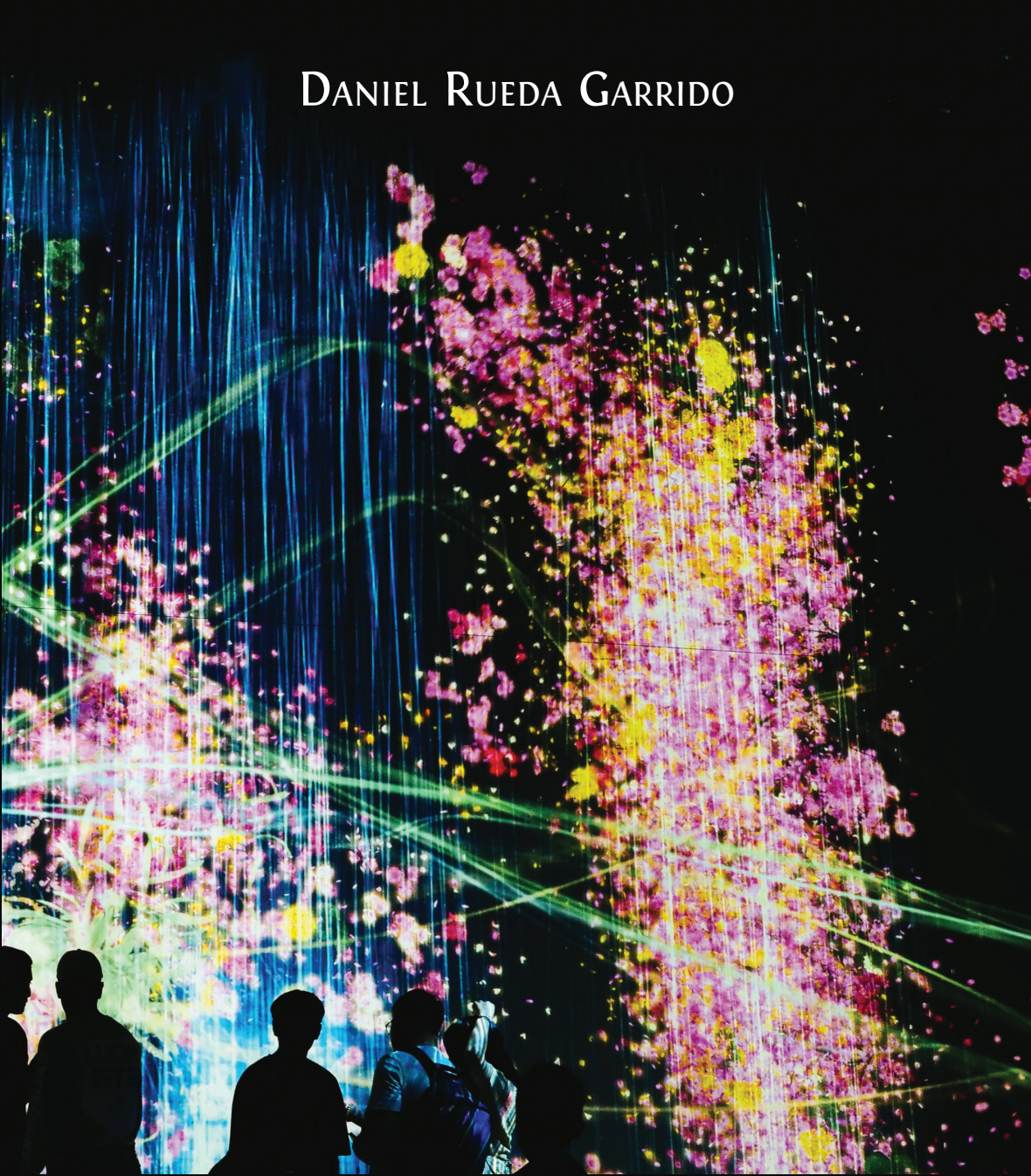


DANIEL RUEDA GARRIDO



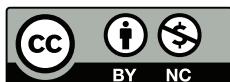
# Forms of Life and Subjectivity

## Rethinking Sartre's Philosophy



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

© 2021 Daniel Rueda Garrido



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Daniel Rueda Garrido, *Forms of Life and Subjectivity: Rethinking Sartre's Philosophy*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0259>

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0259#copyright>. Further details about CC BY licenses are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0259#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

ISBN Paperback: 9781800642188

ISBN Hardback: 9781800642195

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800642201

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800642218

ISBN Digital ebook (azw3): 9781800642225

ISBN XML: 9781800642232

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0259

Cover photo by Cosmin Serban on Unsplash at [https://unsplash.com/photos/2fn\\_pxLM59g](https://unsplash.com/photos/2fn_pxLM59g)

Cover design by Anna Gatti

# Preface

---

If we are asked what *a* form of life is, we may respond abstractly by stating that it is what people in a particular location do and think. If then we are asked to respond more precisely what *our* form of life is, we will probably begin to make an inventory of what we do and think on a daily basis.

We would begin, most likely, in a temporal order, from the moment we wake up. We would describe our breakfast in relation to the work we are going to do during the day and how breakfast keeps us energized until the next meal; we would describe our journey by car or public transport to the workplace, the music we listen to as we travel and the people we meet; we would describe a working day, the activities we do and what we are paid for; we would describe our communication with co-workers and with those other people who are not present but with whom we communicate via mobile phone using some Internet application; we would describe how we get along with them, those we dislike, those we admire and those with whom we compete; and we would describe the return home, the leisure hours, perhaps video-conferencing with friends or chatting with a partner or family, perhaps exercising our body in the gym; and we would describe the shopping we have done on the way home in some supermarket or, once there, through some online shop, and how the car or motorbike we see parked next to our building moves us to want to buy a similar one in the future, perhaps when we get the expected pay rise or success in a business we have invested in; and finally, we would describe how, while having a snack, we relax watching a film or TV series to empty our minds of the daily hustle and bustle, and get ready to sleep and come back the next day with renewed energy to do it all over again.

If we were now asked to bracket everything we have just described and answer again the question of what *a* form of life is, we would

undoubtedly have some difficulties in answering. After all, what we have put into brackets is what we consider to be *our* form of life, and yet the imagined inquisitive questioner forces us to go further: to describe what a form of life is without resorting to the particular description of everyday action and emotion. This means describing the form of life in what we can call its conditions of possibility; that which makes possible the content we have just put into brackets. This fundamental description must therefore be not of actions but of what makes us perform those actions. We are thus confronted with our consciousness as a whole, whose content we have put into brackets. And yet this whole continues to shape our consciousness. That emptied whole—at least emptied of that which we have brought to reflection—is the principle that governs everything that is between the brackets. Everything, right now, only has a reason to exist because of that emptied whole. The actions between brackets cease to have—temporally—meaning in themselves. What they are is due to that whole that we now stop to contemplate. The content between the brackets cannot exist without this emptied whole. It is that without which nothing of what is described would take place. It is its constitutive or ontological principle. And this is what we can call our first discovery on the way to answering what a form of life is after having put its content into brackets.

A form of life is thus an ontological principle that constitutes all our daily actions. But should we be satisfied with this finding? —We are asked. Our interlocutor would add that it is also important to bracket this principle, at least to see what happens. And, learning from the first experience, we could also aspire to show what is the foundation or *raison d'être* of this principle, which, in turn, constitutes our first bracket. Thus inspired by our interlocutor, we bracket that principle which we have found to be constitutive of our form of life. 'When not only the content or the parts but also the whole itself is put into brackets, what is left?' —We are asked. We are tempted to answer that nothing is left. But let's think about it for a moment: can anything emerge from nothing? If the whole appears out of nothing, what makes it appear? After meditating, we answer that 'If we put the whole into brackets, what remains is its possibility.' Our interlocutor does not show any signs of surprise, and asks us again: 'What is the difference between nothingness and possibility?' We meditate for another moment. From nothingness

as such, the whole cannot emerge. For it to emerge there must at least be its possibility to do so, and the latter is a mode of being. There must be a difference between nothingness and possibility. If there were not, everything would be possible, even when there is no possibility, that is, when there is nothing. Our interlocutor then invites us to conclude: 'If it is not nothingness, but rather possibility that remains after bracketing the whole, what is this possibility?' We become aware that we are about to lay the foundations of the constitutive principle of a form of life. And we meditate one last moment. The possibility of the whole is the whole as a possibility. But as possibility, it is not yet enacted. It is rather the negation of the whole as actuality. We therefore conclude that 'The possibility of the whole is the negation of the constitutive principle insofar as it is its possibility of being.' Our interlocutor looks at us with an elusive gaze.

We have reached the second important finding in order to answer the question of what our form of life is. Putting both the content of our daily actions and the whole into brackets, we are left with negation as a possibility. 'And what exactly does this mean?' our interlocutor asks us once again. So we meditate on the negation of the constitutive principle of our actions. That the negation of this is its possibility means that in order to be, let us say, in actuality, the constitutive principle of our form of life has had to deny its negation. Our possibility, then, is that which denies us, for only by denying it, in turn, can we be who we are. Before our meditation turns into a string of meaningless tongue twisters or riddles, we meditate and answer our interlocutor: 'Negation as possibility is the negative constitution of our ontological principle. This means that our form of life as a whole arises from its negative principle. The whole that we have put into brackets is first of all its possibility, and this is its negativity.' Let us sum up the road we have covered and state now that the content of our first bracket depends on the possibility of our constitutive principle. We would not act as we act if it were not for the fact that with our actions we deny (or flee from) the *negation* of our constitutive principle.

We think that our interlocutor is now going to leave us alone, having reached our two important findings. But we are wrong; our interlocutor now asks us: 'What is the difference between the constitutive principle and its negation, if the latter is the possibility of the former?' We meditate



once more and answer: 'The possibility of the constitutive principle is also, in a sense, the constitutive principle, for without it, the constitutive principle would not be.' Our interlocutor looks at us patiently. We confront him and reply that 'Without the possibility, there is no being, but being carries in itself its possibility. Therefore, the negation of the principle is constitutive of the principle itself. It is its original possibility.' And we conclude that 'Our form of life is the content of a whole that carries within itself its negation. So our form of life persists in its being without ever moving away from its negation, which, in turn, is its permanent possibility.' It is like the shadow wanting to move away from our figure or us wanting to stop breathing because the dioxide ages our cells and kills us.

Once again, we are forced to go beyond, and show the consequences of our meditation. If our form of life consists of the actions bracketed and the constitutive principle that grounds them from their own original possibility, who are we? Are we something other than or equal to that form of life? Do we exist outside of it? This meditation is certainly taking us far, and yet we can see that we are still exploring the answer to the initial question of 'What is *a* form of life?' So, we close our eyes and set ourselves once again to meditate. If we admit that we are something distinct from our form of life, because we are that which performs the actions (distinguishing between action and agent), we would have to admit equally that we are distinct from the constitutive principle, for we have found that the form of life is not only those actions we perform but also the constitutive principle in which they are contained as their whole. But are we distinct from the constitutive principle of our form of life? That would mean that whatever it is that we refer to as 'we' or our 'I' is distinct from both the whole and its possibility. But what is distinct from the whole and its possibility, what is beyond the one and the other? Now it seems that the answer is 'nothing'. For the whole has in itself its possibility, and the latter constitutes it. Therefore, if there is something that we are, and that we call 'I', it must be included in the whole of our form of life, or at least it must also arise from its constitutive principle and its original negativity. Our interlocutor is no longer looking at us. But we are ready to respond and we draw his attention. "'We" or our "I" cannot be outside the form of life and its possibility, therefore we

conclude that we are our form of life. That is also what we can call our subjectivity.'

The interlocutor makes us reflect for the last time: 'And are we, then, in the actions we have put into brackets, or in the constitutive principle that governs them, or in both?' Now we have no more doubts, we reply without fear: 'We cannot be outside the form of life, and our subjectivity cannot, therefore, be different from it, so our subjectivity is both the constitutive principle and its original negativity and the actions it constitutes.' The actions between brackets governed by the principle can be considered our habits. And all together this is our subjectivity. Answering now our interlocutor's question more precisely, we conclude that 'We are in our constitutive principle as much as in our habits.' Our interlocutor, acquiescing, then summarizes the journey we have made: 'In our meditation on the form of life we have accounted for our daily actions, their constitutive principle and the possibility of the constitutive principle or its negativity, and all this has led us to identify the form of life with our habits or principled actions and the latter with our subjectivity.' And, in an affectionate tone, he encourages us to continue meditating on the particular principle of *our* form of life and its original possibility.

The philosophical inquiry to be found in the pages that follow assumes the *attitude* to which this initial meditation has predisposed us. A meditation, thus, that aims to facilitate the philosophical quest that is presented in this book as arising from our own inner search.

