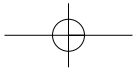
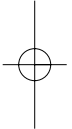


part I

The division of this book into two parts is in a sense arbitrary. The method which Sartre employs – phenomenology, together with its necessary adjunct which I have called Sartrean therapy – is inextricably interwoven with its results. But because its intertwining with certain of its results – namely its descriptions of consciousness and of bad faith – is more immediately evident than its interweaving with its other results, I have placed the chapters on these two topics together with the methodological chapters in Part I.



phenomenology

Sartre's monumental work *Being and Nothingness* is subtitled a 'phenomenological essay on ontology'.¹ Phenomenology is the philosophical method which we will be elucidating in this chapter. Ontology is the philosophical study of being, existence or reality, and Sartre, following Heidegger (see 'Sartre's Life', above), sees the starting point of ontology as the exploration of what he calls '*human reality*' – what Heidegger had called *Dasein* or 'there-being'.

My aim in this chapter is to outline what the philosophical method called 'phenomenology' involves, at least for Sartre, not in a historically rigorous but in a practically accessible way.² Heidegger (BT 34ff.) takes us back to the etymological roots, in Greek, of the word 'phenomenology': it means the 'logos' – roughly, 'talk' or 'discourse' – of the 'phenomenon', 'that which shows itself'. Since to show oneself is to *appear*, we might say that phenomena are 'appearances', and Sartre does often use the word 'appearance' in place of 'phenomenon'. This, however, is liable to mislead those philosophers who come to this discussion wielding a ready-made 'appearance/reality' distinction; they will suppose that phenomenology studies how things *seem* as opposed to how they really *are*.³ But no such contrast is intended; how else could there be a 'phenomenological essay on *ontology*'? Back to the Greek! If I say 'A cloud has shown itself on the horizon', or, equivalently, 'A cloud has appeared on the horizon', I am not thereby implying that it merely seems to be a cloud but might not really be one.⁴

At the same time, to appear is to appear *to* someone; and so we could also say that phenomenology is the study of 'experience'. But this term, like 'appearance', is subject to many misunderstandings. Historically, the philosophical orientation known as 'empiricism' – which etymologically suggests a doctrine that takes experience as basic – has transformed the concept of experience unrecognizably. The word 'experience', the philosopher George Santayana suggests, began by referring to 'so much knowledge and readiness as is fetched from contact with events by a teachable and intelligent creature' (1922: 189), the sense in which we speak of 'an experienced train-driver' or 'the wisdom of experience'. It

was transformed by the empiricists into a pluralizable term, 'experiences', which designated – not engagement with the world through action, practice and exploration, but – the putative causal upshot in the mind of the perception of putative atomistic qualities of the world: inner, private, atomistic objects also known as 'sensations' or 'impressions' or 'qualia'. By the end of this conceptual mutation, empiricists – those 'practical people' – paradoxically found themselves 'inarticulate sensualists, rapt in omphalic contemplation of their states of mind' (1922: 192). This seems a paradigm case of what Galen Strawson calls 'looking-glassing' a term: i.e., using a term 'in such a way that whatever one means by it, it excludes what the term means' (2005: 43)! The phenomenologists' emphasis on experience can make them sound like empiricists; but their notion of experience is emphatically *not* that of those philosophers known as empiricists. On the contrary, empiricism constitutes one of their principal philosophical targets (see Chapter 2).

Although different phenomenologists will spell this out in different ways, the study of phenomena may be seen as having two stages: the description of phenomena, and the elicitation of their essence from that description. For Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, this second stage is not complete until this essence has been put into relation to some fundamental aspect of human reality. So Sartre's exploration of imagination observes that when I imagine Pierre, who is in London, he 'appears to me as absent', which 'is enough to distinguish [the imagined object] from the object of perception' (PsyI 261); that in imagination the object is 'given-in-its-absence', whereas in memory it is 'given-now-as-in-the-past' (PsyI 263); and so on. These certainly constitute important features of the essence of imagination; but he refuses to stop there, instead raising the much more fundamental question, 'can we conceive of a consciousness which would never imagine?' (PsyI 260). The answer proves to be 'no', because without the ability to imagine not-yet-existing states of affairs, human beings could never act and hence would not be free (PsyI 269–73). Thus the phenomenological exploration of the essence of imagination as a modality of consciousness requires putting it into relation to an aspect of human reality, freedom, which Sartre sees as absolutely fundamental, and thereby demonstrates that imagination is central to human reality.

The first two sections of this chapter are devoted to looking at these two stages, as they have been explicated and practised by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. In the third section I work through an example of phenomenology in practice to help to put some flesh on these bones. By this stage, we are in a position to clarify some of the confusion around the term 'existentialism', which for both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty is connected with phenomenology. I end by considering a very general objection that may be made to the whole phenomenological enterprise,

an objection that might be put by asking: 'Isn't phenomenology just *assuming* that phenomena are *real*? And might that assumption not be false?'

The Phenomenological Reduction: Description of Phenomena

Husserl introduced the 'phenomenological reduction' – what he also called the 'phenomenological *epoché*', the "parenthesizing" of the Objective world', and 'putting [things] out of play' (CM 20) – as in a certain sense parallel to Descartes's doubt, i.e., suspension of judgement. We have already noted that part of what Husserl required us to 'put into parentheses' or 'bracket off' was the truth of the claim to existence made by perceived objects such as Husserl's famous die. As we also observed, Sartre held this aspect of the phenomenological reduction to be impossible: Roquentin's encounter with the chestnut tree root in Sartre's novel *Nausea* showed that; and Merleau-Ponty's use of the term 'existentialism' – or anyway 'existential philosophy' – refers to 'the impossibility of a complete reduction' (PP xiv), that is, the impossibility of suspending judgement on such existence-claims.

Yet there is still in Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's view an important role for something *like* the phenomenological reduction. The phenomena which phenomenology aims to describe are absolutely familiar, and paradoxical though it may seem, this very familiarity is one of the principal obstacles to describing them. As Wittgenstein put it, '[t]he aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something – because it is always before one's eyes.)' (PI §129). It is this fact that gives point to the so-called 'phenomenological reduction' *à la française*: in the hands of the French phenomenologists, this becomes suspension, not of judgement, but of what might be called *unastonishment*, a recovery of what Merleau-Ponty calls "wonder" in the face of the world' (PP xiii); we must 'allow ourselves to be struck' by or 'find surprising' things which we take for granted. (For example, 'Don't take it as a matter of course, but as a remarkable fact, that pictures and fictitious narratives give us pleasure', Wittgenstein PI §524.) The aim is not to find a new epistemological foundation for our former opinions, but to put ourselves in a position to describe the familiar. This suspension of unastonishment is vital for the phenomenological aim of describing the experienced world and our relationships with it, '[n]ot because we reject the certainties of common sense and a natural attitude to things . . . but because, being the presupposed basis of any thought, they are taken for granted, and go unnoticed' (PP xiii).

Anyone who has ever been, as we say, 'taken for granted' can testify that the familiar can become in a certain sense invisible! There are various techniques we might adopt for suspending unastonishment and thus rendering the invisible visible:

One, very straightforwardly, is the technique which Wittgenstein labelled 'assembling reminders' (PI §127): rendering into words what is normally unreflected-on. Sartre's literary talents are exhibited to fine effect in his descriptions of such familiar experiences as this:

I have an appointment with Pierre at four o'clock. I arrive at the café a quarter of an hour late . . . Will he have waited for me? . . . When I enter the café to search for Pierre, there is formed a synthetic organization of all the objects in the café, on the ground of which Pierre is given as about to appear . . . But now Pierre is not here . . . I expected to see Pierre, and my expectation has caused the absence of Pierre *to happen* as a real event concerning this café. (BN 9–10)

'Do we not say, for example, "I suddenly saw that he was not there"?' (BN 9). Such experiences are familiar; this is also, it happens, a crucial example for Sartre: absences are instances of what he terms *négatités*, concrete 'nothingnesses', which play a starring role in, *inter alia*, his discussion of freedom. Yet we in all probability had never made the experience of absence explicit to ourselves. We recognize descriptions of these experiences because they are familiar, yet we find such descriptions illuminating or even revelatory precisely *because* we have not previously made them explicit to ourselves.

Another technique takes off from the observation that familiar things can be invisible simply through lack of contrast. At a basic level, we can even grasp this as a *sensory* phenomenon: we cease to hear the ticking of the clock because it is a constant sensory accompaniment. We can also fail to notice or be struck by familiar aspects of our own country or culture because we have nothing to contrast them with; one of the potential benefits of foreign travel is precisely that, by providing such a contrast, it may get us to notice these features in our own land or culture: accents, styles of dress or architecture, landscapes, customs. Though this technique seems to be less prominent in Sartre, one purpose of Merleau-Ponty's descriptions of unfamiliar experiences, for example, his discussion of phantom limbs and anosognosia, or of the brain-injured war veteran Schneider, or of experiments with inverting spectacles, is to illuminate the familiar by way of contrast.⁵

A final point: there is a widespread but misguided impression among some philosophers and psychologists that phenomenological reflection is what is sometimes called 'introspection': philosophers, particularly those sceptical of the notion, tend to characterize introspection as a

kind of metaphorical peering into the private contents of one's own mind, therein catching fleeting glimpses of those 'experiences' and 'qualia' invented by the empiricists. If we have conflated phenomenological reflection with introspection, we may demand to know what licenses the phenomenologists' easy glide from the first-person singular ('I expected to see Pierre'), to the first-person plural ('Do *we* not say, for example, "I suddenly saw that he was not there"?'). We may, like the philosopher D. C. Dennett, charge the phenomenologists with making what he terms 'the first-person plural presumption' (1991: 67): if all Sartre is really talking about is the private contents of his own mind, is not such a presumption not only presumptuous but untestable?

Phenomenological reflection is not introspection, however; the phenomenologists' examples are clearly *not* meant as reports of what is going on inside their own minds. When Sartre describes the experience of absence, he is describing not the contents of his own mind but the *world*; and we, Sartre's readers, are meant to *recognize* something in this description, a recognition which may be manifested in our spontaneously relating Sartre's description to occasions when *we* have experienced an absence. His shift to the first-person plural is hardly presumptuous; and far from his descriptions being untestable, we might say that our recognition is a *criterion of correctness* for a phenomenological description: 'When we focus on some feature of our dealing with the world and bring it to speech, it doesn't come across as a discovery of some unsuspected fact, like for example the change in landscape at a turn in the road' (Taylor 2005: 35).

There is, however, a complication, namely that the failure to recognize the description may be due to intellectual prejudices. Dennett is fond of citing cases where people are surprised by their own perceptual experience; this surprise is engendered by the fact that people are inclined to describe what they *think* the perceived world must be like, without actually looking.⁶ For example, we may be surprised to discover that we cannot identify a playing card until it is virtually directly in front of our eyes, *because*, Dennett suggests, we tend to think of our visual field as a kind of inner picture composed of coloured shapes, so that it 'stands to reason that each portion of the canvas must be colored *some color*' (1991: 68). But that the phenomenological enterprise of describing experience is endangered by intellectual prejudice is hardly news to the phenomenologists, who devote a good deal of effort to identifying and attempting to undermine such prejudices. Indeed Dennett's diagnosis sounds just the sort of diagnosis that a phenomenologist might well give (though contrast Merleau-Ponty's actual diagnosis, PP 6). Some of the more pernicious patterns of thinking identified by the phenomenologists will be explored in Chapter 2.

'True philosophy consists in re-learning to look at the world', says Merleau-Ponty (PP xx); there is a great deal that needs to be re-learned – and unlearned.

The Eidetic Reduction: Essences and Meanings

Husserl spoke also of the 'eidetic reduction' or 'the intuition of essences'. The notion of essence has a long history within philosophy, and the phenomenologists are eager to distinguish their conception of essences from others'. Two conceptions of essence in particular are in the background of their discussions: the scholastic conception and the logical-positivist conception, itself formulated largely as a reaction against the scholastic conception.

The scholastic conception of essence. The term 'scholastics' is applied to a loosely defined set of medieval philosophers and theologians whose fundamental project was to integrate the teachings of the Bible with those of the great Greek philosophers, particularly Aristotle. Their writings form the backdrop for Descartes, whose own writings are such an important part of the backdrop to the phenomenologists. A basic distinction which Descartes and the scholastics made is that between two kinds of properties: *essential* and *accidental*. Essential properties belong to *kinds* of things, and do so eternally; every instance of a particular kind necessarily exemplifies that kind's essential property or properties: it is that in virtue of which the instance *is* an instance. Essences are expressed in what the scholastics called 'real definitions' or definitions of *things* as opposed to the more superficial nominal definitions or definitions of *words*. Accidental properties belong to individuals, i.e., instances of kinds, and need not be exemplified by other individuals of the same kind. Thus the essence of a triangle is: a three-sided plane figure. A particular triangle *must* exemplify that property since otherwise it would not be a triangle, but it might be right-angled, or isosceles, or scalene; these are accidental properties, which other triangles may or may not have. Again, the essence of a human being is (at least according to many scholastics) a rational animal; an individual human being *must* exemplify this property since it is this in virtue of which he is a human being, but might possess the accidental properties of being French, or male, or aged 49, which not all human beings need possess.

One type of property was of especial consequence for the scholastics: existence, which was always an accidental property – except in the case of God, who exists necessarily: his existence, uniquely, is part of his essence. The real definition of a triangle or a human being does not mention existence; we can know what a triangle *is*, what it is to *be* a triangle, without knowing whether any triangles actually exist. This point might

be articulated by saying that essences were a kind of blueprint in the mind of God prior to his creating things which fulfilled the blueprint. The scholastics expressed this basic principle as: 'Essence precedes existence'.⁷ Sartre's principle 'Existence precedes essence', the defining axiom of *his* existentialism, is a deliberate reversal of the scholastic axiom (see below).

The logical-positivist conception of essence. Merleau-Ponty's target is less the scholastics than the logical positivists, those twentieth-century empiricists of the so-called Vienna Circle whose basic premise was that every meaningful sentence is either 'analytic' – true in virtue of the meanings of the words, as for example 'All bachelors are unmarried' – or verifiable through 'experience', i.e., empirically. The logical positivists were in part self-consciously setting themselves against certain aspects of the scholastic notion of essence; their main complaint was that the scholastics had elevated the notion of essence into something metaphysical, as their emphasis on the word 'must' and their grandiose language of 'eternal' or 'unchanging' indicated. The positivists wanted to replace that notion with the much more down-to-earth notion of an analytic proposition whose truth was grounded in the meanings of words, themselves the product of conventions. Thus instead of saying 'Man is a rational animal', which is apt to be understood as expressing a metaphysical insight deep into the nature of human beings, it is less misleading to say 'The sentence "Man is a rational animal" is analytic' or 'The word "man" means "rational animal"'.⁸ They rejected the very intelligibility of a 'real definition', a definition of the thing as opposed to the word; only words, not things, have meanings. We can't talk about the meaning of life, only about the meaning of (the word) 'life'!

The logical positivists, however, shared with the scholastics the principle that essence, re-interpreted as word-meaning, precedes existence, for one can, on the positivist view, know what a word means independently of knowing whether that word refers to anything which actually exists.⁹ (Nor would they see God as an exception to this principle.) And Merleau-Ponty is as critical of this axiom as Sartre was, though on different grounds; his conclusion will be not that 'existence precedes essence': rather, phenomenology 'puts essences back into existence' (PP vii), essence and existence are intertwined.

The core of Merleau-Ponty's critique of the positivists is a critique of their conception of language: they see its 'office' as 'caus[ing] essences to exist in a state of separation [from existence]'. Their essences are word-meanings, and they understand word-meanings as the product of arbitrary convention, ungrounded in what Merleau-Ponty refers to as 'the ante-predicative life of consciousness' (PP xv). It is as if positivists have forgotten that they are human beings and that language is a human, expressive phenomenon. If we wish to say that the meanings of words

are the result of conventions, we must not exaggerate their arbitrariness. Let us not forget that conventions are the product of *human* activities, activities of beings-in-the-world, which take place in a *situation*. The claim that the conventions which produce word-meanings are arbitrary is commonly justified by the apparent arbitrariness of the connection between – to take a typical if apparently trivial example – a particular type of animal and the word ‘dog’, as evidenced by the fact that the same type of animal is called *Hund* or *chien* in other languages. Yet to call the conventions governing the use of these words arbitrary is to suggest, on the one hand, that it was simply decided by *fiat* that *these* animals would henceforth be called ‘dogs’ (or *Hunds* or *chiens*); this is to ignore the fact that the name of this type of animal in a given language itself has a history and presupposes a whole culture. And it seems to suggest, on the other hand, that it was an arbitrary matter to pick out this type of item from the world and to give it a name in the first place, as if perceptual saliences are unrelated to human needs, be they for companionship, food or safety. Thus Merleau-Ponty says that ‘[i]n the silence of primary consciousness can be seen appearing not only what words mean, but also what things mean’ (PP xv); his language echoes the scholastics’ distinction between real and nominal definitions, and also helps to clarify the shift between talk about essence and talk about meaning that we sometimes see in phenomenological writers. Word-meanings and thing-meanings (essences) are inseparable; both have their roots in existence, i.e., in the experienced world; and ultimately both refer to fundamental features of human reality.

The question of how we actually arrive at characterizations of the essence or meaning of a phenomenon from a description is best considered by way of example.

The Practice of Phenomenology: an Example

What then does a phenomenologist do in order to exhibit the essence or meaning of a phenomenon? We should expect already that this will fall roughly into two phases: the execution of the phenomenological reduction and the execution of the eidetic reduction.

Take again the example from earlier: Sartre’s description of the experience of the absence of Pierre. We exhibit our recognition of this description and thereby confirm its correctness by spontaneously relating it to our own experiences of absence – say, the time I was meant to be meeting Sue off the plane, but she had missed her flight. We may not understand or grasp the full implications of some of his language (e.g., ‘synthetic organization’), but whatever it is that we recognize in the description helps us in grasping that language; we reflect on our own

experience, perhaps we note that the passengers who are *not* Sue, the terminal itself, the announcements, all *merge into* one another as background with a Sue-shaped hole, as it were, waiting to be filled, although that hole is not in any precise location. Thus we, upon reading Sartre's descriptions with understanding, begin to notice things in our own experience which are perfectly familiar but which we had, chances are, never been attuned to before. We have suspended our unastonishment, and thus, at least incipiently and in a small way, performed the phenomenological reduction; and we can begin to describe our experience, perhaps to supplement or even to correct Sartre's description.

Sartre's description and our confirmation of it enable us to say that 'an absence can *happen* as a real event'. In so doing, we have *already* moved beyond the particular experience, either that described by Sartre or that which we brought to mind in order to understand his description. We are now talking about a *kind* of experience: experiences of absence. We are then in a position to perform the eidetic reduction; and the first step here consists in a technique which Husserl labelled 'free imaginative variation'. We might, for example, think of other people who did not get off the plane – the Queen, Martin Heidegger – and confirm that *their* non-appearances did not 'happen as real events'; there was no Queen-shaped hole in the airport terminal. So we can now say that there is a difference between absence and mere non-presence; I am just amusing myself if I say 'The Queen was not on the plane', whereas 'Sue was not on the plane' bears a real significance (cf. BN 10); it means phone calls, worrying, changes of plan. The difference, as we can confirm by imagining that we had gone to the airport in order to meet the Queen off the plane, is that experiences of absence only occur in the context of an *expectation*: 'I expected to see Pierre, and my expectation has caused the absence of Pierre to *happen* as a real event concerning this café' (BN 9–10). It was my *expectation* that caused Sue's absence to happen, my expectation that brought it about that her non-presence, unlike the Queen's, was an *absence*.

For the French phenomenologists, however, we do not yet fully grasp the meaning of the phenomenon of absence until we have succeeded in relating our description of this type of experience to some fundamental aspect of human reality. Although it takes Sartre many pages to get there, what we learn, through a series of increasingly penetrating questions, is that '[m]an is the being through whom nothingness comes to the world' (BN 24). And man's ability to 'secrete his own nothingness' (see BN 24, 28) is nothing other than *freedom*. A positivist would have said that the meaning of absence is the meaning of the word 'absence', and this is roughly what you might find in a dictionary, perhaps 'the state of being away or not present'. How very distant this is from the phenomenologists' answer: that the meaning of absence is that human beings are free!

We will see a number of phenomenological descriptions in what follows; although I won't always distinguish as explicitly as I have here between the two principal phases, this discussion should set the scene for these. Before considering a general objection to the whole enterprise, I want first to say something about the connections between existentialism and phenomenology; many people find this puzzling, and we now have the necessary materials to explain it.

Existentialism and Phenomenology

The term 'existentialist' has been applied to a wide range of thinkers, invariably including Sartre, but also including, just for example, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Heidegger, Jaspers, Marcel and Camus. Most of those who had the opportunity to – including Sartre at times – have repudiated the title; and curiously, Merleau-Ponty seldom figures on this roll-call. Many books and articles with titles like *Existentialism* and *Introduction to Existentialism* have tried to identify something in common between all these thinkers; others have given up on the task, or rejected the applicability of the label to one or more of the thinkers commonly listed. I will confine myself to indicating what Sartre and Merleau-Ponty understood by the term 'existentialism'.

In Merleau-Ponty's usage, 'existentialism' or 'existential philosophy' is simply part of phenomenology as he understands it; phenomenology must be an *existential* philosophy because the phenomenological reduction cannot be taken to the point of suspending judgement on the truth of the existence-claims made by perceived objects. Sartre shares this understanding of phenomenology and of the reduction; the primary intuition to which *Nausea* gave expression – the intuition that at first drew him to Husserlian phenomenology and afterwards repelled him from it once he had understood the idealist tendencies of Husserl's version of phenomenology – was the intuition of the contingency and at the same time the indubitability of the existence of things. Thus we can say that Sartre is an existentialist in Merleau-Ponty's sense of the term, even though this is not the sense in which Sartre uses that term.

When Sartre uses the term 'existentialism', it refers not to an aspect of the method of phenomenology but to one of its foremost *results*: the idea that human beings do not possess a pre-given essence. He expresses this claim by saying that existence precedes essence, a deliberate reversal of the scholastic claim that essence precedes existence. Just as the artisan who produces a paper-knife has a conception of a paper-knife and at the same time is aware of 'the pre-existent technique of production which is a part of that conception', so too, according to the scholastics, for the 'supernal artisan', God. On this picture 'God makes man according to a

procedure and a conception, exactly as the artisan manufactures a paper-knife' (EH 27). Sartre himself rejects the notion of God. But even if 'the notion of God is suppressed', there is still a tendency to invoke 'human nature' to fulfil a parallel role; it means that 'each man is a particular example of a universal conception'. So even on this picture, 'the essence of man precedes that historic existence which we confront in experience' (EH 27). Existentialists, by contrast, say that 'man first of all exists . . . and defines himself afterwards' (EH 28). This conception of human beings is integral to Sartre's conception of freedom and will be explored later (Chapter 8).

Note several things: first, when Sartre develops this principle in EH, it applies solely to human beings. Rather as God was the exception to the scholastic principle that essence precedes existence, human beings are, it seems, exceptions to that same principle for Sartre. Nor by the way is this comparison inapt; as we will see, man is rather closer to the scholastics' God than we might expect! Thus despite its seemingly general formulation, he is not proclaiming 'Existence precedes essence' as a general principle applicable to all kinds of things. Second, 'essence' for Sartre belongs to *individual* human beings, not the kind 'human being', and this is a feature which is radically at odds with the scholastics' understanding of essence. When he says 'man first of all exists . . . and defines himself afterwards', he means that *each individual* human being defines himself, through his actions; that is, as Sartre sometimes puts it, each human being *creates his own* essence, which is utterly unique to him. Sartre does, of course, make general claims about fundamental aspects of human reality; that is after all the subject-matter of BN, but this is not what *he* has in mind when he uses the term 'essence'. Third, unlike scholastic essences, these self-defined individual essences are not eternal; indeed, through a radical conversion of one's 'fundamental project' (see Chapter 8), one can *change* one's own essence. One might be forgiven for concluding that Sartre's famous principle is simply if memorably playing with words: he has 'looking-glassed' the term 'essence'. This obviously diminishes the value of his existentialism as a critique of the scholastic conception of essence, but does not, of course, diminish the value of his existentialism per se.

Appearance and Reality Revisited

I want to end by considering what might seem to be a fundamental objection to the entire phenomenological endeavour. We noted earlier that although phenomena may be characterized as 'appearances', this term was not to be understood against the background of a distinction between appearance and reality; we are not to understand the

phenomenological enterprise as one of describing how things seem as opposed to how they really are. But are the phenomenologists not then assuming that to describe phenomena is to describe *how things really are*? And, worse yet, might that assumption not be false? These questions themselves, I suggest, manifest intellectual prejudices.

This objection has been put forcefully for many years by Dennett. He develops what he takes to be an analogy: he imagines a tribe which believes in a god called Feenoman and considers the various positions which anthropologists might take toward the tribe's beliefs about this deity. Some, the Feenomanists, go native and start to 'believe in the real existence and good works of Feenoman'. Others, the Feenomanologists, gather descriptions of Feenoman from their native informants, questioning them closely to eliminate disagreements wherever possible; they catalogue and inventory the relevant 'belief-manifolds' of the natives and arrive at as definitive a description as possible of Feenoman considered as an 'intentional object' whose actual *existence* they have bracketed. Yet others take the Feenomanologists' descriptions of the natives' belief-manifolds and set out to plot their normal *causes*, which may or may not turn out to be the words and deeds of Feenoman. If they do not – if in fact their beliefs are caused by the trickery of Sam the Shaman – then we might either conclude that Sam the Shaman *is* Feenoman or that Feenoman does not exist, depending on how many of Feenoman's central properties Sam possesses (Dennett 1978: 182–3; cf. 1991: 82–3).

This looks like an elegant way to raise the general question about the phenomenological enterprise. What the phenomenologists, by analogy with the Feenomanologists, are doing is cataloguing our beliefs about ourselves and the 'life-world'; and that is in and of itself an irreproachable activity. To the extent that they assume that these beliefs are true, however – i.e., to the extent that they assume that the normal causes of our belief-manifolds are sufficiently like what we take their causes to be – they are open to refutation by philosophers who take the third approach. Since Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, unlike Husserl, do *not* 'bracket off' existence, they apparently make the very assumption that is open to refutation.

We might begin by observing that Dennett's anthropology would ring an old-fashioned note to many modern anthropologists: Dennett's Feenomanologists sound rather like J. G. Frazer, writing in 1922: 'In various parts of Mecklenburg, where the belief in the Corn-wolf is particularly prevalent, every one fears to cut the last corn, because they say that the Wolf is sitting in it' (quoted in Wittgenstein RF n.11), or W. H. R Rivers, writing in 1924: 'in Torres Straits, disease is believed to occur by the action of certain men who, through their possession of objects called *zogo* . . . have the power of inflicting disease. Thus, one *zogo* is believed

to make people lean and hungry and at the same time to produce dysentery, another will produce constipation, and a third insanity' (quoted in Good 1994: 18). The anthropologist B. J. Good focuses on the word 'belief' in such passages; etymologically it is related to 'beloved' and the archaic 'lief'. In its older use, still retained in some contexts today,

The affirmation 'I believe in God' used to mean: 'Given the reality of God as a fact of the universe, I hereby pledge to him my heart and soul . . .' Today, the statement may be taken by some as meaning: 'Given the uncertainty as to whether there be a God or not . . . I announce that my opinion is "yes".' (W. C. Smith, quoted in Good 1994: 16).¹⁰

Within the old-style anthropology, as well as in philosophy, it clearly bears the latter meaning. For Dennett and his imaginary anthropologists, beliefs are opinions, not commitments to ways of life.

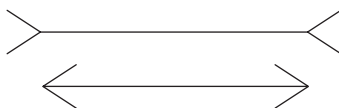
More recent anthropologists such as Good have come to question both the epistemology and the politics underlying such belief-discourse. Their concerns are directly relevant to ours, because their grounds echo those of the phenomenologists, as well as Wittgenstein's 'Remarks on Frazer's *Golden Bough*'; it is no coincidence that many modern anthropologists, Good included, actually draw on phenomenology for their theoretical framework.

Firstly, anthropology since Pierre Bourdieu (esp. 1977) has tended to focus on practices rather than beliefs. Bourdieu, himself influenced by both Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty, argued, against the prevailing intellectualist or 'mentalist' (Good 1994: 23) trend, that the learning of a cultural practice was – not the acquisition of a set of beliefs but – the acquisition of a set of embodied *habits* through imitation and training. Moreover, as Wittgenstein himself argued, cultural practices were not to be explained by *reference* to beliefs. When Frazer states that the king in a particular culture 'must be killed in his prime, because the savages believe that otherwise his soul would not be kept fresh', Wittgenstein comments that 'the practice does not spring from the view' (RF 62), any more than kissing the picture of one's beloved springs from the opinion 'that it will have some specific effect on the object which the picture represents' (RF 64). And the phenomenologists – admittedly Merleau-Ponty more assiduously than Sartre – have made parallel anti-intellectualist arguments in other arenas. Dennett's discussion simply bypasses these arguments via his assumption that the subject-matter of phenomenology is *beliefs about* experience rather than experience.¹¹ It exhibits a version of what we in Chapter 2 label 'the prejudice in favour of knowing over living'.

Secondly, belief as Dennett understands it is closely akin to 'opinion', as in the Smith quotation, or to 'assumption', as in our original question.

An opinion is at the least something which it makes sense to doubt, and such that it makes sense to ask for grounds; the word 'assumption' might be characterized as something such that it makes sense to ask for grounds but for which one is not presently giving grounds. But what Dennett in his critique of phenomenology calls 'beliefs' are in fact *lived certainties*. That is, they are such that the notion of doubt makes no sense, and such that it makes no sense to ask for grounds; hence they are precisely *not* opinions or assumptions. We will see many examples of lived certainties in what follows; a paradigm case is the existence of other conscious subjects (see Chapter 7). Unlike Dennett (see 1991: 95), we don't *assume* that our friends aren't zombies, i.e., human beings who exhibit 'perfectly natural, alert, loquacious, vivacious behavior' but are 'in fact not conscious at all' (1991: 73). In Wittgenstein's words, "I believe that he is not an automaton" [or a zombie], just like that, so far makes no sense. . . . I am not of the *opinion*' that he is a conscious subject' (PI p. 178). The suggestion that phenomenologists *assume* or *believe* that other conscious subjects exist embodies a widespread intellectual prejudice; it is what we will label (Chapter 2) 'the prejudice in favour of knowledge over certainty'.

Thirdly, Dennett, like the earlier anthropologists, is clearly treating the tribe's beliefs about Feenoman as proto-scientific: Feenoman's powers are seen as a 'primitive' causal explanation of various events the tribesmen observe in the world around them. Wittgenstein's comment on Frazer seems equally applicable to Dennett. Both present 'primitive' practices 'as, so to speak, pieces of stupidity' (RF 61); so to represent these practices is not just, as we today might say, 'politically incorrect', but obviously wrong.¹² Wittgenstein refers to 'a Rain-King in Africa to whom the people pray for rain *when the rainy period comes*. But surely that means that they do not really believe that he can make it rain, otherwise they would make it rain in the dry periods of the year' (RF 71–2).¹³ 'What a narrow spiritual life on Frazer's part!', he exclaims (RF 65); 'Frazer is much more savage than most of his savages' (RF 68). In anthropology, analyses of such practices as proto-scientific are 'now largely discounted' (Good 1994: 22). The old-style anthropologists who employed the term 'belief' in connection with 'primitive' tribes tended to use the word 'knowledge' in reference to their *own* assented-to propositions, thereby suggesting that their own beliefs are true whereas those of the culture they are studying are false; 'the representation of others' culture as "belief" authorizes the position and knowledge of the anthropological observer' (Good 1994: 20). Although Dennett is somewhat disingenuously purporting to remain neutral with regard to the truth of the tribe's beliefs about Feenoman, he does have a clear view of what would count as showing these 'beliefs' to be false. For him, as for the old-fashioned anthropologists, science has the role of 'arbiter between knowledge



The Müller-Lyer illusion

and belief' (Good 1994: 22). This attitude exhibits scientism, which embodies a veritable bouquet of intellectual prejudices (see below and Chapter 2).

The objection we are considering assumes that there *is* a contrast to be drawn between how things seem and how they really are (cf. Austin 1962). No doubt in particular cases we can make such a distinction for particular purposes, but it will not carry the weight philosophers tend to want it to bear. Consider a so-called visual illusion (see BN 312): a paradigm occasion for making the appearance/reality distinction. It is commonly said of the lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion (see figure) that they *look* different lengths but are *really* the same length.

In the first place, however, this is a careless description of how they *look*; the fact is that they look the same length if you ignore or cover up the arrowheads, and different lengths if you do not – so that they do not unambiguously look either the same length or different lengths.¹⁴ In the second place, the temptation to say that they *really are* the same length rests on the preconception that the measurable is more real than the non-measurable; the criterion for saying that they are 'really' the same length is simply that they reach the same point on a ruler (cf. PP 6ff.).¹⁵

To apply the word 'real', however, is to make a value-judgement: reality is contrasted with '*mere appearance*'; to call something real is to give it our philosophical seal of approval. But once we recognize that 'real' simply means 'measurable' in this context, we might be in a position to raise the question of why the measurable is supposed to be more valuable than the non-measurable. We can even grant that for certain purposes, e.g., building a bridge that will not fall down, it is; for others, e.g., judging the aesthetic quality of the bridge, it is not. As Carman nicely puts it, scientific purposes 'are not our only, and certainly not our most cherished, purposes'. If, as Carman goes on to suggest, we define scientism as the 'insistence on equating reality with scientific utility' (2005a: 70 n. 5), this critique of phenomenology – like Dennett's – is a paradigm instance of scientism.¹⁶ It is a cousin of what we will label (Chapter 2) 'the prejudice in favour of the existent'. This is not, of course, to devalue science: science 'has its own magnificent work to do'; it is, however, to wish to restrain its hegemonic pretensions. Science 'does not need to rush in and take over extraneous kinds of questions (historical, logical, ethical, linguistic or the like) as well' (Midgley 2004: 6).

Finally, there is a crucial disanalogy between Dennett's anthropologists and the phenomenologists. Dennett's Feenomanologist anthropologists are what he calls 'heterophenomenologists' (see 1991: 72ff.), i.e., *inter alia*, they are studying subjects other than themselves, from the 'third-person point of view'.¹⁷ But the 'tribe' which the phenomenologists are studying is *us* – us human beings, us conscious beings-in-the-world. There is no taking an external point of view on these subjects; even Dennett cannot conduct heterophenomenology *vis-à-vis* human reality.

I have attempted to present the phenomenological method in a practically accessible way, as well as to clarify its relations to existentialism. We have seen that the familiarity of the phenomena which phenomenologists seek to describe tends, for a variety of reasons, to render those phenomena 'invisible', and to make the invisible visible calls for a variety of techniques. We have also, in considering an objection to the whole phenomenological enterprise, seen glimpses of another formidable obstacle: widespread intellectual prejudices. These, and some of the techniques for overcoming them, are the focus of the next chapter.

notes

- 1 The subtitle of BN is, in French, '*essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*', which, as others have noted, might be translated either as 'essay on phenomenological ontology' or as 'phenomenological essay on ontology'. Barnes chooses the former; I have chosen the latter since I think it makes it a little clearer that phenomenology is the method whereby being is to be explored philosophically.
- 2 See, e.g., Spiegelberg's classic study of phenomenology (1961–9) or Moran's excellent introduction (2000), for more historically rigorous outlines of phenomenology.
- 3 McCulloch (1994) reads phenomenology in this way, thus misleading a whole generation of Sartre students.
- 4 See Austin's (1962) discussion of the terms 'appear' and 'appearance'.
- 5 Wittgenstein does something similar sometimes, although often with imaginary examples, e.g., his human beings who speak only in monologue (PI §243); in RF he considers anthropological descriptions of the practices of other cultures, but he also comments 'that we ourselves could think up all the possibilities' (RF 66).
- 6 Cf. Wittgenstein PI §66; cf. Sartre's charge against Bergson that instead of 'looking' at his images he 'appeals' to 'a priori deduction' (I 56).
- 7 Different scholastic and post-scholastic thinkers will express these points differently and some may disagree about the details; this is accurate enough for present purposes.
- 8 Cf. Carnap (1937, Part V.A) on the 'material mode' vs. the 'formal mode' of speech.

- 9 Unlike the scholastics, this is not because they think of existence as an accidental property; indeed they reject the view that existence is a property at all.
- 10 Cf. Sartre's use in BN Part I.2, where he tries to make it clear that in this context 'belief' means 'faith'; see Chapter 4.
- 11 Carman 2005a and 2005b have excellent discussions of Merleau-Ponty's anti-intellectualist arguments which explicitly engage with Dennett.
- 12 On this point, words such as 'primitive', 'savage' and even 'tribe' have disappeared from the anthropological vocabulary; I trust that I won't be seen as endorsing the use of these words.
- 13 There is a whole literature in Christian theology on the efficacy of prayer, much of which makes a parallel point.
- 14 Merleau-Ponty will add that 'same length' and 'different length' don't figure in our experience anyway, at least insofar as the word 'length' refers to measurable length (PP 6). For example, we can't ask 'How much longer does the one line look than the other?'
- 15 Again, Dennett asserts that '[p]eople do undoubtedly believe that they have mental images'; but it is 'an empirical matter to investigate' 'whether items thus portrayed exist as real objects, events, and states in the brain' (1991: 98). The word 'belief' again shows his commitment to intellectualism; his phenomenology of mental images is seriously inaccurate (see Sartre, I); and his presupposition about what it would be for this belief to be true is scientific (see below, in this chapter).
- 16 Debates about scientific realism in philosophy of science – e.g., whether subatomic particles are 'real' or merely 'theoretical constructs' – would be interesting to consider here. 'Real' means 'existent' in either case; those who think of, say, subatomic particles as theoretical constructs often characterize them as 'useful fictions', hence accord them a certain 'heuristic' value, from which it follows that they recognize values other than reality – though still, of course, a value only for *scientific* purposes. Some of those who insist that subatomic particles are real may be assuming that the criterion for existence and hence for reality is, precisely, scientific usefulness.
- 17 In fact there is a whole literature on what is sometimes called 'anthropology at home' (e.g., Peirano 1998 and her bibliography), which shows a sensitive awareness of both the advantages and the difficulties of studying one's own 'tribe'.

phenomenology	41