

SARTRE'S METHOD OF PHILOSOPHIZING

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The paper deals with the method used by Sartre in his philosophy. In this regard I would like to develop Sartre's concept of consciousness and independent existence of the World. I shall concentrate on Sartre's view that the actual object is not to be reduced to its appearance, since it is comprised of an "infinite series of appearance", therefore, cannot be apprehended at a time. I would attempt to show that the realization, that "...it would require an infinite series of appearance..." for an object to be revealed totally, comes in consciousness through successive process. It can be derived from the observed describable aspect of the object, but can be derived only through inference. The inference would be shown as the unavoidable means to say anything about the unobserved aspect of the object. The inference, in this regard, is an inductive inference, not deductive. I would try to establish it as an induction through the postulates offered by J.O. Wisdom, and by Frequency interpretation of probability proposed by H. Reichenbach.

According to Sartre consciousness exists as consciousness of something external to itself. In itself consciousness has no "content". It has no existence without its object. The object of consciousness can be a thing, a man, a physical or psychological event etc. The object, external world is independent from consciousness. But its existence gets revealed only through consciousness. But consciousness can be there only of the appearance of the object. And for Sartre consciousness of the "table" cannot be identified with the object table. The object table has an "infinite" "series of appearance" which can reveal its "total contents" thus cannot be apprehended at a time.

A table is in space _____ is a center of opacity for consciousness; it would require an infinite process to inventory the total contents of a thing.¹

Sartre discusses the reciprocation between consciousness and its object table etc. Consciousness tries to know object completely. Sartre believes in a drive of consciousness toward object to know it. For Sartre Consciousness has no existence apart from the object of which it is conscious. But he ascribes an opacity to object to differentiate it from consciousness. He believes in the power of consciousness to direct itself toward its object. And he defines object as not to be reduced to its appearance, therefore, ungraspable. It is clear that consciousness cannot differentiate itself from the "appearance of the object" rather consciousness comes into existence through it. It must be considered that consciousness can differentiate itself from the "actual object". It becomes inevitable for Sartre to admit that consciousness by itself can go over and above appearance in considering the appearance as not to be identical with "object".

The Question arises as to how it is possible .

We must highlight some points of Sartre's philosophy. First of all the point which is to be noted that Sartre rejects outright the possibility to describe the "actual object" through the description of its appearance, Sartre says that appearance can be described in the form of image since in this form it is made to be "complete" and "certain".

I could give description of the object as it appears to me in the form of image _____ only by an act of second degree in which the attention is turned away from the object and directed to the manner in which it is given.²

To express the responsibility of the consciousness itself for not grasping the "actual object" or not to grasp the object in its entirety Sartre says that

"..... object enters into my perception in its completeness, I nevertheless see it only from one side at a time ____ (I must therefore apprehend them successively...)"³

But for Sartre, consciousness in its directedness toward outside, does not know its perception. It is just a directedness, nothing else.

The immediate consciousness which I have of perceiving _____ does not know my perception, does not posit it; all that there is of intention in my actual consciousness is directed toward outside, toward the World.⁴

If immediate consciousness does not know its perception, Sartre must admit that it does not know its perception whether as identical with the actual object or not. Sartre differentiates between "pre-reflective" and "reflective" stages of consciousness. In pre-reflective stage it is only directed toward outside. But in reflective stage it can judge its perception. According to Sartre when "I" get ashamed of any of my gesture, at first my certain gesture is directed toward outside, which is its pre-reflective stage. "I" can find myself to be ashamed of my gesture, when "I" reflect into my mind. But for Sartre my being ashamed depends on the presence of other person who looked at me. Not his mere presence but the way "I" perceive his presence, is responsible for my being ashamed of my gesture. It seems to me that "reflection" is neither to see the mind in a static state nor a looking back into the mind. It is not the case that when "reflection" is there, consciousness is not directed to the outside but directed to the inside. Rather, it is the consciousness as directedness toward outside can "reflect". Sartre says that "... it is the non-reflective consciousness that renders the reflection possible...".⁵ We can seek help of this kind of "reflection" proposed by Sartre to find out how consciousness does go over and above appearance, in considering "actual object" as beyond appearance. It seems that at first the pre-reflective consciousness is directed to the outside world, since it does not know its perception (that it is not identical with "actual object"), it must take the first appearance it comes across as identical with the "actual object". But as it takes second or following drives toward the "actual object" to grasp it (since it cannot resist from taking drive in order to nihilate itself)⁶, it grasps more aspects ("sides")⁷ of the object. The more knowledge of latter perception "reflects" the previous to be partial. Thus the perpetual drives of consciousness can give it the realization of partialness of the perception of appearance. Thus it has been made clear that the realization of the "actual object" as not reducible to appearance can be realized only through the successive stages of perception and through "reflection". In *Psychology of Imagination*, Sartre holds that mind by seeing only some sides of a thing, tends to form image of the thing in its completeness. By reflecting into the mind consciousness can find this image as complete which is not identical with the actual object. Because perception in its every attempt, gives every new detail about the object. We have argued how strong ground we can have, to reduce from Sartre's philosophy that "reflection" can find out the partialness of perception. Thus it seems that reflection can find out both the partialness of perception and the tendency to

give completeness to the partial aspect. Therefore, Sartre is justified to say that

"...the infinite movement belongs only to the reflective regard which wants to apprehend the phenomenon as a totality..."⁸

J. L. Ackril in his book *"Aristotle : The Philosopher"* brought out Aristotle's method of Philosophy. In that work the "route" of knowledge as depicted by Aristotle is stated as follows :

The natural route is from what is clear and more easily known to us (daily experience), to what is more knowable and clearer in its own nature (basic principle and ideas) _____ for the two are not the same _____ the things that are to start with clear and plain to us _____ it is only later as a result of analyzing them that we come to know their elements and principle.⁹

For Sartre too, nothing except the experience through appearance is there before consciousness to start the "Knowing process". And it is only later by seeing series of appearance and by finding out their partialness, consciousness may realize that the object is not identical with its appearance (It can know that the principle presides over the series of appearance cannot itself be reduced to appearance). As Sartre says "...it would require an infinite series to inventory the total contents of a thing ..." he is going over and above the perception of appearance in concluding thus. He is doing nothing but inferring the possibility of infinite series of appearance for the actual object, therefore, cannot be apprehend at a time. Sartre is definitely concluding on the basis of the perception which consciousness has apprehended already. But there is something new in the conclusion, supplies additional knowledge for the "actual object", which is not yet observed. Inference that supplies new information is inductive inference, not deductive. In inductive inference, by seeing many people to die, it is concluded that all men are mortal. But the observed fact of the death of many people does not ensure all men to be mortal. Similarly by seeing many appearances do not reveal the actual object in a finite time, it is concluded that "... it would require an infinite process...". It is not ensured by its premises. Whatever long series of appearance (partial) might have been perceived by consciousness it does not ensure that the series of appearance which may reveal the total content, is infinite. But the conclusion can have thus probability.

The above argument cannot be deductive. In deductive argument the premise, depending on which, something is concluded, is taken to be true, it is not based on observed fact. "All men are mortal" is taken to be true, therefore, if some one is a man, he has to be mortal. Thus it does not supply any additional knowledge. Similarly if by Sartre it was taken to be true that "the actual object is not identical with its appearance". Then every appearance will fall short of the knowledge of the total content of the object. It would sound similar to Plato's philosophy that we possess an "Idea" of a "bed" and no particular bed can appropriate the "Idea" of bed. But for Sartre consciousness has no content in itself;¹⁰ And above all from the premise like "object is inexhaustible through appearance" _____ it cannot be derived that the "object of appearance" has an infinite series of appearance. Therefore we have a legitimate ground to say that Sartre's method, is an induction. It is based on the perception of particular facts, it goes above the observed facts by inferring its infinite possibility to appear. Though its premise does not ensure the conclusion it has the probability.

There are some postulates of inductive inference presented by John O. Wisdom. 1) The limitation of natural variety 2) Things cannot change magically.¹¹ For Sartre's philosophy too a continuous partial revelation without revealing the actual object i.e., without a magical change, must exist throughout the process of knowledge. Thus the conclusion "...that it would require an infinite process to inventory the total contents of a thing ..." can have the probability. If all of a sudden there occurs a change in the "process" the conclusion will lose its probability.

Hans Reichenbach tries to maintain the applicability of Frequency Theory¹² to all concepts of probability. Frequency for him furnishes the reason to believe in a statement from which another frequency is stated which concerns future observation. Frequency of events is "repetition of events" which is an indispensable condition for induction. It seems that Sartre would agree that unless and until there is repetition of the perception found out to be partial, consciousness cannot infer an infinite series of partial appearances as having the total content of the object. By seeing men to die repeatedly one can infer that men are mortal. Otherwise it is not possible. But it is to be noted that the repetition in the "process" of revelation of Sartre's philosophy has suitable distinction from the usual "repetition" (the basis of usual induction). In this "process" there is no repetition of the same event, but there is repetition in

revelation of the partial aspects of a same event. It is the repetition of the partialness in revelation. The revelation that occurs, repeatedly comes out as partial. Thus it persuades revelation consciousness to conclude that "... it would require an infinite process ..." It seems that Sartre would accept that it is only from the frequency of appearance as partial, another frequency of further partial appearance can be assumed. For him this frequency would remain for an infinite period and not to be completed in a finite time.

The question arises : what kind of induction is it? Induction as an argument appears to be a simple generalisation of particular premises. All the crows I have seen are black, therefore, all crows are black. This is an example of logical or unscientific induction. It is based on simple enumeration of the instances. But in Sartre's treatment the conclusion that "...it would require an infinite process to inventory the total contents of a thing..." is not based on simple enumeration of the instances of appearance of the object. The instances of the appearance of different aspects of an object, must have been compared with each other, while reflecting former by the latter. Moreover Sartre's conclusion for infinite appearance must have been based on largest possible number of instances of appearance. In scientific induction the instances enumerated must be arranged as antecedent and consequent. It is a causal generalization. By seeing people to die in tuberculosis, it is concluded that tuberculosis is a fatal disease. Here tuberculosis and death are arranged as antecedent and consequent respectively. In Sartre's philosophy as we found every latter appearance can be the cause to reflect the former appearance to be partial, from which it can be concluded that "an infinite series of appearance" is required to grasp the total object. But here we can see that the appearances cannot be arranged as antecedent and consequent according to the traditional definition of antecedent and consequent. Another causality is involved in endless "process" of knowledge where both, consciousness, (in order to inhilate itself) and object (which does not allow itself to be apprehended completely) are the cause and effect in the "process" of knowing the actual object to be infinite. But neither consciousness nor object can be defined as antecedent or consequent to be either cause or the effect in the "process" to be infinite. Though for Sartre "object" exists before the consciousness of objects, the "revelation" of the object which necessitated consciousness to be an "infinito process" is the "revelation" through "consciousness". So both "consciousness" and "object" exist together at the same

time in the process of revelation or in the process of knowing. Therefore the method of inductive inference which must have been followed by Sartre is not simply logical induction and not definitely a scientific induction. But we can say it a pseudo scientific induction since it does have some similarity with it. Otherwise, if a revolutionary attempt to violate definition of antecedent and consequent to bring out a causal generalisation, is to be accepted, Sartre's method will be definitely a scientific induction.

From the above discussion it can be concluded that consciousness by its nature cannot cease itself from being directed toward appearance. And the external world by its nature reveals new aspect as it is not identical with appearance. Therefore, what Sartre is expressing in his philosophy is a brute fact which cannot be questioned to know the reason behind it. It seems that Sartre is unveiling a scientific fact, on the basis of number of particular partial appearances and he concludes that it would require an infinite process to inventory the total contents of a thing. Thus his method becomes similar to inductive inference.

NOTES

1. *Being and Nothingness* : A phenomenological Essay on ontology, by Jean Paul Sartre. Trans. with Intro by Hazel E. Barner Washington Square Press, Published by Pocket Book (1996) Intro., P. 11
2. *Psychology of Imagination*, by Jean Paul Sartre Mathneu & Co. Ltd., London, 1972 ch. I, P. 1
3. *Ibid.*, ch. I, P. 6
4. *Being and Nothingness* by J. P. Sartre, Intro., P. 12.
5. *Ibid.*, Intro., P. 13.
6. *Ibid.*; see Part I ch I P 58 and Part II ch I PP 130-131
7. See *Psychology of Imagination*, ch. I P 6.

8. (1) See *Psy. of Imagination* PP 6-7 & (2) *Being and Nothingness* Part II ch. I P. 126.
9. See ch. VIII P. 107 (Original Text Physics Book I ch. I.184 a 10)
10. "...consciousness has nothing substantial; it is pure appearance"
11. See *Probability and Inductive Logic* by H.E. Kyburg Jr. The Univ. of Rochester. Copyright ... 1970 Ch. X pp 127-128.
12. See *Experience and Prediction* by Hans Reichebach Phoenix book of Univ. Chicago Press 1961 Ch. V PP 302-339.