions may ensue. It must be noted that this practical sublation is only temporal. As *unhappy* and *embodied consciousness*, other requirements, wants, and wishes necessarily arise in the course of human existence.

2.4 Existence as Praxis-Process

From the unified account of action in Sartre's philosophy developed throughout this chapter, two findings can be derived. First, every action takes place as a practical interrelation between a human being and their socioculturally structured material surroundings as a mediating milieu. Second, every action follows its dialectical circularity, from positing through the course of realizing action and then again to another positing.

This section extends these two findings by outlining Sartre's thoughts about the duality of action and situation, as well as by representing individual action situations as moments within a larger conception of human existence as a *praxis*-process.

Action and Situation

According to Sartre, the practical totality of all meaningful factors that condition the entire course of action comprise the *situation* of this action. Although Sartre struggles to give a clear definition of the *situation*, he describes it rather poetically as follows:

> The situation is the subject in his entirety (it is *nothing* other than his situation) and it is also the 'thing' in its entirety (*there* is never anything more than the things). It is, if you like, the subject lighting things up through his very surpassing—or it is

> things sending back to the subject his image. (Sartre 2021, 713, emphasis in original)

Every action situation consists of the givenness of being, certain entities with practical significance, the ontologically free agents themselves, their needs, desires, and intentions, realized objective ends, and the recognition of potential differences between subjective and objective ends—through which agents become aware of their actions' quality.

A situation is thus a totality of totalities (subject-totality, object-totality, world-totality) that is continuously constituted and theoretically synthesized by an agent's intentions. Furthermore, a situation is practically realized through actions in which agents simultaneously realize themselves as *in* and *beyond* the situation. The situation is neither purely subjective, as "the sum nor the unity of the *impressions* that things make on us" (Sartre 2021, 712, emphasis in original), nor is it purely objective "in the sense of a pure given which the subject could observe without being in any way committed within the system thereby constituted" (Sartre 2021, 712). The whole facticity of human existence, the place of birth, all actions taken so far, past decisions, the current position that agents adopt in societal constellations—all are contained in the situation that agents realize through their concrete totalizing actions. At the same time, the concrete meaning of the existence of these agents is derived from the constant confrontation between them and the conditions of their situation.

The dialectical constitutiveness of the action situation is at the same time a requirement and the product of human actions. Sartre mentions that

> we are thrown into the world at every moment, and committed within it. We act, therefore, before we have posited our possibles, and these possibles—which are revealed as having been actualized, or as in the process of being actualized—direct us to meaning that can be called into question only by some special action. (Sartre 2021, 77)

The concrete action situation is dialectically posited by the action performed to surpass, modify, and thus negate the current situation itself (Bourdieu 1977, 74). Action and situation are mutually affirmed in the course of being realized.

Situated action is thus the goal-directed and intentional mediating activity of an ontologically free agent, in which the agent dialectically totalizes both themselves, as a practical totality in relation to the world, and the world, as a practical totality in relation to themselves. The agent does so by modifying the present, lacking state of the world through future-oriented use of means into a (temporarily) satisfying state that is roughly outlined according to certain ends. These ends arise by how the agent's needs and desires, in relation to the agent's material surroundings, affect how the agent interiorizes these surroundings as a world, as an exigency, and as a

practical field. In short, situated action is the active, material negation of a materially posited and socioculturally structured state of the world, which is perceived as insufficient and exigent, toward a state of the world that was previously projected as satisfactory. Within this course of action, the agent as subject-totality, the utilized means as object-totalities, and the world as a totality are sublated in the totality of the situation. This means that all of these present totalities are simultaneously contained in the course of being transcended through the active, transformative engagement toward a different future state of materiality.

Situated action is a free engagement. Although ends are posited through needs and desires based on material or immaterial requirements, wants, and wishes, agents can neither be fully determined by these needs and desires nor by their material facticity. Human existence is a self-relational attitude toward these factors. It is only in the becoming of existence that these factors are qualified by how agents realize their possibilities. Sartre advocates that the freedom of human existence has to be understood not as a negative freedom *from* the limitations of being and materiality, but as an ontological freedom *despite*, *because*, *with*, and *against* these limitations and the self-relational structure of embodied self-consciousness.

Enacting Existence and World

Although Sartre uses the term *inertia* to refer to the human body as a material entity, it is not the case that actions have a straight trajectory and that agents *push*, so to say, their inert body so that it performs the act. The examples above show that, although only implicitly explained in Sartre's philosophy, what are considered to be singular actions must rather be considered more complex spatiotemporal relations of active totalizations within totalizations. Embodied consciousness, needs and desires, intention, ends, material entities, and the world as a totality do vaguely outline the course of action. However, at its most basic level, the exact course of action—the exact activity of an agent's muscles, the loudness of their voice, or how hard they have to push buttons, hit nails, and slam brake pedals—can only be known against the background of an agent's project. According to Sartre, "we cannot conceive of the for-itself possessing the slightest possibility of any thematic prediction [...] unless it is the being that, on the basis of its future, returns to itself, the being that makes itself exist as having its being outside itself, in the future" (Sartre 2021, 186).

Sartre's example involves actions during a tennis game. Here, each movement and position become meaningful in anticipation of the next one, all undertaken to hit a tennis ball with a racket. According to Sartre, there neither is a "clear representation" of each movement nor a "firm resolution" to exactly accomplish it. There is only the "future movement which, without even being thematically presented, turns backward to the positions I adopt, in order to illuminate, to connect and to modify them" (Sartre 2021, 186). An action situation like *playing tennis* is not posited in its en-

tirety by reflective consciousness nor performed by pushing the inert body alongside a prefabricated course of action toward the desired end.

Rather, the course of actions and the concomitant totalization of the action situation must be understood as an active mediation that is enacted, each step of the way, by the constant adaptive, interactive, self-totalizing world-engagement of an inert material entity. In the tennis game example, this engagement involves the player, the tennis racket, the tennis ball, the court, the net, the competitor (and the player's relation to the competitor), whether the agents want to win or just have fun, the weather, the rules of the game, etc. Each positional change, as well as each exchange of the ball and each of the competitor's movements, alter the player's embodied relations to the material world, and thus the meaning each player gives to the overall situation.

Consequently, players adapt all further movements and positions according to what their finality roughly projects them toward—in this case, hitting the ball. In every action, "the meaning of my [acts of] consciousness is always at a distance, over there, outside" (Sartre 2021, 186).[8] Although what happens on the tennis court happens only as a result of the player's intentional directedness toward the world—maybe they play for fun or the win—the overall, concrete course of situated action first emerges from the player's mediating transformation.

In this regard, the course of situated action is the synthetic unity of various material entities that occupy a specific space in the player agent's organized practical field of possibilities; the unity also includes the meaning these agents give these entities, irrespective of a pre-reflective or reflective engagement. Against the background of an agent's embodied interrelation with the world, situated action must thus be understood as initiated—either through will or passion—by the agents' intention to attain their ends. These ends are a result of the agents themselves being needy/desiring in relation to the world. The exact course of action, although vaguely outlined by ends and the world as an exigent practical field of possibilities, is enacted by adapting each movement, position, and action in correspondence to the larger roughly outlined course of action, as well as to the feedback agents get through their intentional relation with the supporting and constraining entities in their practical field. Situated actions, like hitting a ball with a racket, drinking water, or telling a friend to reserve a table, comprise subactions in which agents make slight adaptations according to their altered situation. These subactions are again smaller-scale interrelations between themselves and the world, through which the whole action is enacted and possibilized.

Especially regarding situated action based on needs and desires, Ally connects Sartre's views on the body in action to biological theories of *autopoietic systems*. He

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8   The square brackets are in the original source and were not added by the author.

quotes the following passage from Sartre's unfinished manuscript of part II of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*:

> For the organism, unity is actually the perpetual restoration of unity. From this viewpoint, there is no difference between its synthetic reality—as a consistency at the heart of temporalizations of envelopment—and the accomplishment of functions: eating to live, and living to eat, are one and the same thing. For unity manifests itself as the totalization of the functions that preserve it. These functions, moreover, ceaselessly turn back upon themselves in a circularity that is only the first temporalization of permanence, since their tasks are always similar and always conditioned by the same 'feedback'. (Sartre 1991, 344–345)

In this sense, embodied needs and desires, as well as an agent's ongoing adaptation to situational factors, reaffirm Sartre's theoretical considerations about the impossibility of fully being-in-and-for-itself (see section 2.3). By virtue of being a synthetic unity of self-consciousness and body, human existence necessarily is a totalization in progress, not a totality (Ally 2017, 445). In a human's corporeal existence, situated and goal-directed action is the active maintenance and preservation of itself as a physicochemical, organic, social, and cultural unity, through its inertial progression in a materially mediating milieu.

The constant and dynamic totalizing flow that is human existence necessarily becomes inert in the concrete course of situated actions to be efficacious. Agents are the adaptation to changing situational factors. They enact their possibilities through their very actions. In reciprocity with their milieu, agents *possibilize* their existence by realizing themselves. In doing so, agents disclose and thus synthesize their milieu as a practical field through their practical engagement (Sartre 2021, 158).

Sartre strikingly summarizes the dialectical interplay of needs, desires, and ends, as well as the existential urgency for action arising from human materiality within a mediating milieu, in the following passage:

> [M]an is a material being set in a material world; he wants to change the world which crushes him, that is, to act on the world of materiality through the mediation of matter and hence to change himself. His constant search is for a different *arrangement* of the universe, and a different statute for man; and in terms of this new order he is able to define himself as *the Other whom he will become*. Thus he constantly makes himself the instrument, the means, of this future statute which will realise him as other; and it is impossible for him to treat his own present as an end. In other words, man as the future of man is the regulative schema of every undertaking, but the end is always a remoulding of the material order which *by itself* will make man possible. (Sartre 1978, 112, emphasis in original)

The *regulative schema* of human existence, as a constant undertaking, is an agent's future self. Because human actions are mediated by socioculturally conditioned ma-

teriality, and because the effects of this mediation are "embodied and manifested in the *actual* and particular art" (Sartre 2021, 675, emphasis in original) of the situated selves of agents, the *practical* realization of this regulative schema is based on the constitutive principles of human becoming.

In this regard, human existence does not just become comprehensible as a constant totalization. Each situated action can also be understood as a singular, structural moment of this totalization. Consequently, human existence can itself be understood either in its processing as a whole or with regard to the situated actions that, as structural moments, represent totalizations themselves. Sartre states that

> we can understand any common *praxis* because we are always an organic individuality which realises a common individual: to exist, to act and to comprehend are one and the same. This reveals a schema of universality which we can call constituted dialectical Reason, because it governs the practical comprehension of a specific reality which I shall call *praxis*-process, in so far as it is the rule both of its construction and of my comprehension. (Sartre 1978, 558, emphasis in original)

Every situated action represents a structural moment in the temporal progression of individual human existence. Individual existence is itself a *praxis*-process that perpetuates itself through action (Flynn 2014, 345).

Fundamentally, the concrete subjectivity enacted throughout this process is continuously transformed through the interrelation between human beings and their surrounding materiality. From that materiality arise the situation-specific structures of needs, desires, ends, and intentions, as well as the structures of the practical field of possibility. Sartre's understanding of this practical relationship between human beings and objective materiality, and of how it constitutes both the concrete shape of their subjectivity and objectivity, can be analyzed in terms of an *intra-action*, i.e. an entangled interrelation between *relata* through which these *relata* are constituted in the first place (Barad 2007, 136–137).

In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad engages in a discussion with Nils Bohr's philosophical-physical considerations for a revised understanding of discursive practices. In such discursive practices, differences between phenomena are enacted first and foremost through their relation, or intra-action. Barad focuses on sociocultural factors that condition the discursive practice itself, which she refers to as *apparatus*. This allows her to consider not only phenomena as such, but the way they are perceived and the distinction that can potentially be made based on this perception itself of these phenomena. Barad argues for a reworking of the notion of *causality* so that it does not posit human beings front and center but also encompasses the supposed agency of materiality in the consummation of causal events. It is only within the larger perspective of the *apparatus*, i.e. "*the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering*" (Barad 2007, 148, emphasis in original), that what matters is enacted and what does not matter is excluded. Against the

background of Sartre's understanding of totalizing action developed throughout this chapter, and against his conception of human existence as a *praxis*-process, it becomes clear that there is a general and abstract form of human existence only in relation to how it concretizes itself through action. Understanding human existence as a *praxis*-process means understanding it as an intra-agential practice. Through this practice, the cut between the subjectivity of human beings and the objectivity of their surrounding materiality is enacted in the first place by their mutual becoming within their interrelation. Individual human existence thus represents the emergence of a situationally concretized, yet spatiotemporally coherent subjective entity that is practically entangled with a thusly situationally concretized and spatiotemporally coherent, objective materiality against the background of a larger socioculturally structured material occurrence.

2.5 Concluding Remarks

The analysis in this chapter has substantiated the fundamental role of human action in the course of human existence. The course of human existence is itself a complex mediation of internal and external factors. Meaning, practical relevance, needs, desires, and intentions interplay and together constitute a complex web of factors that condition how agents realize themselves through their actions. Simultaneously, each of these actions represents a structural moment in the overall totalizing processing of human existence as *praxis*-process. Human beings represent material entities that act for themselves, and thus they constitute their existential situation.

However, this situation is itself a constitutive factor for human existence. Depending on the larger societal constellation and the concrete material conditions in which actions take place, agents interiorize the world differently. They also subjectively relate to the world differently and thus act differently. The mutual influence of action and situation in Sartre's philosophy reflects the significance he attributes to both the individual and the societal context the individual is situated in.

Needs and desires are fundamental for the exact course of actions and even for how individuals apprehend themselves and the world. The agents' practical field is co-constituted by their needs and desires. Given that the structure of these needs and desires results from the agents' situation within a larger societal constellation, this constellation co-constitutes the agents' needs and desires and thus their situationally concretized subjectivity. Therefore, how needs and desires project toward certain ends is, to a degree, an outcome of the structure of societal constellations.

The conceptions of situated action and *praxis*-process further elucidate the relationship between individual and history addressed in section 1.4. The structural dynamic between situated action and existence as *praxis*-process instantiates and realizes the societal constellations that build the larger situational frame of individ-

ual action. Situated action on the micro-level is a structural moment of human existence as a *praxis*-process on the meso-level, which is a structural moment of the processing of larger societal constellations on the macro-level, which again affects the course of situated action on the micro-level. Because history dialectically progresses through material transformations of socioculturally and materially structured constellations, and because human actions represent the basic structural moments in these transformative processes, history itself becomes intelligible alongside the fundamental dialectic of human experience and action. With the conception of situated action and *praxis*-process, these transformative processes can now be represented by retracing their structural dynamics.

Despite the inherent situatedness of human existence, this analysis proves that action is ontologically free. Although practical freedom of choice might be limited by the position that agents adopt in their respective constellations, agents must be understood as remaining free to relate to themselves. This ontological freedom cannot be taken from human existence. However, the inherently material character of human existence already delimits an individual's practical field. Both the human body as well as the fact that actions must take place in the medium of matter affect human agency.

Now, with regard to the material realization of action, Sartre is not blind to the role of technology in human existence. In most of his works, Sartre illustrates certain ontological differences between human beings and things with examples of tools, instruments, and machines. He especially emphasizes the autotelic character of human existence—i.e. the fact that human beings engage in goal-directed actions by being ends in themselves—in contrast to the somewhat determined nature of technological artifacts. Technology plays a crucial role in Sartre's later works in particular. Practico-inert things and structures manifest the relations between individuals. These artifacts stabilize the structures of societal constellations and can even generate their complex demands and requirements.

However, *Critique* represents a culmination of some of Sartre's earlier thoughts. His reflections on human action are followed by further reflections on the nature of technical artifacts, their role as instrumental means, and the significance of these constructed things for human existence. Given that this current work intends to outline a theory of practical ensembles that can, with some modifications, be applied to urban mobility infrastructures, Sartre's philosophical thoughts on technology must be laid down first. This will be done in the next chapter.