

PART ONE

The Problem of Nothingness

CHAPTER ONE

The Origin of Negation

I. THE QUESTION

OUR inquiry has led us to the heart of being. But we have been brought to an impasse since we have not been able to establish the connection between the two regions of being which we have discovered. No doubt this is because we have chosen an unfortunate approach. Descartes found himself faced with an analogous problem when he had to deal with the relation between soul and body. He planned then to look for the solution on that level where the union of thinking substance and extended substance was actually effected—that is, in the imagination. His advice is valuable. To be sure, our concern is not that of Descartes and we do not conceive of imagination as he did. But what we can retain is the reminder that it is not profitable first to separate the two terms of a relation in order to try to join them together again later. The relation is a synthesis. Consequently the *results* of analysis can not be covered over again by the *moments* of this synthesis.

M. Laporte says that an abstraction is made when something not capable of existing in isolation is thought of as in an isolated state. The concrete by contrast is a totality which can exist by itself alone. Husserl is of the same opinion; for him *red* is an abstraction because color can not exist without form. On the other hand, a spatial-temporal *thing*, with all its determinations, is an example of the concrete. From

this point of view, consciousness is an abstraction since it conceals within itself an ontological source in the region of the in-itself, and conversely the phenomenon is likewise an abstraction since it must "appear" to consciousness. The concrete can be only the synthetic totality of which consciousness, like the phenomenon, constitutes only moments. The concrete is man within the world in that specific union of man with the world which Heidegger, for example, calls "being-in-the-world." We deliberately begin with the abstract if we question "experience" as Kant does, inquiring into the conditions of its possibility—or if we effect a phenomenological reduction like Husserl, who would reduce the world to the state of the noema-correlate of consciousness. But we will no more succeed in restoring the concrete by the summation or organization of the elements which we have abstracted from it than Spinoza can reach substance by the infinite summation of its modes.

The relation of the regions of being is an original emergence and is a part of the very structure of these beings. But we discovered this in our first observations. It is enough now to open our eyes and question ingenuously this totality which is man-in-the-world. It is by the description of this totality that we shall be able to reply to these two questions: (1) What is the synthetic relation which we call being-in-the-world? (2) What must man and the world be in order for a relation between them to be possible? In truth, the two questions are interdependent, and we can not hope to reply to them separately. But each type of human conduct, being the conduct of man in the world, can release for us simultaneously man, the world, and the relation which unites them, only on condition that we envisage these forms of conduct as realities objectively apprehensible and not as subjective affects which disclose themselves only in the face of reflection.

We shall not limit ourselves to the study of a single pattern of conduct. We shall try on the contrary to describe several and, proceeding from one kind of conduct to another, attempt to penetrate into the profound meaning of the relation "man-world." But first of all we should choose a single pattern which can serve us as a guiding thread in our inquiry.

Now this very inquiry furnishes us with the desired conduct; this man that *I am*—if I apprehend him such as he is at this moment in the world, I establish that he stands be-

fore being in an attitude of interrogation. At the very moment when I ask, "Is there any conduct which can reveal to me the relation of man with the world?" I pose a question. This question I can consider objectively, for it matters little whether the questioner is myself or the reader who reads my work and who is questioning along with me. But on the other hand, the question is not simply the objective totality of the words printed on this page; it is indifferent to the symbols which express it. In a word, it is a human attitude filled with meaning. What does this attitude reveal to us?

In every question we stand before a being which we are questioning. Every question presupposes a being who questions and a being which is questioned. This is not the original relation of man to being-in-itself, but rather it stands within the limitations of this relation and takes it for granted. On the other hand, this being which we question, we question *about* something. That *about which* I question the being participates in the transcendence of being. I question being about its ways of being or about its being. From this point of view the question is a kind of expectation; I expect a reply from the being questioned. That is, on the basis of a pre-interrogative familiarity with being, I expect from this being a revelation of its being or of its way of being. The reply will be a "yes" or a "no." It is the existence of these two equally objective and contradictory possibilities which on principle distinguishes the question from affirmation or negation. There are questions which on the surface do not permit a negative reply—like, for example, the one which we put earlier, "What does this attitude reveal to us?" But actually we see that it is always possible with questions of this type to reply, "Nothing" or "Nobody" or "Never." Thus at the moment when I ask, "Is there any conduct which can reveal to me the relation of man with the world?" I admit *on principle* the possibility of a negative reply such as, "No, such a conduct does not exist." This means that we admit to being faced with the transcendent fact of the non-existence of such conduct.

One will perhaps be tempted not to believe in the objective existence of a non-being; one will say that in this case the fact simply refers me to my subjectivity; I would learn from the transcendent being that the conduct sought is a pure fiction. But in the first place, to call this conduct a pure fiction is to disguise the negation without removing it. "To

the pure fiction" is equivalent here to "to be only a fiction." Consequently to destroy the reality of the negation is to cause the reality of the reply to disappear. This reply, in fact, is the very being which gives it to me; that is, reveals the negation to me. There exists then for the questioner the permanent objective possibility of a negative reply. In relation to this possibility the questioner, by the very fact that he is questioning, posits himself as in a state of indeterminacy; he *does not know* whether the reply will be affirmative or negative. Thus the question is a bridge set up between two non-beings: the non-being of knowing in man, the possibility of non-being of being in transcendent being. Finally the question implies the existence of a truth. By the very question the questioner affirms that he expects an objective reply, such that we can say of it, "It is thus and not otherwise." In a word the truth, as differentiated from being, introduces a third non-being as determining the question—the non-being of limitation. This triple non-being conditions every question and in particular the metaphysical question, which is *our* question.

We set out upon our pursuit of being, and it seemed to us that the series of our questions had led us to the heart of being. But behold, at the moment when we thought we were arriving at the goal, a glance cast on the question itself has revealed to us suddenly that we are encompassed with nothingness. The permanent possibility of non-being, outside us and within, conditions our questions about being. Furthermore it is non-being which is going to limit the reply. What being *will be* must of necessity arise on the basis of what *it is not*. Whatever being is, it will allow this formulation: "Being is *that* and outside of that, *nothing*."

Thus a new component of the real has just appeared to us—non-being. Our problem is thereby complicated, for we may no longer limit our inquiry to the relations of the human being to being in-itself, but must include also the relations of being with non-being and the relations of human non-being with transcendent-being. But let us consider further.

II. NEGATIONS

SOMEONE will object that being-in-itself can not furnish negative replies. Did not we ourselves say that it was beyond

affirmation as beyond negation? Furthermore ordinary experience reduced to itself does not seem to disclose any non-being to us. I think that there are fifteen hundred francs in my wallet, and I find only thirteen hundred; that does not mean, someone will tell us, that experience had discovered for me the non-being of fifteen hundred francs but simply that I have counted thirteen hundred-franc notes. Negation proper (we are told) is unthinkable; it could appear only on the level of an act of judgment by which I should establish a comparison between the result anticipated and the result obtained. Thus negation would be simply a quality of judgment and the expectation of the questioner would be an expectation of the judgment-response. As for Nothingness, this would derive its origin from negative judgments; it would be a concept establishing the transcendent unity of all these judgments, a propositional function of the type, "X is not."

We see where this theory is leading; its proponents would make us conclude that being-in-itself is full positivity and does not contain in itself any negation. This negative judgment, on the other hand, by virtue of being a subjective act, is strictly identified with the affirmative judgment. They can not see that Kant, for example, has distinguished in its internal texture the negative act of judgment from the affirmative act. In each case a synthesis of concepts is operative; that synthesis, which is a concrete and full event of psychic life, is operative here merely in the manner of the copula "is" and there in the manner of the copula "is not." In the same way the manual operation of sorting out (separation) and the manual operation of assembling (union) are two objective conducts which possess the same reality of fact. Thus negation would be "at the end" of the act of judgment without, however, being "in" being. It is like an unreal encompassed by two full realities neither of which claims it; being-in-itself, if questioned about negation, refers to judgment, since being is only what it is—and judgment, a *wholly* psychic positivity, refers to being since judgment formulates a negation which concerns being and which consequently is transcendent. Negation, the result of concrete psychic operations, is supported in existence by these very operations and is incapable of existing by itself; it has the existence of a noema-correlate; its *esse* resides exactly in its *percipi*. Nothingness, the conceptual unity of negative judgments, can not have the

slightest trace of reality, save that which the Stoics confer on their "lecton."¹ Can we accept this concept?

The question can be put in these terms: Is negation as the structure of the judicative proposition at the origin of nothingness? Or on the contrary is nothingness as the structure of the real, the origin and foundation of negation? Thus the problem of being had referred us first to that of the question as a human attitude, and the problem of the question now refers us to that of the being of negation.

It is evident that non-being always appears within the limits of a human expectation. It is because I expect to find fifteen hundred francs that I find *only* thirteen hundred. It is because a physicist *expects* a certain verification of his hypothesis that nature can tell him no. It would be in vain to deny that negation appears on the original basis of a relation of man to the world. The world does not disclose its non-beings to one who has not first posited them as possibilities. But is this to say that these non-beings are to be reduced to pure subjectivity? Does this mean to say that we ought to give them the importance and the type of existence of the Stoic "lecton," of Husserl's noema? We think not.

First it is not true that negation is only a quality of judgment. The question is formulated by an interrogative judgment, but it is not itself a judgment; it is a pre-judicative attitude. I can question by a look, by a gesture. In posing a question I stand facing being in a certain way and this relation to being is a relation of being; the judgment is only one optional expression of it. At the same time it is not necessarily a person whom the questioner questions about being; this conception of the question by making of it an intersubjective phenomenon, detaches it from the being to which it adheres and leaves it in the air as pure modality of dialogue. On the contrary, we must consider the question in dialogue to be only a particular species of the genus "question"; the being in question is not necessarily a thinking being. If my car breaks down, it is the *carburetor*, the *spark plugs*, etc., that I question. If my watch stops, I can question the watchmaker about the cause of the stopping, but it is the various mechanisms of the watch that the watchmaker will in turn question. What I expect from the carburetor, what the watchmaker expects from

¹Tr. An abstraction or something with purely nominal existence—like space or time.

the works of the watch, is not a judgment; it is a disclosure of being on the basis of which we can make a judgment. And if I *expect* a disclosure of being, I am prepared at the same time for the eventuality of a disclosure of a non-being. If I question the carburetor, it is because I consider it possible that "there is nothing there" in the carburetor. Thus my question by its nature envelops a certain pre-judicative comprehension of non-being; it is in itself a relation of being with non-being, on the basis of the original transcendence; that is, in a relation of being with being.

Moreover if the proper nature of the question is obscured by the fact that questions are frequently put by one man to other men, it should be pointed out here that there are numerous non-judicative conducts which present this immediate comprehension of non-being on the basis of being—in its original purity. If, for example, we consider *destruction*, we must recognize that it is an *activity* which doubtless could utilize judgment as an instrument but which can not be defined as uniquely or even primarily judicative. "Destruction" presents the same structure as "the question." In a sense, certainly, man is the only being by whom a destruction can be accomplished. A geological plication, a storm do not destroy—or at least they do not destroy *directly*; they merely modify the distribution of masses of beings. There is no *less* after the storm than before. There is *something else*. Even this expression is improper, for to posit otherness there must be a witness who can retain the past in some manner and compare it to the present in the form of *no longer*. In the absence of this witness, there is being before as after the storm—that is all. If a cyclone can bring about the death of certain living beings, this death will be destruction only if it is experienced as such. In order for destruction to exist, there must be first a relation of man to being—*i.e.*, a transcendence; and within the limits of this relation, it is necessary that man apprehend one being as destructible. This supposes a limiting cutting into being by a being, which, as we saw in connection with truth, is already a process of nihilation. The being under consideration is *that* and outside of that *nothing*. The gunner who has been assigned an objective carefully points his gun in a certain direction *excluding* all others. But even this would still be nothing unless the being of the gunner's objective is revealed as *fragile*. And what is fragility if not a certain probability of non-being for a given being under determined

denly arrested by his face and the whole café would organize itself around him as a discrete presence.

But now Pierre is not here. This does not mean that I discover his absence in some precise spot in the establishment. In fact Pierre is absent from the *whole* café; his absence fixes the café in its evanescence; the café remains *ground*; it persists in offering itself as an undifferentiated totality to my only marginal attention; it slips into the background; it pursues its nihilation. Only it makes itself ground for a determined figure; it carries the figure everywhere in front of it, presents the figure everywhere to me. This figure which slips constantly between my look and the solid, real objects of the café is precisely a perpetual disappearance; it is Pierre raising himself as nothingness on the ground of the nihilation of the café. So that what is offered to intuition is a flickering of nothingness; it is the nothingness of the ground, the nihilation of which summons and demands the appearance of the figure, and it is the figure—the nothingness which slips as a *nothing* to the surface of the ground. It serves as foundation for the judgment—"Pierre is not here." It is in fact the intuitive apprehension of a double nihilation. To be sure Pierre's absence supposes an original relation between me and this café; there is an infinity of people who are without any relation with this café for want of a real expectation which establishes their absence. But, to be exact, I myself expected to see Pierre, and my expectation has caused the absence of Pierre *to happen* as a real event concerning this café. It is an objective fact at present that I have *discovered* this absence, and it presents itself as a synthetic relation between Pierre and the setting in which I am looking for him. Pierre absent haunts this café and is the condition of its self-nihilating organization as ground. By contrast, judgments which I can make subsequently to amuse myself, such as, "Wellington is not in this café, Paul Valéry is no longer here, *etc.*"—these have a purely abstract meaning; they are pure applications of the principle of negation without real or efficacious foundation, and they never succeed in establishing a *real* relation between the café and Wellington or Valéry. Here the relation "is not" is merely *thought*. This example is sufficient to show that non-being does not come to things by a negative judgment; it is the negative judgment, on the contrary, which is conditioned and supported by non-being.

How could it be otherwise? How could we even con-

ceive of the negative form of judgment if all is plenitude of being and positivity? We believed for a moment that the negation could arise from the comparison instituted between the result anticipated and the result obtained. But let us look at that comparison. Here is an original judgment, a concrete, positive psychic act which establishes a fact: "There are 1300 francs in my wallet." Then there is another which is something else, no longer it but an establishing of fact and an affirmation: "I expected to find 1500 francs." There we have real and objective facts, psychic, and positive events, affirmative judgments. Where are we to place negation? Are we to believe that it is a pure and simple application of a category? And do we wish to hold that the mind in itself possesses the *not* as a form of sorting out and separation? But in this case we remove even the slightest suspicion of negativity from the negation. If we admit that the category of the "not" which exists *in fact* in the mind and is a positive and concrete process to brace and systematize our knowledge, if we admit first that it is suddenly released by the presence in us of certain affirmative judgments and then that it comes suddenly to mark with its seal certain thoughts which result from these judgments—by these considerations we will have carefully stripped negation of all negative function. For negation is a refusal of existence. By means of it a being (or a way of being) is posited, then thrown back to nothingness. If negation is a category, if it is only a sort of plug set indifferently on certain judgments, then how will we explain the fact that it can nihilate a being, cause it suddenly to arise, and then appoint it to be thrown back to non-being? If prior judgments establish fact, like those which we have taken for examples, negation must be like a free discovery, it must tear us away from this wall of positivity which encircles us. Negation is an abrupt break in continuity which can not in any case *result* from prior affirmations; it is an original and irreducible event. Here we are in the realm of consciousness. Consciousness moreover can not produce a negation except in the form of consciousness of negation. No category can "inhabit" consciousness and reside there in the manner of a thing. The *not*, as an abrupt intuitive discovery, appears as consciousness (of being), consciousness of the *not*. In a word, if being is everywhere, it is not only Nothingness which, as Bergson maintains, is inconceivable; for negation will never be derived from being. The necessary condition for our saying

not is that non-being be a perpetual presence in us and outside of us, that nothingness haunt being.

But where does nothingness come from? If it is the original condition of the questioning attitude and more generally of all philosophical or scientific inquiry, what is the original relation of the human being to nothingness? What is the original nihilating conduct?

III. THE DIALECTICAL CONCEPT OF NOTHINGNESS

It is still too soon for us to hope to disengage the *meaning* of this nothingness, against which the question has suddenly thrown us. But there are several conclusions which we can formulate even now. In particular it would be worthwhile to determine the relations between being and that non-being which haunts it. We have established a certain parallelism between the types of conduct man adopts in the face of being and those which he maintains in the face of Nothingness, and we are immediately tempted to consider being and non-being as two complementary components of the real—like dark and light. In short we would then be dealing with two strictly contemporary notions which would somehow be united in the production of existents and which it would be useless to consider in isolation. Pure being and pure non-being would be two abstractions which could be reunited only on the basis of concrete realities.

Such is certainly the point of view of Hegel. It is in the *Logic* in fact that he studies the relations of Being and Non-Being, and he calls the *Logic* "The system of the pure determinations of thought." He defines more fully by saying, "Thoughts as they are ordinarily represented, are not pure thoughts, for by a being which is thought, we understand a being of which the content is an empirical content. In logic thoughts are apprehended in such a way that they have no other content than the content of pure thought, which content is engendered by it."² To be sure, these determinations are "what is deepest in things" but at the same time when one considers them "in and for themselves," one deduces them from thought itself and discovers in them their truth. How-

² Introduction, v. P. c. 2 cd. E. §xxiv, quoted by Lefebvre: *Morceaux choisis*.

ever the effort of Hegelian logic is to "make clear the inadequacy of the notions (which it) considers one by one and the necessity, in order to understand them, of raising each to a more complete notion which surpasses them while integrating them."

One can apply to Hegel what Le Senne said of the philosophy of Hamelin: "Each of the lower terms depends on the higher term, as the abstract on the concrete which is necessary for it to realize itself." The true concrete for Hegel is the Existent with its essence; it is the Totality produced by the synthetic integration of all the abstract moments which are surpassed in it by requiring their complement. In this sense Being will be the most abstract of abstractions and the poorest, if we consider it in itself—that is, by separating it from its surpassing toward Essence. In fact "Being is related to Essence as the immediate to the mediate. Things in general 'are,' but their being consists in manifesting their essence. Being passes into Essence. One can express this by saying, 'Being presupposes Essence.' Although Essence appears in relation to Being as mediated, Essence is nevertheless the true origin. Being returns to its ground; Being is surpassed in Essence."⁴

Thus Being cut from Essence which is its ground becomes "mere empty immediacy." This is how the *Phenomenology of Mind* defines it by presenting pure Being "from the point of view of truth" as the immediate. If the beginning of logic is to be the immediate, we shall then find beginning in *Being*, which is "the indetermination which precedes all determination, the undetermined as the absolute point of departure."

But Being thus undetermined immediately "passes into" its opposite. "This pure Being," writes Hegel in *Logic* (of the *Encyclopaedia*), is "pure abstraction and consequently absolute negation, which taken in its immediate moment is also non-being." Is Nothingness not in fact simple identity with itself, complete emptiness, absence of determinations and of content? Pure being and pure nothingness are then the same thing. Or rather it is true to say that they are different; but "as here the difference is not yet a determined difference—

³ Laporte: *Le Problème de l'Abstraction*, p. 25 (Presses Universitaires, 1940).

⁴ *Treatise on Logic*, written by Hegel between 1808 and 1811, to serve as the basis for his course at the gymnasium at Nuremberg.

for being and non-being constitute the immediate moment such as it is in them—this difference can not be named; it is only a pure opinion.”⁶ This means concretely that “*there is nothing in heaven or on earth which does not contain in itself being and nothingness.*”⁶

It is still too soon for us to discuss the Hegelian concept itself; we need all the results of our study in order to take a position regarding this. It is appropriate here to observe only that being is reduced by Hegel to a signification of the existent. Being is enveloped by essence, which is its foundation and origin. Hegel’s whole theory is based on the idea that a philosophical procedure is necessary in order at the outset of logic to rediscover the immediate in terms of the mediated, the abstract in terms of the concrete on which it is grounded. But we have already remarked that being does not hold the same relation to the phenomenon as the abstract holds to the concrete. Being is not one “structure among others,” one moment of the object; it is the very condition of all structures and of all moments. It is the ground on which the characteristics of the phenomenon will manifest themselves. Similarly it is not admissible that the being of things “consists in manifesting their essence.” For then a being of that being would be necessary. Furthermore if the being of things “consisted” in manifesting their essence, it would be hard to see how Hegel could determine a pure moment of Being where we could not find at least a trace of that original structure. It is true that the understanding determines pure being, isolates and fixes it in its very determinations. But if surpassing toward essence constitutes the original character of being, and if the understanding is limited to “determining and persevering in the determinations,” we can not see precisely how it does not determine being as “consisting in manifesting.”

It might be said in defense of Hegel that every determination is negation. But the understanding in this sense is limited to denying that its object is *other* than it is. That is sufficient doubtless to prevent all dialectical process, but not enough to effect its disappearance at the threshold of its surpassing. In so far as being surpasses itself *toward something else*, it is not subject to the determinations of the understanding. But in so far as it surpasses *itself*—that is, in so far

⁶ Hegel, P. c. E. 988.

⁶ Hegel: *Greater Logic*, chap. I.

as it is in its very depths the origin of its own surpassing—being must on the contrary appear such as it is to the understanding which fixes it in its own determinations. To affirm that being is only what it is would be at least to leave being intact so far as it is its own surpassing. We see here the ambiguity of the Hegelian notion of “surpassing” which sometimes appears to be an upsurge from the inmost depth of the being considered and at other times an external movement by which this being is involved. It is not enough to affirm that the understanding finds in being only what it is; we must also explain how being, which is what it is, can be *only that*. Such an explanation would derive its legitimacy from the consideration of the phenomenon of being as such and not from the negating process of the understanding.

But what needs examination here is especially Hegel’s statement that being and nothingness constitute two opposites, the difference between which on the level of abstraction under consideration is only a simple “opinion.”

To oppose being to nothingness as thesis and antithesis, as Hegel does, is to suppose that they are logically contemporary. Thus simultaneously two opposites arise as the two limiting terms of a logical series. Here we must note carefully that opposites alone can enjoy this simultaneity because they are equally positive (or equally negative). But non-being is not the opposite of being; it is its contradiction. This implies that logically nothingness is subsequent to being since it is being, first posited, then denied. It can not be therefore that being and non-being are concepts with the same content since on the contrary non-being supposes an irreducible mental act. Whatever may be the original undifferentiation of being, non-being is that same undifferentiation *denied*. This permits Hegel to make being pass into nothingness; this is what by implication has introduced negation into his very definition of being. This is self-evident since any definition is negative, since Hegel has told us, making use of a statement of Spinoza’s, that *omnis determinatio est negatio*. And does he not write, “It does not matter what the determination or content is which would distinguish being from something else; whatever would give it a content would prevent it from maintaining itself in its purity. It is pure indetermination and emptiness. *Nothing* can be apprehended in it.”

Thus anyone who introduces negation into being from

outside will discover subsequently that he makes it pass into non-being. But here we have a play on words involving the very idea of negation. For if I refuse to allow being any determination or content, I am nevertheless forced to affirm at least that it *is*. Thus, let anyone deny being whatever he wishes, he can not cause it *not to be*, thanks to the very fact that he denies that it is this or that. Negation can not touch the nucleus of being of Being, which is absolute plenitude and entire positivity. By contrast Non-being is a negation which aims at this nucleus of absolute density. Non-being is denied at the heart of Being. When Hegel writes, "(Being and nothingness) are empty abstractions, and the one is as empty as the other,"¹ he forgets that emptiness is emptiness of something.² Being is empty of all other determination than identity with itself, but non-being is empty of being. In a word, we must recall here against Hegel that being *is* and that nothingness *is not*.

Thus even though being can not be the support of any differentiated quality, nothingness is logically subsequent to it since it supposes being in order to deny it, since the irreducible quality of the *not* comes to add itself to that undifferentiated mass of being in order to release it. That does not mean only that we should refuse to put *being* and *non-being* on the same plane, but also that we must be careful never to posit nothingness as an original abyss from which being arose. The use which we make of the notion of nothingness in its familiar form always supposes a preliminary specification of being. It is striking in this connection that language furnishes us with a nothingness of *things* and a nothingness of human beings.³ But the specification is still more obvious in the majority of instances. We say, pointing to a particular collection of objects, "Touch *nothing*," which means, very precisely, nothing of that collection. Similarly, if we question someone on well-determined events in his private or public life, he may reply, "I know *nothing*." And this nothing includes the totality of the facts on which we questioned him.

¹ P. c. 2 ed. E. §Lxxxvii.

² It is so much the more strange in that Hegel is the first to have noted that "every negation is a determined negation"; that is, it depends on a content.

³ Tr. *Ne . . . rien* = "nothing" as opposed to *ne . . . personne* = "nobody," which are equally fundamental negative expressions. Sartre here conveniently has based his ontology on the exigencies of a purely French syntax.

Even Socrates with his famous statement, "I know that I know nothing," designates by this *nothing* the totality of being considered as Truth.

If adopting for the moment the point of view of naive cosmogonies, we tried to ask ourselves what "was there" before a world existed, and if we replied "nothing," we would be forced to recognize that this "before" like this "nothing" is in effect retroactive. What we deny *today*, we who are established in being, is what there was of being before this being. Negation here springs from a consciousness which is turned back toward the beginning. If we remove from this original emptiness its characteristic of being empty of *this world* and of every whole taking the form of a world, as well as its characteristic of *before*, which presupposes an *after*, then the very negation disappears, giving way to a total indetermination which it would be impossible to conceive, even and especially as a nothingness. Thus reversing the statement of Spinoza, we could say that every negation is determination. This means that being is prior to nothingness and establishes the ground for it. By this we must understand not only that being has a logical precedence over nothingness but also that it is from being that nothingness derives concretely its efficacy. This is what we mean when we say that *nothingness haunts being*. That means that being has no need of nothingness in order to be conceived and that we can examine the idea of it exhaustively without finding there the least trace of nothingness. But on the other hand, nothingness, *which is not*, can have only a borrowed existence, and it gets its being from being. Its nothingness of being is encountered only within the limits of being, and the total disappearance of being would not be the advent of the reign of non-being, but on the contrary the concomitant disappearance of nothingness. *Non-being exists only on the surface of being*.

IV. THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF NOTHINGNESS

THERE is another possible way of conceiving being and nothingness as complements. One could view them as two equally necessary components of the real without making being "pass into" nothingness—as Hegel does—and without