

Jean-Paul Sartre.

The Imagination.

Trans. Kenneth Williford and David Rudrauf.

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At the conclusion of their excellent translation of Sartre's *The Imagination*, Kenneth Williford and David Rudrauf provide an early review of the work by Sartre's fellow phenomenologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty concludes his review by praising Sartre's philosophical acumen and his adroit exposition of it. Williford and Rudrauf's translation evinces such thoughtfulness that even after all these years, the English reader is led to appreciate how apt Merleau-Ponty's assessment was. Indeed, some of the turns of phrase used in the translation perfectly capture Sartre's unique style, a style that is at once critical, acerbic, and fun. The playful quality of Sartre's prose is one of the reasons undergraduates have consistently taken to Sartre's version of critical philosophy.

The book's introduction provides several interesting observations that pick up on Sartre's use of language. At the same time, the nuances that the translators discuss serve to underscore how much depth Sartre layered his texts with by his choice of words. Because *The Imagination* is such an early work, it allows us to appreciate the refinement of the concepts and phrases that became such richly textured canvases in his later works. For example, the translators wisely note the importance of Sartre's use of the term, *ensemble*. As they note, the standard account is that the word *ensemble* is tied to the French use of the term. However, there is more to it than this. For those in the phenomenological tradition like Sartre, the idea of an ensemble captures what phenomenology sets out to do—explicate the 'reduction' of a series of ideas. The book provides an intriguing account of why they chose certain words over others. This later contribution serves as a useful guide to the translator's own informing philosophy.

One of the themes of Sartre scholarship concerns the extent of Husserl's, as opposed to Heidegger's, influence on his philosophy. For example in a number of Sartre's early works, including *The Imagination* and *Transcendence of the Ego*, and in the early article on intentionality, the influence of Husserl is striking. This is especially true of *The Imagination*. It is here, in this current work, that Sartre provides such a clear picture of Husserl's contribution. For Sartre, Husserl's *Ideas* and *Cartesian Meditations* both address the underlying critique that phenomenology brings to the psychological account of imagination. These ideas are however left undeveloped. So, Sartre saw part of his plan for *The Imagination* as the exposition of the contours of what was left unsaid in Husserl's contribution. For this reason, this translation of *The Imagination* should be of keen interest to students of Sartre who also wish to see a fulsome instance of Sartre's Husserlian applied phenomenology.

So, what exactly is Sartre's critique of the standard account of the image? He begins by establishing the original set of mistakes that both philosophy and later, contemporary psychology, made regarding the non-entitative status of consciousness. Inquiry itself has a bias which renders the inert object as somehow retaining that quality when one is conscious of it. As Sartre put it in the article on intentionality, the tree is not in consciousness, it is in the world as an in-itself, a thing. This is precisely what is not the case with the image that consciousness has before it.

For Sartre, consciousness immediately and spontaneously makes a distinction between existence under the auspices of image and existence under the auspices of thing. Retracing just how this awareness is possible requires a Sartrean version of bracketing the tendency to objectify. In this view, in order to grasp the truth of the image, I must, according to Sartre, “get rid of our almost unbreakable habit of construing all modes of existence on the model of physical existence” (5). The tendency to use the physical model as the predominant model leads to what Sartre refers to as a “naïve metaphysics of the image” (6).

This metaphysical miscue informs much of what Sartre refers to as the great metaphysical systems of the past. In his chapter of the same title, Sartre turns his attention to the assumptions made by Descartes, of whom he writes that the images of things reside in a kind of twilight, wherein they are only awakened by their *association* with conscious ideas. The question of how things are rendered in consciousness remains unanswered.

In terms of the tradition, Sartre first considers the approach of Descartes, and then that of Hume, Leibniz, and to a lesser extent, Locke. With the exception of Leibniz, Sartre’s critique of the empirical tradition is that the image devolves to a psychological fact. The result of the tradition’s metaphysical bias is that there are three possibilities. First, the realm of thought is radically distinct from that of the image. Second, the image inhabits a pure realm composed of images. Finally, there is the possibility of a world of factual images wherein an organization of both images and facts somehow coalesces.

Sartre’s next step in his exposition of the problem of the image, is that of contemporary psychology. After a review of key figures in that tradition, Sartre notes that the image comes to be reborn as a sensation, or a reviviscence. The upshot of this is that psychology posits the image as a thing, because thought is a thing, and man, ultimately, in this view, is also a thing. The new psychology of mind, Sartre argues, is resolutely determinist, which those familiar with Sartre’s work will recognize as one of his major themes. In fact, this concern will follow Sartre throughout his early and later works. It will become part of Sartre’s relentless critique of psychology, be it the early researches of psychologists, or the later behavioral and empirical solutions of psychology, and famously a core element of his critique of Freud.

Sartre pauses to consider the approach of Bergson, but here one can grasp the influence of Husserl, as Sartre’s analysis is informed and guided by the breakthrough he found in Husserl. His language here is likewise Husserlian with references to *noesis* and *noema*.

Next, Sartre redoubles his critique of the classical approach in a chapter similarly titled. For Sartre, the problem with psychological approaches, unlike that of the phenomenological account of reality, wherein consciousness spontaneously makes a distinction at a primordial level between image and perception, is that they fall into the trap of rendering this immediate distinction as one that merely involves the true and false. Sartre retains his clearest statement of his critique in his discussion of the contradictions introduced by M. Sapier. After quoting him, Sartre replies, “Who has ever made so much effort to distinguish an image from perception. If the image of a creaking had crossed my mind, I would have recognized it right away as an image without needing to look at the windowpanes or open the window” (94).

Sartre describes the transition from the classical approach to images to the revolutionary approach introduced by Husserl in this way: “We just saw, for instance that the classical theory of

the image contains a whole implicit metaphysics, and that one moved on to experimentation without getting rid of the metaphysics, carrying in experimentation a crowd of prejudices that sometimes go back to Aristotle” (128). For Sartre, this is an apt introduction to the core concept he finds in Husserl—his use of the doctrine of intentionality. The emphasis that Sartre gives to this account is on the strong distinction between consciousness and whatever it is conscious of. This was powerfully depicted in his article on intentionality, but here it informs his approach to the image, and how the image has been historically depicted. Sartre plainly notes that he does not agree with Husserl on all aspects of intentionality. But where? The disagreement involves the extraordinary place afforded to the world as such, which for Sartre and Heidegger is decisive, but which in Husserl remains latent.

This distinction between Husserl and Sartre matters here because it holds the key to Sartre’s own account of the image. The image, as we will learn later, is given with the selfsame distinctness as perception, and that is why one knows at once that the image is not the same as a perception. The consciousness that constitutes it has open before it a number of modes of construal, so it is a direct result of the intentional structure of experience. However, it has an existential basis: that of being itself. For Sartre, the final word on the image is, as he notes in his conclusion, that the image is an act and not a thing, as it always implies consciousness.

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