

What Makes a Memphian a Memphian?

An Existential Analysis

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August 3, 2012

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This paper will investigate the relationship between one's self and one's community defined by place using the conceptual tools provided by twentieth century existentialist philosophy, especially the works of Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger. We will direct this investigation in a more concrete way by using the Memphis community as a case study, analyzing how Memphians may factor in the entire Memphis community in constituting their sense of self-identity. I will proceed in a three-part structure. The first part will introduce the relevant concepts in early twentieth century existentialist philosophy; the second part will investigate the Memphian community, articulating how hypothetical Memphians may construct themselves in light of their fellow Memphian community in terms of the "projects" they make for themselves; the final part will conceptualize the preceding investigation, attempting to arrive at a phenomenological understanding of community and how it factors into constituting a self.

I. Existentialism in Philosophical History and Phenomenological Method

In order to apply concepts from the existentialist tradition in our investigation of the relation between community and self, it is first necessary to elucidate these concepts. But *before we can do that*, we must understand first how existentialism fits into the broader history of philosophy and what assertions differentiate it from earlier philosophies.

The philosophers Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are often regarded as the originators of existentialist thought, although in a far less systematic way than their twentieth century heirs. They make the radical move of shifting our philosophical attention away from human essences in an abstract sense and onto the actually existing individual. This move is best explicated by contrast with prior philosophies. Since the time of the ancient Greeks, philosophers have

attempted to arrive at the human essence—that is, what makes a human a human (or, in more technical language, what the necessary and sufficient conditions are for ‘humanhood’). The familiar notions we frequently encounter in philosophical history include the Platonic divisions of the soul, the Aristotelian conception of human being as rational animal, the Renaissance notion as ‘in the image of God’ (*Imago Dei*), and the Cartesian notion as the synthesis of mind substance and body (physical) substance. What is characteristic of these attempts is that they treat the human being in a highly abstract way, stripping her from her material circumstances and elevating her to the status of a theoretical essence. To be a human, then, is to merely be an occurrence of an essence. The existentialist, however, feels that this is a misguided approach. The human rather is necessarily placed *within a situation*, so any attempt at understanding the human must account for its necessary situatedness. This implies then that we cannot find a proper understanding of the human by looking on the level of *essence* (an abstract notion described in the language of universals), but we must shift our focus to the *concrete, actually existing individual*.

This shift in focus is beautifully exemplified in Kierkegaard’s account¹ of the biblical story of God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Without getting steeped in the details of the story, Kierkegaard (under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio) describes Abraham and what he had to do to be considered the Father of Faith. Kierkegaard stipulates that Abraham must embrace a paradox, otherwise we external observers must deem Abraham either a madman or a murderer. Briefly, the paradox can be described as a conflict between Abraham’s obligation to the *universal* realm of the ethical—viz., the moral requirement of the father to love (and obviously not kill) his child, which, importantly, *everyone* can understand—and Abraham’s

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, “Problema I,” *Fear and Trembling; Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 54-67.

direct duty to God, which in this case appears to violate the ethical. The crucial point here is that we *cannot hope to understand* what it must be like for Abraham to embrace this paradox from his point of view (or any point of view, for that matter). Since the ethical realm and its universally accessible and understandable laws is *suspended* in this case, we are forced to admit that Abraham's experience is a complete and utter *singularity* that cannot be understood by anyone (which would require for universals to apply). In this way, Kierkegaard shows that universal categories don't (and *can't*) offer an adequate explanation of Abraham, and any possible understanding of him (if not ruled out *a priori*) will require a focus on Abraham as an actually existing individual.

We find much more systematic expositions of understanding the human being as necessarily situated in the twentieth century philosophers Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre. The example with Kierkegaard, however, is sufficient to give us a hint as to what we mean by focusing on the actually existing individual. Before we can understand Heidegger and Sartre, it is first necessary to understand the sort of methodology they inherit from their common teacher, Edmund Husserl, namely, phenomenological method.

Let us begin our investigation of phenomenological method with Husserl and the philosophical tradition he inherits. Husserl begins with the famous *cogito* of Descartes—the “I think, I am.” For Descartes, this thinking subject, or ego, was a passive observer that represented the outside world internally in the form of mental phenomena. Still, there is a problem as to what standard can we use to judge whether our mental representations *correspond* to the external world.² Kant takes up this position but adds the idea that the ego is not merely passive but also *constitutive* of the phenomena that the ego perceives. That is, without the contribution of the ego,

² See René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1961).

the phenomena would be an unorganized input of experiential data. The ego then literally *makes sense* of the phenomena. We are still left with the idea of a so-called ‘thing-in-itself’ that somehow lies behind the appearances/phenomena (especially articulated by Kant), but by Husserl’s time the idea of such a thing-in-itself becomes altogether superfluous.³

In Husserlian phenomenology,⁴ we begin by performing the “phenomenological reduction.” What this involves is that we limit our philosophical discourse to the level of phenomena, meaning that we don’t posit any external reality that the phenomena stands in relation to as *other*. This *does not* mean that we say such an external reality does not exist (it may) but simply that we don’t concern ourselves with it; it is not relevant to a discussion of phenomena, especially if we can’t be sure that an external reality plays any constitutive role in our experience of phenomena. Husserl also says that our philosophical talk about phenomena is different in kind than scientific talk. In scientific discourse, we adopt the methodology of the empiricist, collecting data, making hypotheses, and performing both inductive and deductive reasoning. Such methods are not useful for phenomenology, for these methods require a “going beyond” what is immediately given in phenomenal experience (that is the nature of inferring). If we are to conduct phenomenology appropriately and thus limit ourselves to our immediate phenomenal perceptions, our methodology then is not one of inference but rather one of *description*. In description, we do not infer anything *beyond* what is immediately given. In phenomenal description then we do not go beyond the phenomena that is immediately experienced (consistent with the phenomenological reduction) but rather concern ourselves with describing the general structural features that make up our phenomenal experience.

³ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴ See Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, trans. J.N. Findlay (London: Routledge, 2001) and Edmund Husserl, *General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1982).

A key feature that Husserl discovers about consciousness—and that Jean-Paul Sartre takes up—is that consciousness is always intentional. That is, consciousness is always *about* or *of* something, which is what we mean when we say consciousness “takes an object.” It is incoherent to speak of a consciousness which is merely conscious without an object. The nature of consciousness is that it can only exist in relation to something else, namely the object of consciousness, and it can *never* take itself as an object in a positional way. That is not to say that consciousness can never be an object for consciousness. Sartre stresses that, if a consciousness is to be an object of another consciousness, we must recognize that the second consciousness which is conscious of the first consciousness is transformed. It becomes “reflective” consciousness, taking a “pre-reflective” consciousness as its object; however, at the same time, these two consciousnesses are not identical. We may notice here that the terminology is in need of some clarification. For Sartre, the human being is identified with consciousness (whether or not we find this plausible is another matter and will only be tangential to our purposes here). Husserl and Descartes, however, posit an ego (the “I” of “I am”) which *has* consciousness, but is *not* consciousness. It is a commonplace then for these philosophers, especially Husserl, to speak of multiple consciousnesses to one ego. The principle of individuation for multiple consciousnesses is the differences in objects for consciousness along a temporal dimension. The ego plays a unifying role, collecting the individual consciousnesses as being perceived by a single “I.” For Sartre, there is no ego which unifies the individual consciousnesses. The human being is simply the totality of consciousnesses. (What constitutes the unity for the multitude of consciousnesses will not be a focus for this paper, although it does constitute a genuine problem, especially for Sartre, for understanding conscious unity if he dismisses the concept of the ego.)

A final word on intentionality. Husserl found intentionality to be such an important feature for consciousness that he considered it our key to discovering the essences of objects.⁵ In taking an object for consciousness, like a red apple, we may perform an eidetic reduction. We notice that in the red apple, the redness is a quality that we see recurring in other objects that is not limited to our phenomenal experience of the red apple in the here and now. The redness, we say, can be said of and found in numerous experiences, and we can think of encountering redness in an infinite number of possible experiences. The entirety of our experience of redness, however, does not exhaust redness, meaning that even if we never have another conscious experience of redness, it is still conceivable, in principle, that I could have another experience of redness. We find then that Red, as an inexhaustible infinity, is a “transcendent” feature of our experience. We are able to go beyond the immediate phenomena and posit a transcendent essence, Red, which is the unifying principle for all possible experiences of red. Importantly, we have limited ourselves to a descriptive phenomenologist account and have not performed any logical inference or deduction. Through the phenomenological method, we are able to arrive at an essence of any entity without recourse to positing a problematic noumena which lies behind the appearance. This is one of the most important advantages of Husserlian phenomenology, and it is a feature that Sartre takes up frequently in his magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*.

II. Modern Existentialism

After the nineteenth century works of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the twentieth century brings the systematic existentialism of Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre. We have already seen in our example with Kierkegaard what we mean by a shift to the actually existing

⁵ Sartre gives the following example with Red. See *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 1-7.

individual. We discovered that the first-person, non-abstract experience is of primary importance to these thinkers.

Martin Heidegger gives us our first idea of what the twentieth century existentialist project looks like, and many of the original concepts he introduces will help us in understanding Sartre's conceptual scheme, which will be our main tool for this investigation. In Heidegger's magnum opus, *Being and Time*,⁶ Heidegger embarks on his famous investigation into the "meaning of being," a question that he never answers but one that nonetheless leads him to developing entirely original categories for understanding the human being. Heidegger believed that, in all of our judgments and dealings with the world, there is an unarticulated, tacit presupposition of there being Being—that is, that which *grounds* all entities as entities. In more Heideggerian language, when we say 'the ball is round,' there is an implicit assumption of Being when we use the word 'is'—even when we say merely that 'the ball is.' He calls this implicit assumption a 'pre-ontological' understanding of Being, meaning that it has not yet been articulated in a properly phenomenological way. Being, for Heidegger, is that ground for which all possible predication gets its foundation as well as the ground for all other varieties of cognition. Those familiar with the history of ancient philosophy might at first be tempted to believe that this is not an original problem. For instance, Aristotle had already articulated a concept of substance as that 'stuff' in which properties inhere, prompting plenty of debates over whether objects should be conceived as properties inhering in a unified substance or merely as a collection of properties without positing a substance to unite them. For Heidegger, however, this does not get at the meaning of Being. The being of substance articulated by Aristotle is a derivative kind of being where objects are conceived in isolation in terms of their properties and without reference to things outside of them (what Heidegger calls the being of "presence-at-

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).

hand”). Being, on the other hand, is even more foundational than the being of presence-at-hand, and Being supposedly grounds all other ways of being. It is this Being that Heidegger wants to get to the bottom of, but unfortunately never does.

Heidegger’s project was not completely without fail. Convinced that our clue to the meaning of Being lay in the analysis of the human being,⁷ the completed, published portion of *Being and Time* embarks largely upon the “existential analytic of Dasein.” The terminology is unusual here, and clarification is necessary. In the original German, Heidegger uses the term *Existenz* (translated ‘existence’) to refer specifically to the way of being of human beings (or more accurately, Dasein). Human beings ‘exist’ *because* their way of being is that of Dasein (that is the nature of *Existenz*); however, tools and materials do *not* ‘exist’⁸ in our strict definition, for they do not have Dasein’s way of being. The natural next question is obviously ‘What is Dasein and how do we characterize its way of being?’ In a way what, or who, is Dasein is the question for the actual text of *Being and Time*, but roughly Dasein is essentially that being who has its own being as an issue for it. That is, Dasein necessarily comports itself in some way in light of its own being. It sees itself in a certain way, “thrown” into a situation, and reacts and modifies its conduct according to its own self-regard. In Heidegger’s words, “*The ‘essence’ of Dasein lies in its existence.*”⁹ As we can see, the essence of Dasein does not specify a human physiology; however, the human being is the only kind of being in our world (that we are certain

⁷ It is important to note that Heidegger does not strictly identify this clue as lying with the human being explicitly. The term he uses is *Dasein*, (English translation: ‘being-there’; used in a peculiar sense in the German so left it is left without translation) which is not a rigid designator for the human being. The human being, however, is the only instance of Dasein in the actual world. More on this later.

⁸ Their ways of being are known as “readiness-to-hand” and “presence-at-hand,” respectively. The former mode of being is characterized by a holistic network of equipment, each element implying a function in terms of another element. The latter mode is characterized by an atomistic, substance regard, treating each member in isolation from its fellow members (often taken in scientific inquiry) and understanding it in terms of its internal material constitution without reference to a function. Note that a single entity can be regarded in more than one way of being: A chair as ready-to-hand functions as for-sitting-on as part of a totality of other equipment, but a chair as present-at-hand is composed of wood, screws, and the like.

⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 67.

of) that has its own being as an issue for it. We can, then, establish a contingent identity between Dasein and the human being.

For the purposes of this paper, we will not concern ourselves with Heidegger and his categories directly. We will take the lesson, though, that the understanding of the human being is completely *different in kind*, not degree, than understanding any other entity (that is not Dasein). The methodologies we employ to understand objects of scientific inquiry or equipment are unlike how we understand the human being. To be sure, we may employ these kinds of investigation perhaps to understand human physiology, psychology, etc., but, in order to provide an *exhaustive* account of the human being, it is necessary to understand the human being in its unique aspect as that being which has its own being as an issue (viz., Dasein). This is the point of departure for Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*.

Jean-Paul Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, takes up the problem of understanding the human being as that being who has its own being as an issue; however, he investigates this problem in a manner that is more faithful to Husserlian phenomenology. To get ourselves acquainted with Sartre's method of understanding the human being, it will be tremendously beneficial to get familiar with his fairly simple ontology, which, despite its simplicity, gets presented in confusing language. Taking up Husserl's phenomenological method, Sartre posits that there are two kinds of being¹⁰ in the world: the being-in-itself and the being-for-itself. The being-in-itself refers to that transcendent being of the phenomena. However, as proper phenomenologists who restrict ourselves to descriptions of experience, the transcendent being for

¹⁰ Note that Sartre is not interested in the question of the meaning of Being like Heidegger, so the term 'being' will never refer to the ground of entities as entities or of all possible cognition. A being for Sartre will merely designate that it should be differentiated from another kind of being, but there is no tacit reference to a foundational Being in Sartre's ontology.

Sartre—as for Husserl—does not refer to some extra-phenomenal noumena behind the appearance. Rather, the transcendent is *disclosed* by the phenomena. In Sartre’s phrase:

The appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it *is* the essence. The essence of an existent is no longer a property sunk in the cavity of this existent; it is the manifest law which presides over the succession of its appearances, it is the principle of the series.¹¹

However, when we regard the transcendent, the being of the phenomenon, the being-in-itself (all are identical) and consider them without specifying it as an object of consciousness, we are tempted to differentiate among the ‘beings-in-themselves’ as entities and distinct objects. In other words, even without a cognition, we regard objects as being separate from one another. I urge us to avoid that temptation and to consider being-in-itself as completely undifferentiated positivity, a transcendent without individuation among elements. There are no “beings-in-themselves” without a witness, only being-in-itself in complete positivity. This stipulation’s necessity will become clear after the explication of Sartre’s second ontological structure: consciousness, or being-for-itself.

Recall our discussion above concerning Husserl’s discovery of intentionality as a necessary feature of consciousness: Consciousness is always conscious *of* something. This implies that consciousness has a problematic identification, unlike the being-in-itself. The being-in-itself, being capable of definition without relation to something other than itself, has an unproblematic identification with itself: It is what it is. Consciousness on the other hand *necessarily* emerges as having a relation to something other than itself, namely the object of which it is conscious. The impossibility of consciousness taking itself as its object only amplifies

¹¹ *Being and Nothingness*, 5.

the problem, making an other necessary for its own manifestation.¹² We will concern ourselves now with what Sartre finds to be another important feature of consciousness, unarticulated by Husserl: its power to negate and to intuit nothingness. As we said, being-in-itself in Sartre's ontology is complete undifferentiated positivity. In order for something to appear as a distinct, isolated entity, consciousness's power of negation comes into play, and this will be made quite obvious immediately. If we identify an object in our experience, say a table, then by our identification we have excluded all the things around the table from participating in the being of the table: The floor is not the table; the walls are not the table; the air is not the table. In bringing the table under our attention, we 'nihilate' (that is, negate, make non-being, exclude from attention) all the things that are not the table, considering it as the 'ground' upon which the table as a distinct entity reveals itself. In pure being-in-itself without the gaze of consciousness, differentiating a table as a table is strictly impossible because the necessary negation made upon all things *that are not the table* cannot be done.

This is enough to elucidate what the power of negation is, but further phenomenological description is necessary to reveal an intuition of nothingness. Our natural inclinations lead us to believe that we cannot have an intuition of nothingness: That is, it seems incoherent to say that we have a *perception* of nothing, an *experience* of nothing. Rather, it seems more appropriate to say that the way we encounter the world presents the world as pure positivity: There are things, solid or fluid, that enter our perception, and these things constitute our world. This is the attitude that Sartre is attacking, offering the countersuggestion that nothingness actually *can* be experienced as a phenomena. His famous example is the case of looking for our friend Pierre in a

¹² The implication is that there is no possible world in which all that exists is a single consciousness, for taking itself as an object and taking no object are both precluded by the essence of consciousness. Consciousness must exist with something else, being-in-itself.

café to *discover* that Pierre is not there.¹³ Let's examine what happens in our perception. After entering in the café, we enter into the mode of looking-for-Pierre, and in this act we 'nihilate' the environment of the café: It becomes the ground upon which we expect to find Pierre and is thus excluded from our attention. However, in fact, Pierre is *not there*, and although we *expect* to find him, we never do. In order to have the cognition that "Pierre is not there," we must actually *discover* this phenomenon, otherwise we would remain static in expectation. Sartre describes Pierre's non-being as a nothingness flickering into our perception:

This figure which slips constantly between my look and the solid, real objects of the café is precisely a perceptual 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.¹⁴

Without this perception of a nothingness, it seems impossible to get ourselves out of the mode of expectation and conclude that Pierre is in fact not there. Otherwise, if nothingness cannot be experienced, we would keep encountering the world as pure positivity, awaiting the eventual fulfillment of our expectation (which will never happen). We know, of course, that this is not how we operate in the world. We must correct our inclinations and realize that the world we live in, our being-in-the-world (in Heidegger's phrase), is not one of pure positivity but a synthesis of being and nothingness. The for-itself, consciousness, is a nothingness and that being by which nothingness comes into the world. Sartre describes as that being which "is what it is not and is

¹³ *Being and Nothingness*, 40-42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

not what it is.”¹⁵ This is an example of an internal negation. Whereas an external negation (like how the floor is not the table, above) does not affect the being of any of its members (the table is still a table even without a floor to differentiate it from), an internal negation is one that affects the being. The for-itself *is* in the sense that all that can be said of it is that *it is not the in-itself*; that is what determines the for-itself as an entity and gives it its kind of being.

All of this so far appears pretty far removed from our original purpose of examining the relation between community and self under existential-phenomenological categories. However, an introduction to existential ontology as well as an elucidation with consciousness power to negate are all necessary to properly consider how consciousness creates a self. Let us consider now the distinction to be made between our selves and consciousness,¹⁶ for they are not identical concepts. In ordinary language, we tend to confuse the two entities and treat them as one. For instance, I might say “I see a chair across the room” and I might also say “I am a philosopher.” It appears then, according to natural language, we treat both “I” here as the same thing; however, I will make a distinction here to show that each instance “I” has a unique sense and different referent than the other one: The first “I” is the “I of consciousness”¹⁷ and the second “I” is the “I of self.” Consciousness, in a phenomenological sense characterized above, is that entity which experiences and has an intuition of its object. We may also add that *there are no other properties than that*. It is simply and only *that which experiences*. It is still *me*, as in me the consciousness, but it is not the *me* the self. The self is an objective entity that may be an object for consciousness. I build myself through my actions, beliefs, desires, and considering them as my

¹⁵ The syntax seems to reveal a contradiction. It is logically impossible for a property to both be affirmed and denied in a given object. However, this is a misinterpretation of the construction. The for-itself is not *what* it is not (i.e., the in-itself). It is rather nothing other than the nihilation of *what* it is not. Let’s consider “what it is not” as a unit (i.e., “It is not in-itself”). What Sartre is saying is that the *determining, defining quality* of the for-itself is that it *is not in-itself*. What it is is constituted by what it is not. It is what it is not.

¹⁶ Recall that, for Sartre, the human reality is identical to consciousness—there is no ego that *has* consciousness.

¹⁷ A Husserlian or a Cartesian would say that this is the “I, the ego” which “has consciousness.” We will limit ourselves to Sartre’s ontology here and not introduce the ego as distinct from consciousness.

own. The distinction between consciousness and self is apparent when we consider the problem of other minds. Another's mind, another's consciousness, will never be experienced by me; however, without positing whether there is a consciousness for a given person, I can still speak of that person's self insofar as I am concerned with her personality. The self then is a public object and may in principle be observed by all. This will be an important distinction in our investigation between the relation between community and self. We seek how community constitutes a self in the objective third person sense.

Without getting steeped in the details of the structures of the for-itself, all of which are illuminating and important in themselves, I will now jump to Sartre's discussion of the for-itself as a freedom, the process that a for-itself, a consciousness, makes herself who she is. Consciousness is not only that which brings nothingness into the world so that the world appears for consciousness as objects invested with meaning and value. It is *itself* a nothingness, a nihilation of Being. Whereas the being-in-itself has an unproblematic identification as the being that *is*, in absolute plenitude, consciousness can only be described in terms of a not-Being. That is, what makes nothingness what it is is the fact that it is not Being; however, as not Being, it has its own kind of being in its own right, namely being as a nothingness. Again, the for-itself "is what it is not and is not what it is." This does not mean that the for-itself is *what* it is not (namely, that it is Being, for that is a contradiction); rather, what this is means is that what the for-itself is *is that it is not (Being)*—reduced to the phrase "it is not." The fact that the for-itself is not Being, namely a nothingness, is *all* that can be said of the for-itself in terms of its being.¹⁸

¹⁸ The construction seems deliberately misleading as if Sartre simply wants to confuse us. It appears actually much easier to understand if we regard it *as if* he were omitting the verb "to exist." However, remember that, for the existentialists, "to exist" is specific to the way of being of a particular individual (*Dasein* for Heidegger), so if we are to be consistent, we cannot use the word "exist" in a discussion on the plane of being and nothingness. We must suppress our inclination to modify the construction to say, "Nothingness, as a negation of Being, does not *exist*, since Being exists." Strictly speaking, Being does *not exist*; it *is*. It is unusual that we use the verb "to be" without assigning a predicate to a subject, but our ontology forbids us from saying that Being exists. Unfortunately we must

Nothingness, then, is logically dependent (not to be confused with temporally dependent) on Being for its own being; for nothingness must have Being to nihilate in order for its own being.

Sartre also describes nothingness as desiring to be like the in-itself, and this desire will be expedient in elucidating how nothingness is also a freedom.¹⁹ Nothingness, insofar as it is a lack of Being, a nihilation of Being, nonetheless desires to be a part of Being, of being-in-itself. The unattainable ideal is to be some magical entity which is wholly in-itself and wholly for-itself, two mutually incompatible ways of being. To be as a for-itself implies a nothingness, a power of negation; to be as an in-itself is all positivity. There is no room in a being which is wholly in-itself to have a nothingness enter into it, so the common transcendent end of human reality is in principle unreachable. We see this desire exemplified in Sartre's examples of the one in bad faith, the lying to oneself in which the deceiver knows at the same time what he is concealing from himself. In the existentially relevant sense, the for-itself enters into bad faith when it considers itself as wholly in-itself, subject to deterministic causes as any other 'thing' would be. The phrase "I am not responsible for this, I am merely a [thing]" (where thing could be an occupation, a position, etc.) shows the typical flight from responsibility that conditions every for-itself in bad faith. Nonetheless, this project of bad faith—insofar as it reveals to us how we posit a transcendent, future ideal as an end for us—is helpful in illuminating the structures of the process of self-creating, which will be relevant for our purpose of arriving at the Memphian being.

ascribe peculiar senses to our limited vocabulary, often resulting in torturous phrasing. The sense of *is* in the phrase "Being is" indicates that Being is that which is complete, undifferentiated positivity capable of identification with itself, of being what it is. At the same time however, Being *does not exist* for it does not take the form of a particular individual (as a particular for-itself does).

¹⁹ Note that the relations being established are *all* of identity. That is, consciousness = nothingness = for-itself = freedom; consciousness does not *have* freedom, does not spring from nothingness. It *is* freedom and nothingness. The terminological distinctions help to clarify different aspects of, different ways of looking at, the same thing.

The self of the for-itself is not a *substance*, is not a *thing* like the in-itself. It is a *process*. The for-itself has no other self other than that self which it constantly makes for it. It is through this process that the world emerges for the for-itself invested in meaning and value. Let us look at the structure of this process, which is the structure of a project and of a freedom. As a particular consciousness, a for-itself, we are immediately acquainted with our own situation that is present for us—we may call this situation our *facticity*. Insofar as we are immediately acquainted with it, the in-itself has no value but retains its quality purely as an in-itself: It is what it is. Now in an act of freedom (which is no different than an act of consciousness, an act of a nothingness, or an act of a for-itself), we posit as an object for consciousness some future, transcendent²⁰ ideal which has not yet been realized. With respect to this future, unrealized object, we return back to our original situation, although, at this point in the logical sequence, values have been conferred upon it in light of the transcendent posited object. Our present facticity quite literally appears for consciousness in an altogether new way, and it was only possible through the process of positing a transcendent future object as an *end* for consciousness. What has just been described is the structure of an internal negation: a thing which *is what it is* becomes reevaluated in terms of what it is not, such that its new being is colored by negation. The crescent moon only appears *as crescent* if we posit a full moon which is not yet realized, coloring the presently crescent moon in a negative light; otherwise, the crescent moon is merely the moon appearing in a certain shape with a certain light, etc. In other words, it is conceived *as pure positivity*,²¹ lacking nothing in its being. Consciousness too has the structure of an internal negation: Its way of being is only possible in that it is *not* Being as positivity.

²⁰ Transcendent here means little more than that the transcendent thing is an object for consciousness. Recall the discussion of Husserl's intentionality above.

²¹ Careful readers may notice what appears to be a contradiction. One objects, "How can we conceive of the (crescent) moon at all as an object unless we negate all things that are *not* the moon? It seems then that the

The process of the project will become clearer through the example. Let's consider the case of an academic research project (though, to be fair, the name used need not have the word "project" in it) to elucidate the structure of an existential project. As a consciousness, as a freedom, as a nothingness, we project into the future and take as our object the transcendent completed research project. We may envisage a paper, a presentation, a short story, a documentary, etc. and from the outset of our research project, this transcendent object has the status of non-being. The idea of non-being shouldn't be hard to grasp here: It is that which is simply not yet realized. We at present do not have a finished product of our research, but this object can still guide us in how we conduct ourselves and appropriate our facticity. In light of this unrealized project, our consciousness begins to confer value upon the givens of our present situation as we work to realize the end, the completed research project. A certain source appears *as helpful*, a biography *appears off-topic for our purposes*, a quotation brings an important new concept to the table *for my project*, and so on. These values are attributed to these things, these beings-in-themselves, with respect to our projected future end, the completed research product, and conversely these values would simply not appear if there were no future product to be realized.²² So is the case with all values: Being-in-itself no longer enters consciousness as inert, static matter but rather appear with a certain value with respect to a future end, as an internal negation. This is the nature of all our projects of freedom.

Finally, Sartre finds that our projects are traceable to an original, spontaneous choice that the for-itself makes. Our projects may be organized into a synthetic unity in which the world

apprehension of the moon necessarily implies a negative coloring." This negation, however, has the character of an external negation. To say that the moon *is not* the sky does not affect the being of the moon at all. To say that the moon *is crescent* is to imply that the moon is not what it could be (or what it is, in a tenseless sense) and thus seen as *deficient*, and it is only in this *internal negation* that we say that the apprehension of the crescent moon is colored by negation, for it refers to its own non-being and thus *is what it is not*.

²² Quite literally *all* value implies a future transcendent object. Even if we do not wish to realize some product of research, a book appearing as to-be-read (not as helpful-for-my-research) refers to a transcendent state in which I learn the contents of the book.

presents itself to me, my consciousness, as a place filled with objects of value and meaning, referring to each other in innumerable contexts²³ in light of my original choice which constitutes the being that I am. And what I am is never realized in the manner of the static being-in-itself, but rather is always a process of a going-towards, a transcendence toward some state which in the end can never be realized (even if we reach a significant amount of secondary ends). We will not concern ourselves with the idea of the original, fundamental choice in the present analysis. We now have the conceptual tools we need to understand what it is to be a Memphian, understood not as a fundamental choice (for no one completely, and hardly spontaneously, identifies with their community entirely), but as a secondary project which forms part of the synthetic unity of the being that we are. Let us now turn our attention to the matter of understanding the Memphian in the conceptual scheme of existentialism, as a project which takes the elements of the community and place of Memphis as the given of facticity, the situation, which the for-itself transcends only in order to reinterpret its community to make the being which it is. We will then extrapolate our findings and see if we may find a relation between community and self-making in general.

III. Memphian Being-in-the-World

In what follows we will explore how a person can be situated in the community of Memphis, confronted with the facts of the city's situation, and make for himself a Memphian project, a self that the person is and must constantly realize. However, we must restrain ourselves from thinking of our task as articulating what the Memphis "essence" is, for such an undertaking

²³ This idea is undoubtedly an application of Heidegger's articulation of the phenomenon of the being of readiness-to-hand, in which things/tools appear in a holistic manner, never understood in terms of their material constitution, but only as always as related in the manner of doing or affecting to something else. A hammer is for-hammering, which refers to a nail to be hammered, which eventually implies an entire complex network of equipmental relations, but never with reference to *what* the thing is in a scientific, substance analysis. This network of equipmentality is for Sartre the world of meaning and value in our being-in-the-world.

is inconsistent with the conceptual scheme we have just acquainted ourselves with. That is, we do not seek to arrive at a statement of the form, “The Memphian is always necessarily a subject with qualities x , behaviors y , and beliefs z ,” such that *all Memphians* would be subsumed under it.²⁴ Rather our task here is a hypothetical exercise of considering a person, a consciousness which has its own being as an issue for it, confronted with the *facts* of Memphis and what a particular project of the Memphian might look like. Our result will not be an *essence* such that all Memphians must have the project and the qualities presented here; rather, it will be an example of how a particular consciousness, a specific for-itself, might *make itself* in such way by interpreting the facts of Memphis in the creation of its own being. For ease of expression, we will use the word “I” in what follows to refer to our hypothetical consciousness.

Fortunately the place and community of Memphis is colored by such a rich, unique history together with a texture of contrasting backgrounds that it should make our task of elucidating the community defined by place all the more clearer. At this point we should make explicit what we mean by the “place of Memphis.” At its most basic, fundamental level, the concept of place refers to our immediate spatiotemporal situation. In existential terms, my place constitutes part of my facticity, my relation to what is given. Although I am radically free as a nothingness, I am nonetheless “condemned to be free,” meaning that I cannot choose not to be free (for a refusal of choice is nevertheless choice) and I cannot choose to not *exist* without also ceasing to be a for-itself (as in death). Our necessary and omnipresent freedom does not entail then that it is within my power to do whatever I please; rather, it means that I will never be

²⁴ The realizability of such an undertaking is quite far-fetched anyway. A Memphian *essence*, assuming the concept is internally consistent, that takes into account all the various demographics that make up Memphis would intuitively be all but the most general statement possible. Our focus will be the concrete individual, which cannot encompass all these demographics. The question is more appropriately phrased “What is it for *me* to be a Memphian?”

presented with a situation in which I cannot exercise my freedom in some capacity.²⁵ Since the for-itself cannot choose to *not exist* as a for-itself and since a for-itself's existence is necessarily conditioned as existing *within a situation*, it follows then that my situation, which includes my community, constitutes the *givens* of my being, the *facticity* which I must stand in some relation to.

Of course, considering Memphis merely as occupying some spatiotemporal dimension misses the point of what makes Memphis what it is, a city which contains a tapestry of cultural backgrounds. The city, the people I encounter—which are also other consciousnesses—its past history are as intrinsic to the community of Memphis as its mere geographic location and so too constitute my facticity. We will concern ourselves mainly with elements of these kinds in our project of the Memphian.

To begin, I will present opinions on what it is that makes a Memphian a Memphian from authorities whose comments about the Memphian way of life should not go unnoticed. This will serve to guide us in understanding the Memphian in terms of an existential phenomenology. When asked about what makes a Memphian, Shelby county mayor Mark Luttrell identified three factors that characterize Memphians, “heritage ... culture ... tradition.”²⁶ His comments on heritage reveal a Memphian that pays special attention to what Memphis has been and the direction that its going, an orientation with regard to the future. The special Memphian for him is one that loves the community despite its deficiencies. Memphis city mayor A C Wharton, Jr., in a letter to Steve Forbes,²⁷ expresses similar sentiments:

²⁵ If something appears as a *limit* to freedom, that something appearing as such is necessarily conditioned by an act of freedom. In Sartre's example, a crag only appears as impossible-to-scale insofar as I have a project of freedom of scaling this or that freedom. The crag appearing as a limit implies a project of freedom which makes it so.

²⁶ Mark Luttrell, interview by the author, digital audio recording, Memphis, TN., July 24, 2012.

²⁷ A C Wharton, “An Open Letter to Steve Forbes,” *From the Mayor's Desk*. March 1, 2010, <http://mayoracwharton.wordpress.com/2010/03/01/an-open-letter-to-steve-forbes/>.

Memphis is not a miserable city, not by any definition, not by any metric....

Memphis is a city of innovation. The accomplishments of our past are outshone only by the brilliance of what's happening right now in our arts and business sectors.... **Memphis is a city of resilience....** For all the problems you might show me, I can point to a legion of government agencies, non-profit organizations, churches, volunteer groups, and grassroots activists working together as one Memphis to find the solutions.... We know too that our city's song is not complete. It is being written every day, and it is sung by a chorus of hopeful, energetic voices that will resonate for generations.

Susan Ellis, an editor of the Memphis Flyer, states, "Memphians kind of have a sort of gentile stubbornness and a wild, wild creativity."²⁸ Indeed, Memphis has strong associations with its blues tradition, which Mayor Luttrell remarks. In Robert Gordon's book, *It Came from Memphis*, he describes the music tradition of the city, often contrasting it with the inauthenticity of more commercially successful styles of music.

The bluesmen did not stop making music after the 1920s and 1930s; they were just no longer recorded. Their material did not hinge on the critical acclaim they may have briefly enjoyed. Rather, it was extension of their being, and if a record man was willing to part with a ten-dollar bill to hear them do their thing, that was fine. But if not, it didn't stop the music.²⁹

He describes the music of Memphis as being a sort of cultural medium: "The initial area recordings were the fiber optics of their time, enabling people to experience another culture without leaving home to do it."³⁰

²⁸ Susan Ellis, interview by the author, digital audio recording, Memphis, TN., July 20, 2012.

²⁹ Robert Gordon, *It Came from Memphis* (New York: Pocket Books, 1995), 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

Gordon also describes the palpable socioeconomic tensions in Memphis. Blues is appropriately described as an originally African-American form of music; Gordon, as does many others, describes the development of rock and roll as the white man's attempt at playing black music, but it is obviously not a smooth translation and the result is obviously not identical to the original. Nonetheless these two styles of music coexist in one place and community in Memphis alongside the racial tension that unfortunately colors the city to this day. Mayors Luttrell and Wharton certainly probably had this tension in mind when describing a united forward-thinking Memphian with an eye toward the past.

Far from being an exhaustive account of the elements that characterize Memphis, what we have described thus far will be enough for me (hypothetically) to express a Memphian project in a properly existential-phenomenological way. Before we articulate this, let us enumerate what we have discovered so far³¹: (1) A Memphian knows its past; (2) A Memphian works toward improving the future; (3) Memphis has strong associations with the blues and rock-and-roll; (4) Memphis is colored by racial tension. Obviously, there is much, much more to be said about the place and community of Memphis, but an account of a person, a for-itself, that would encompass *everything there is to know* about Memphis in its definition³² of itself would be counterproductive for our ultimate purpose of elucidating the relation between community and self.

Let us suppose that I see myself as a Memphian in the sense that I am aware of Memphis' troubling history of difficult race relations and actively work toward improving them. We will concern ourselves then with outlining a description with aspects (1) and (2) in mind. What do we make of this in terms of an existential phenomenology?

³¹ Again, this certainly does not apply to *all* Memphians.

³² Not to mention that this would be *extraordinary* human being who provides meaning for herself encompassing every facet of the Memphis community.

To begin, Sartre has some rather direct remarks on how the nature of time is revealed to us in an existential sense. The for-itself as a temporally extended being retains its character of being what it is not and not being what it is. If I were once an athlete but have since become overly sedentary, my former athlete-being gets viewed in a different light. I am now an athlete in the mode of *was*; my athlete-being is now not what I am. But insofar as I *was* an athlete and am presently *not* an athlete, as a free, conscious *nothingness* this not-being-an-athlete constitutes what I am. I am an athlete in the mode of not being an athlete. My athlete self then becomes a part of my *facticity*: I of course *cannot change* my once being-an-athlete to make it so that I have been sedentary my whole life. That change is quite literally *barred* from my freedom, making it a given, a member of my facticity, which colors all of the possible projects I may undertake.

How do we extend this insofar as Memphis is *my* city, including it in my being-a-Memphian? Does its past enter into my facticity? Insofar as I consider myself a Memphian, *yes it does*. As a Memphian, as a for-itself which freely considers the city of Memphis as *my* place and *my* community, its facticity becomes my facticity. Let's examine this in detail. The part of Memphis history that we will concern ourselves with in this example will be its past troubling race relations which still color the city today. The city is famous for playing host to significant events in the African-American Civil Rights Movement, perhaps most recognizably as the site at which Civil Rights Leader Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Since then and other events of the movement have become past, we may say, tentatively, that race relations have improved significantly and open hostilities from white people to black people on the basis of being black is no longer tolerable. If I am to consider myself as a true Memphian, can I ignore this history? Can I ignore the *change* of the once-accepted racial segregation and intolerances of the past into a more acceptable state of racial relations now (but perhaps still needs even more significant

improvement, which we will examine later)? I find that my being as a Memphian is necessarily tied to the city's history and I will have to account for it somehow in my being-a-Memphian. Otherwise I believe that I will fall into the error of bad faith, concealing the unpleasant facts of Memphis from myself which I nevertheless *know*. As a Memphian, my city gains its negative colors in that it is *no longer* its past: It is in the mode of not being a city which accepts intolerance. If we reject this negative characterization, then the city as *my city* loses its qualities as an extension of the for-itself. Memphis becomes a collection of buildings, of streets, of sidewalks, etc. *completely devoid* of all value previously bestowed upon it, its elements related only through a series of external negations (i.e., of the form “the *building* is not the *street*”). In short, the city becomes pure positivity, complete being-in-itself. And it does this at the cost of *being Memphis*. The city of Memphis as *my city* requires us to perform an internal negation with respect to its past: It was a city that accepted and encouraged racial intolerance and is now no longer. It is *x* in the mode of not being *x*. In short, the being of Memphis as *my city* invested with value requires my powers as a for-itself to cast *negative* light on the city of Memphis which gives it its character. Otherwise, Memphis would be no different than the ubiquitous cities around the world, and would in effect cease being Memphis. The facticities of Memphis and of myself are intrinsically connected inasmuch as I constantly realize my being as a Memphian.³³ So much for the facticity of the Memphian.

We know of course that the for-itself does not merely define itself in terms of its past, but also makes itself by projecting toward a future. Let us now turn to how I the Memphian realize my projects. Recall the structure of the project in general outlined above. We posit—that is, take

³³ It appears then that Memphis as the city that it is must be maintained through the collective power of the for-itself. If all the for-themselves of the world that realize Memphis being were to vanish, as a consequence it would seem that the being of Memphis the city would cease to be altogether. The nihilation that is Memphis would be converted into mere being-in-itself, pure positivity.

as an object for consciousness—a transcendent reality in the future which at present has not yet been realized. This could be a work of art, a state of affairs, or anything of which we can be conscious. Now in light of this transcendent ideal, my present facticity in turn gets colored in a negative light so that *value* gets conferred upon them. If I posit for myself a beautiful painting that I want create, then the present paintbrush before me appears as *for-creating-art* and my paint palette appear as *to-be-organized-into-art*. A whole new world appears to me as a network of instruments conceived in terms of *function* (or malfunction) in order to bring about my transcendent object of the work of art, values which previously were not attached to the equipment.³⁴

What might a Memphian project toward the future look like? Suppose I consider the present state of affairs of pleasant race relations to be *not enough*. What does this reveal to me? Since I consider the present state of affairs in terms of a *deficiency*, a negative, then the phenomena I experience must refer me to some project of mine by virtue of which I see my situation the way I do. If I perceive a genuine lack of appropriate racial equality, then the object for my consciousness can be none other than a future state of affairs where equality among races has been firmly solidified. The lacking current state, in a sense, becomes “filled” as it moves closer toward its completed being as the state of equality among races. This movement from lacking to completion reflects the over-arching project common to every for-itself of its desire to become in-itself—as a desire to no longer be a nothingness and to have complete identification with itself (without realizing that such an endeavor inevitably results in the destruction of our freedom). This structure of nihilated being becoming the positive transcendent object is characteristic of all projects of the for-itself, no matter how miniscule. We must not stop here,

³⁴ To be extremely thorough, the equipment would not be equipment strictly speaking. However, as freedoms we are always future-oriented, always must choose, and so are always encountering a world of equipment, meaning, and value.

however, for we must note that my world, in light of this transcendent future state of equality among races, is cast in a different light. Organizations that fight for equality of race appear to me as *instrumental for my end*; bigotry and segregation become *obstacles* which my freedom must overcome; friends and foes become defined in terms of how they can help or hinder realizing my transcendent end; and so on and so forth. Indeed all value, whether beneficial or destructive, implies a project of consciousness which seeks to realize an end.

My Memphis then—as opposed to the common *our* Memphis of the past, with which all Memphians are stuck with—becomes constructed in terms of the projects *I*—not *we*—create for it. I posit a Memphis which has even better racial equality than it currently has. My enemy posits a Memphis that returns to a pre-Civil Rights era of racial inequality. And perhaps a third Memphian posits a Memphis with a certain degree of difference between the two. In principle, it appears to me that there as many possible projects for every Memphian being as there are projects for a for-itself—namely, infinite, considering the degrees of variation that could exist in a Memphian project. In fact, the differences in projects of the Memphian can serve as a principle of individuation for all Memphian subjects; for, after all, the human being by existentialist thought is no more than the process of its projects. The Memphian then is characterized by a common facticity, a common history of the city shared among all actual Memphians and all possible Memphians, and a divergent transcendence, since each Memphian—that is, each for-itself—has its own project for what Memphis ought to be.

IV. The Being of the Community

At this point we are ready to sketch a phenomenological description of the community and how the self appropriates it in its own self-understanding. We wish to illuminate what it is

for us to live within a community define by place and how it in turn affects how we make ourselves. Let us review what we have established so far.

Existentialism in general makes the shift from prior philosophies by abstaining from the abstract in order to focus on the actually existing individual. As a consequence, we abandon all attempts at articulating an essence for being human. There is no essence common to all humanity as actual, existing individual. Any essence we can appropriately speak of is only a manifestation of an individual existence, and as such we would be in error to generalize a particular person's way of being into some universal human essence. In this assertion, existentialist philosophers are in agreement.

Jean-Paul Sartre's variety of existentialism, with which we have concerned ourselves here with a few references to Heidegger for clarification, is phenomenological in method. We provide descriptive accounts of phenomena that make no use of inferential reasoning as in the natural sciences. We established an ontology of the world with respect to our first-person phenomenological description by asserting Being and Nothingness. Being, or being-in-itself, is logically prior, capable of maintaining itself in a state of pure, undifferentiated positivity. Nothingness, or consciousness or being-for-itself or freedom, is dependent on Being in that it is a nihilation of Being, an internal negation. Nothingness is no more than the fact that it is not-Being. "It is what it is not." As Nothingness, it is able to negate or nihilate Being. It can divide Being into parts, revealing a being-in-itself by nihilating that which is not it into the ground upon which the being reveals itself for consciousness. The synthesis of the two beings—Being and the being of nothingness—constitutes the being-in-the-world totality.

Consciousness has a desire for Being. It seeks to become a synthesis which is at once wholly being-in-itself and wholly being-for-itself, both entirely Being and entirely Nothingness.

It is apparent though that such a synthesis is impossible, for to be wholly Being means to be without Nothingness, and wholly Being which contains Nothingness is then an unacceptable contradiction. In effect, consciousness tacitly seeks its own cessation as a for-itself. Despite its *a priori* internal inconsistency, consciousness nevertheless seeks being-in-itself as a transcendent end. Consciousness then is nothing more than a process. It is not a static, inert substance. It is always striving toward a transcendent future end to be realized, the ultimate end of course being unattainable. In this way, consciousness makes for itself an essence, but this essence only comes about through its existence, which is nothing more than the culmination of projects and ends the for-itself makes for itself. Consciousness, then, is a freedom to choose itself.

This freedom however is not an absolute freedom, meaning that consciousness is capable of *achieving* any end which it sets for itself. As a nothingness, freedom is still a nihilation of Being and dependent upon it. We cannot, for instance, choose not to be free, for even that is a choice. A genuine choice for no freedom amounts to a choice for being-in-itself, which is denied for a nothingness. Limits to our freedom only appear to us within the context of a freedom. The wall is un-climbable only insofar as I have a project positing myself having climbed the wall as an end. Obstacles and other facts of our surroundings constitute the *givens* of my *situation*, my *facticity*. My projects and the transcendent ends which they posit have as a correlate the coloring of my facticity in a negative light, which gives objects their value with respect to my end.

With this ontology of Being and Nothingness and the structures belonging to each of them, we investigated what a Memphian being or project would look like. In being a Memphian, I identified the place and community of Memphis, as being my own. In so doing I in effect took on the city's past, which is nothing other than the city's facticity, as an extension of my own and one which myself as a freedom must answer for. To deny this responsibility would result in

robbing the place Memphis of its past and how it has changed, how Memphis is defined according to the internal negation (i.e., in terms of what it is not), and would reduce Memphis to a mere geographical location with buildings, streets, and sidewalks only externally negatively related to each other. I would rob Memphis of what makes it Memphis, and so it would cease to *be* Memphis and I would cease to be a Memphian. The community of Memphis and the being Memphian are co-dependent entities, sustained by a nothingness.

I also, as a Memphian, project as an end what Memphis should be. I make for myself a transcendent state of affairs which Memphis at present lacks, and then I act with my facticity in accordance with my transcendent end. My facticity, and by extension the facticity of Memphis, becomes colored by an internal negation in relation to my posited transcendent state of affairs, and the elements of Memphis appear to me as a world network of instrumental entities for realizing my end. The Memphis past is not excluded from this negative coloring: It becomes embarrassing, to-be-avoided, or ideal, to-be-realized-again, or some other valuation. We notice, here, unlike in the case of the facticity of Memphis, that it is in the future projects of Memphis that I really see it as *my* Memphis. I cannot expect another consciousness, another for-itself, to posit identical transcendent ends as I do for what Memphis ought to be. The present, then, becomes a point where the collective for-themselves split into their own individual projects of Memphis. All Memphians share a common facticity, but each has *their own* future Memphis. Just what Memphis becomes as soon as it is made past will enter into the Memphian facticity and will become a common element for each Memphian for-itself.

In the above recapitulation of this section, we have stripped the discussion of Memphis of its concrete examples of race relations. Actually, Memphis understood as a community here merely functions as a placeholder for the phenomenon of the community, which can be

substituted at any point in this section. We will now outline a phenomenological sketch of the community in light of the ontological structures we have revealed. First and foremost, it should be apparent that the phenomenon of the community is an *internal negation* maintained by the for-itself, or rather the collection of for-themselves as is the nature of a community. The collective consciousnesses maintain the *past* of the place and community in memory, and as we should see the past itself can only be brought about by the for-itself, for it is negatively defined as “no longer,” as “was.” And insofar as a community has a past we may expect for the community itself to undergo change, for such is the nature of time as change. There are elements of the community which once belonged to it but which are now past, which *are not* anymore. This internal nihilation of the elements of the community are as much constitutive of the community as its positive parts; in fact, it is this nihilation which serves to differentiate this community from an *other* community—as an actually existing distinct community. Assuming there is a coherence in memory among the for-themselves that maintain the community, we may assert that there is only one facticity for the community, constituted by its past and its present givens. However, as we noted, a community cannot, in principle, have a common future project for every for-itself which considers the community as an extension of her own being. There is a divergence for every individual for-itself for every unique end they posit for the community. The present marks a point in the temporal flux where the collective for-themselves split as each for-itself projects an end for the community by which it makes the community its own.

Community, then, reflects the structure of the for-itself. Its facticity is defined according to its givens and the community’s past, which is no more than the past of the collective for-themselves in history that have ever defined part of their being as a member of the community, while its possibilities are the various projects that the for-themselves create for the community.

However, given a specific stretch of time, we can only expect one of these possibilities—that is, one of the projects of the various for-themselves—to be realized and made past, just as in an individual for-itself only one of its possibilities becomes *its own* possibility. Community too has its essence defined through its existence, since it is maintained by these nothingnesses. Perhaps all it *is* is a nothingness. The appropriate way to conceive of community, it appears, is to see it as a collection of for-themselves—a kind of public, conscious being-for-itself: the being-of-the-community. The common facticities of all the for-themselves that define part of their being according to the community is *identical* to the facticity of the community conceived as a collective for-itself. The structure of the community and the existences of the for-themselves which define themselves according to the community are in fact logically contemporary to and coincide with one another in every temporal dimension. The community is no more than a public nothingness that is a collection of nothingnesses that consider themselves a part of it, both emerging at once. For me to be a member of a community then is to *participate* in the being-of-the-community, which is no more than the collection of the community-beings of all of its members.³⁵

³⁵ We notice that the phenomenon of place has not been explicated. The conclusions reached only elucidate the phenomenon of the community; however, I have not provided a clear relation between community and place, not to mention an investigation of the phenomenon of place in general. Seeing how community is defined by place, how Memphis is a community placed in a city, is a good starting point for future investigation.

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