

WHY "BEING-FOR-OTHERS"?

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In the later part of Sartre's play *In Camera*, where the three characters are locked in a room, the male occupant Garcin cries out--*L'enfer c'est les autres*, meaning whereby "Hell is the Other". That each of these personages is trapped eternally in moral and erotic impasses from which none is able to allow any of the other to escape.¹ Precisely speaking, each one of us is posited in a similar situation in our own worlds. And so did Jean Paul Sartre voiced the phenomenon through his character, Garcin. In fact, "other" plays a formidable role in the philosophy of Sartre.

While exploring Sartre, one of the questions that predominantly emerges on the problem of "other" is --if "other" is an off-shoot of the *self*, or is entirely an independent category. If the former is true, then *Being-for-others* is bound to be a subsidiary development of *Being-for-itself*. In case "other" is distinct and different from *self*, then *Being-for-others* is a separate and exhaustive category. Interestingly, *Being-for-others* is made a separate category by Sartre, yet it is an extension of *Being-for-itself*. The third proposition denies the validity of the first two hypothesis taken in their exclusivity.

In this paper, I propose to explore the grounds for the development of *Being-for-others* as a separate category by Sartre. Let me therefore begin with the question-Why *Being-for-others* is necessary for the formulation of any human relationship?

Sartre's characters in the *In Camera* is the symbolic representation of the world in which we are living. The problem of love, hate and conflict as shown in the play is what we face ourselves in the multitude of persons. "Other" is shown always as a threat to my existence. The most intriguing paradox is that on the one hand, one is always being watched by suspicious

eyes and there is a tendency in each one of us to escape the look of the other, yet on the other hand, one cannot live in total isolation all by oneself. The example of Robinson Crusoe, as expounded by many, can be contested on the ground that while living in isolation he has to visualise the possible existence of an "other", in formulating and reformulating rules for his own living.

I

Sartre's distinction between *Being-for-itself* (non-conscious) and *Being-for-itself* (conscious) finds foundation in consciousness. In addition to these two, he coins the new term, *Being-for-others*. This is a further classification of the "conscious". Why is this further classification? Putting aside the view that humans are different from non-humans (or to put it in Sartrean terminology, as conscious beings are different from non-conscious beings), what finds significance is that there are differences between "I" and the "other" (between/among conscious beings). I do not know if the other exists and thinks in the same way as I do. My subjectivity is accessible to me and the other's subjectivity is accessible to the other. There is always a gap between I and the other, hence a need for a distinction between the two.

I do not perceive other's consciousness, yet I behave as if other has consciousness. It may be a fact that other is conscious, too. But we have to find good reasons to believe that other is a conscious being as much as I am. To follow Cartesian doubt-if at all there is anything of which we cannot doubt it is the existence of the mind as a substance. For Sartre, distinction between mind and consciousness is redundant, nor does he agree with the distinction between body and mind- the body being an extended substance and mind being the thinking substance. Nor does he speak of consciousness per se, for consciousness is always as embodied consciousness. He also rejects the realists' view that there are no difficulties in other's existence to the extent that realism takes everything including the existence of the other as "given and doubtless".² If I see everything as given without any doubt, then I can also perceive my consciousness, my body, other's body, and other's consciousness distinctly. In that case, it would mean clubbing together substances/ideas which are ontologically different and incompatible. Con-

consciousness cannot be perceived in the same way as body is perceived. While body can be perceived as (inanimate) object, consciousness cannot be perceived without embodiment. This argument also denies dualism of Cartesian kind where consciousness (mind) and body are seen as two separate substances. As Sartre avers:

If the souls are separated by their bodies, they are distinct as this inkwell is distinct from this book; that is, we can not conceive of the immediate presence of the one in the other. And even if we admit that my soul can be immediately present in the other's body, I will have to overcome all the density of a body before I touch his soul. Therefore, if realism bases its certitude upon the presence "in person" of the spatial-temporal thing in my consciousness, it can not lay claim to the same evidence for the reality of the other's soul since by this very admission, the other's soul does not give itself, "in person" to mine. It is an absence, a meaning; the body points to it without delivering it.³

Unperceivability of consciousness in isolation, here, does not mean the kind of inconceivability of the noumenal reality as propounded by Kant. For Sartre, the distinction between noumenal and phenomenal realities is superfluous. This distinction is based on the assumption that for any perceivable object, there is an inner or true reality which is imperceivable. This makes the objects we perceive as mere images, an illusion. Unperceivability of consciousness is not like that of perceiving an illusory image but of conceiving a *function*. Consciousness is not a substantial or perceivable substance, it is merely an operational notion- a function.

Similarly, when we speak of "pain", it is not like perceiving the phenomenon "pain", and some *real* "pain" hiding behind this phenomenon. Pain is not a perceivable object. It is inferred from some perceivable phenomena like say, yelling, crying, etc., though these phenomena by themselves are not pain. For example, I see a stone falling over the foot of my friend. Then I hear him yelling. I see a change in his expression; his eyes closing, mouth widely open and his hands holding the foot. Then I say that he is writhing in pain. What I perceive is series of happenings and also

different bodily gestures performed in a stretch. But where is the pain? It is like Ryle's "where is the university?". If we put them, i.e. "pain" and "yelling" in the same footing or category, we commit the fallacy of *Category mistake*. Yelling is not pain, nor closing the eyes, nor writhing. Idea of pain is derived out of this "yelling", "closing of eyes" and "writhing". I quote Sartre for clarification:

In the first place the appearance of the Other in my experience is manifested by the presence of organized forms such as gestures and expression, acts and conducts.

These organized forms refer to an organizing unity which on principle is located outside of our experience. The Other's anger, in so far as it appears to his inner sense and is by nature refused to my apperception, gives the meaning and is perhaps the cause of the series of phenomena which I apprehend in my experience under the name of expression or gestures.⁴

It is the commonality of behaviour and gestures, and unification of these impressions through consciousness that we know what we call as the feeling of the other. We come to know the other's state of mind since all of us have common forms of life. I see the gestures of my friend as similar to mine when I am in pain. I compare our gestures; his yelling, closing of eyes, writhing and holding of feet, etc. to my own when faced a similar situation. Through analogy we infer other's inner existence. "Organized forms" as stated above by Sartre, is precisely this comparison of collective experiences. But form is not experience, it is merely an idea. Experience is a *vehicle* to arrive at the state of "form".

Negation is also seen by Sartre as one of the foundation for the distinction between I and the other. ".....there is a fundamental presupposition; others are the other, that is the self which is not myself. Therefore we grasp here a negation as the constitutive structure of the *being-of-others*."⁵ I cannot be the other and the other cannot be me. It is a case of complete exteriority between the two. There is no relationship⁶ between the two, the two exist in a completely different spatial frameworks. If there is any relationship

between the two it is the relationship of nothingness. "Nothingness" does not derive its origin from myself nor from the other, nor is it a reciprocal relationship between the other and I. "On the contrary, as a primary absence of relation it is originally the foundation of all relation between the other and me."⁷ The absence is because of the completeness of each body, each being exhaustive and encompassing by nature. Since bodies are extended substances and consciousness is imperceivable, I naturally see a lack of relationship between the two because extended substances are complete in themselves. Interestingly, the idea of negation is conceived by the consciousness. Without consciousness, bodies would remain as complete in themselves, incapable to bring out the idea of negation or alienation. From this negation that I am not the other and other is not me, all subsequent meanings are formulated.

Let me bring here similar concepts like shame, anguish, hate, love, etc. for further explanation. Arthur Danto invites some interesting points when he writes that we feel ashamed before someone, and because of something one is or one has done-before God or one's parents, or someone whose moral perceptions one respects and whose good opinion somehow matters. To feel ashamed is to be committed to the belief that one is not alone and the existence of others as a structure of one's consciousness is being built into the very concept.⁸ One may argue against this contention by holding that one can feel ashamed of oneself, and not necessarily to others. But it must be seen that even in such a case, I may feel ashamed of myself because I imagine that others might observe me in the way I am observing myself. But my observing myself (as an object) is also influenced by the way others observe me (as an object). It is kind of vicious circle-the way others look at me and I presume others look at me. "The structure of shame is such that one who had no concept of other persons could not sensibly be supposed to feel shame; the feeling simply cannot arise except with reference to other persons."⁹ As mentioned earlier, even a Robinson Crusoe who lives all alone cannot dissociate himself from the concept of other's existence. He could not so much as rise to a concept of himself as himself if he did not have this further notion of "company". To see oneself as oneself means one

is distancing oneself as a first person, and then observing from a third person's perspective. An argument may follow that there might be a possibility of a person who throughout his life lived alone and never thought of himself as himself, i.e. not even thinking of himself as a person. In this case, he is either not a man to be able to be conscious of his own consciousness or we have to put him into an ontologically distinct category as his being cannot fall in the boundary of what we call by the term "man". It is like thinking of a creature like sphynx, or some living beings landing on earth from another planet. (In such a case, our perspective of this world will get changed in terms of an addition of a new ontological category.)

Sartre sees acts of consciousness as the foundation of not only my own world but also the other's worlds. Let me present the following three propositions: (a) my consciousness of myself, (b) my consciousness of the other, and (c) the other's consciousness of me. It is quite obvious that (b) and (c) do not require further explanation as the phrases are self-explanatory, clearly showing the involvement of the "other". Even in case of (a), to be aware of myself as object presupposes an awareness of (c), i.e. awareness of other's awareness of me (as an object). This implies that "since I am my body, I arrive at bodily self-consciousness only when I have the concept of my body as it is for others".¹⁰ Therefore, the "way my body appears to me" is more or less close/similar to the "way my body appears to the other". Let me also add here that the "way my body appears to the other" is close/similar to the "way other's body appears to me". In other words, my-being-for-other is synonymous to other's-being-for-me. The emergence of a new *being* (being conscious of the other) helps in the seeing of a different order than that of being conscious of mere objects and myself. Formulation of *Being-for-others* shows Sartre's commitment towards the social life and also that he is not a solipsist as many critics charged him of.

II

"The original relation of the other people with myself is to the 'look'. This is not the eyes of the other person, but something different".¹¹ It is true that through eyes I perceive the other. And it is also through the eyes of the other that I come to know about other's looking at me. But it is not the eyes

alone that are seen by me, but a "look" which makes me passive, consequently turns me into an object. "Look" is something different, it is not a part of my body. I see "look" of the other as a threat to my own existence, it threatens my security. I start thinking as if others have already trespassed over my secrets. "In perceiving an eye as *looking*, I perceive myself as a possible object for that look, I lose my transparency as it were and become opaque even for myself."¹² It is however not necessary that I have to perceive suspicious eyes in order to confront a look. Even without seeing anybody in person, I may start visualising the look of the other. Supposing that I am making love to a girl in a dark corner of a park and all of a sudden hear the sound of footsteps. I may come to an abrupt halt thinking that I may get caught in the act. This shows my awareness of other's existence and my possibility of becoming an object in front of other's suspicious eyes. Further, I may indeed be caught. But on the contrary, if it were not a person, but say a dog, then I calm down thinking that my privacy is still preserved. But had it been a person, I would have felt an infringement on my privacy and would have become an object in the eyes of the person.

Look also leads to conflict. A conflict-because I try to objectify the other and other tries to objectify me. It is a reciprocal act of objectification. There is always a kind of selfish motive behind every individual. I always want that the other should consider me as a "freedom" while I treat the other as an "object". The same attitude is possessed by the other towards me out of which arises this irreconcilable conflict. Danto writes:

My world, of which I as its centre am not a proper part, is taken from me and I am reduced to an object, become a proper part of the world of another...At this point, accordingly, a kind of logical drama begins, in which there is a spontaneous struggle for centrality and for ownership of worlds: as though I could get my world back as mine only if I can reduce him to an object in it, and he likewise with me, as though there could not be room for two foci in a single world.¹³

In fact, it is a tussle of possession, to possess the other in my world,

and not letting myself being possessed by others in a similar way.

Beginning from the act of mere meaning-giving, man tries to create a world of his own through the act of totalization. In order to control and bring others under the fold of *his* own world, he uses "look" as a tool. In such a situation, conflict is bound to happen. Similarly because of the look of the other, I get reduced to an object and go into the fold of other's world.

But my being-object-for-him is not possible without my being-object-for-myself, i.e. my consciousness must conceive myself as an object before becoming an object for him. Danto further writes:

I did not perceive myself as being a location in any world at all, being logically outside if looking in. I was not an object for myself. But I have become just that by recognizing that I am, or at least can be, an object for an other. This is achieved through the concept of the look.¹⁴

By conceding defeat to the *look* of the other, I allow my being-for-myself to be concerted into my-being-for-others. The problem of bad faith comes when I choose to become an object knowingly, for I could have avoided myself from becoming an object. It is not merely the *look* of the other that freezes me but my participation in the game of being looked at. I perceive the *look* of the other, take into consideration his *look* and choose to become an object to escape responsibility of countering the *look*. In Sartre's example, the girl who allowed herself to be seduced by her lover knowing fully the motive of her lover, yet pretending to remain like an object is in fact attempting to escape the responsibility of responding either positively or negatively to her lover. Though she does not like her body to be played with, yet she is afraid that her lover might desert her if she resists. Interestingly, in the process it is not only the girl who has become an object, but also her lover who tried to seduce her. For I disrobe others only by disrobing myself; I foreshadow and outline the other's flesh only by outlining my own flesh. So my-becoming-object-for-me is closely related to my-becoming-object-for-others or others'-becoming-object-for-me.

I have maintained above that look leads to conflict, and conflict

subsequently leads to objectification, that is objectification of one another. Objectification is possible because both "I" and "others" are bodies (partly objects). It is because of my being body that others act upon me, similarly others as bodies that I act upon them. The body, thus, helps us in objectifying one another. The idea of objectness is the fundamental principle of an interpersonal relationship. But one thing which demands attention is that I/other can never be fully an object, i.e. I cannot be an inert object like this pen or the table. Quoting an example from Sartre, "A man passes by those branches. I see this man; I apprehend him as an object and at the same time as a man...What do I mean when I assert that this object is a man?"¹⁵ Here I would distinguish two different acts of perception: (a) that I perceive a group of spatial-temporal things; (b) I perceive a group of spatial-temporal things besides a person. In the first case I perceive concrete inanimate objects like books, papers, and pen on my table. All these *are*, and *will be*, there, if we do not move them from their respective places. I may see them as a *totality* making myself at the centre of them or each of them separately. This is possible because they are inert objects (*Being-in-itself*). But in the latter case the arrangement of objects with myself at the centre is broken up because of his (other's) existence. The reason being, other can also create a totality of things including me and posit himself at the centre of the totality. My presence in his act of totalization¹⁶ is more or less turned into an inert existence, as much as I put him when I undergo the act of totalization myself.

III

The root of objectification and conflicts lies in facticity, that is my objectivity primarily lies in my bodily presence (my facticity). "Other's existence is experienced through the fact of my objectivity."¹⁷ My facticity as objectively given becomes meaningful only so far as the body is a conscious body. "The problem of the body and its relations with consciousness is often obscure because of the fact that while the body is from the beginning posited as a certain thing having its own laws and capable of being defined from outside, consciousness is then reached by the type of inner intuition which is peculiar to it."¹⁸ But Sartre holds out, against this view, that body cannot be separated from consciousness, and what we

conceive of as body is the *conscious body*.

Being-for-itself must be wholly body and it must be wholly consciousness: it cannot be united with a body. Similarly being-for-others, is wholly body; there are no "psychic phenomena" there to be united with the body. There is nothing behind the body. But the body is wholly psychic.¹⁹

Faticity as bodily presence of a person, means the *conscious bodily presence*- the totality of the two, and not addition or conglomeration of two separate substances.

Considering facticity as the ground for understanding human existence, and body as the primary means of perceiving the other, let me examine the nature of body at three possible levels:²⁰

- (1) My body is for myself. That is, the body-for-me.
- (2) My body is for others. My body is an object in the eyes of the other (as subject).
- (3) My body is for me in the eyes of others. Or, I exist for myself as a body known by others.

Taking note of the first statement "My body is for myself", it seems that "body" and "I" are different entities because of the words, "my body" and "myself". "Body" can be analysed of its existence and relationship with other things at two levels²¹; firstly, body cannot be taken in isolation. It has to have a background upon which it exists, i.e. we must take into account the surrounding objects. For example; The table is at my right, The bed is beside the chair, etc. Secondly, my body is a unity of different parts. Suppose that I say, "I see a cup in front of me". It is the eyes which perceive it, my ears cannot, for each of my sense organs performs different functions. My ears can listen, my eyes have sight, tongue has taste, etc. But I can never say, "It is my eyes, and not me, which see the object". Even if I say that my eyes see a cup in front of me, I cannot mean two eyes in isolation to other organs. It is the *whole* body as a *conscious body* which is considered when I say "I see a cup in front of me." The first statement- My body is for myself-

implies my facticity. I have to see my body first as a concrete reality. My body as the *for-itself* must exist prior to the idea of my existence/reality, and consequently, the human reality. Facticity, as to be noted, has an interesting implication for Sartre. While my existence in this world is an ontological necessity,²² it is a contingent fact that I exist. It could have been anyone in my place or no one at all. But once my reality is founded in this world, my being-in-the-world becomes a necessity. Though my existence is contingent, yet once I exist it is a necessity.

I have so far tried to show that "My existence as a body" is "my facticity". But I do not merely see my body as for myself alone. I also see my body as it appears to others. [Refer second statement]. Similarly, I perceive other's body as an object. Here, we see two acts synonymous to one another, i.e. the way my body appears to the other and the way the other's body appears to me. They are similar because the other is also a conscious body like me. If I were in his (other's) place, I would have looked at my (present) body in the same way as he is looking at my body now. The relationship of my body to other's body is an external relationship.

But an argument may arise that if the relationship of my body to other's body is a pure relationship of exteriority, then in what way is it different from the relationship between a table and a chair. As stated earlier, there can be no relationship at all between two things if they are completely exterior to one another. There has to be something else. And that is found in *internal negation*. Sartre sees that "my connection with the other is inconceivable; if it is not an internal negation."²³ That internal negation is the mediating force, and mediation is possible because man is conscious. Thus appearance of the other's body is not the primary mode of mediation between me and the other. Existence of the other as a conscious being is apprehended prior to the involvement of the body as a *means* of mediation. Sartre writes:

The appearance of the other's body is not therefore the primary encounter; on the contrary it is only one episode in my relations with the other and in particular in what we have described as making an object of the other. Or if you prefer, the other exists for me first and

I apprehend him in his body subsequently. The other's body is for me a secondary structure.²⁴

Further when I perceive the existence of the other, other cannot be isolated from the body. That is to say, I cannot think of Pierre without visualising Pierre as a person (as a body). To talk of body as *first* and consciousness as *later*, or consciousness as *first* and body as *later* do not make much sense. If we are talking of Pierre, we are thinking of him as a conscious body, a complete *Being-for-itself*, and not separately as a body or as a consciousness.

Finally, let me take up the last statement- "I exist for myself as a body known by the other". It is true that I exist for myself. But that is not all. My facticity cannot ignore the other's facticity. Let me state a case of a man who is embarrassed by his own body. But he cannot be embarrassed by himself alone. "I cannot be embarrassed by my own body as I exist it. It is my body as it is for the other which embarrass me."²⁵ It is conceiving myself as seen and understood by others. In our practical life, each one of us, to a large extent, see ourselves more or less in the light of what others conceive or would conceive of us. That is seeing ourselves in the light of others' perception of us.

To conclude, I have tried here to present three ontological levels of human relationships as perceived between "I" and "others". To talk of human reality is to conceive the bodily existence. Before establishing any kind of interpersonal relationship, we must first assume the notion of facticity. My bodily presence is not for myself alone. I become an object in the eyes of others and similarly the other becomes an object in my eyes. This leads to my seeing myself as an object as visualised/imagined through the eyes of the other. These are the ontological dimensions which I see as grounds for understanding an interpersonal relationships-and subsequently the reason for the formulation of *Being-for-others*, as a separate category like *Being-for-itself*.

NOTES

1. Arthur Danto, *Sartre*, Fontana, 1975,p.105. Henceforth, it will be known as *SRT*.
2. J.P.Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. H.E.Barnes, Washington Square Press, 1966, p.303. Henceforth, it will be known as *BN*.
3. *BN*,p.304.
4. *BN*,p.307.
5. *BN*,p.312.
6. Non-relationship, here, only is indicative of the bodily existence of I and other, that the two are separate beings. Relationship, however, is later sought through consciousness.
7. *BN*,p.313.
8. *SRT*,p.108.
9. *SRT*, p. 109.
10. *SRT*, p. 112.
11. Anthony Manser, *Sartre: A Philosophical Study*, Athlone Press, University of London, 1966,p.77.
12. *SRT*, p. 117.
13. *SRT*, pp. 115-16.
14. *SRT*,p. 117.
15. *BN*, p. 341.
16. Sartre defines "totalization" as the constantly developing process of understanding and making history. See,J.P.Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, tr. Alan Sheridan -Smith, Verso, 1982, New York, p. 830.
17. *BN*, p. 400.
18. *BN*, p. 401.

19. *BN*, p. 404.
20. *BN*, p. 460.
21. *BN*, p. 453.
22. *BN*, p. 407.
23. *BN*, p. 445.
24. *BN*, p. 446.
25. *BN*, p. 463.