

AN EXISTENTIAL CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SARTRE'S BEING-FOR-OTHER; IN REFERENCE TO BEING AND NOTHINGNESS

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Abstract – This paper is my own very attempt to bring into an analysis of the philosophical existential outlook at the existence of the Other person other than the self and the existential relational encounter that exist between the two individuals. Philosophically, this also known as the problem of the existence of the Other, the notion that historically it has been tackled with all sorts of different understandings and approaches from different thinkers. In such case, while keeping in mind the vastness of this notion, this paper has taken an interest in critically looking at the existential argument presented by Jean Paul Sartre concerning the encounter between the subjective self and the Other and also the possibility of a genuine relationship from such encounter. This paper takes Sartre' analysis of the structure of a mode of being that is attributed to man, which he calls the Being-for-Other in reference to his work Being and Nothingness. The reasons why we have chosen Sartre's argument in our paper, first, is that he takes his analysis from the ordinary everyday existential encounter with one another in the world. Therefore, we see this as being more relevant to how we look at our day to day human encounter and relationships. Another reason why we have chosen the Being-for-Other of Sartre, is his conclusive claims that he gives. In which he argues that the Other is a threat or a limitation to the very nature of the self, thus, no genuine relationship can be possible in such encounter. This paper starts by providing the two modes of existence that Sartre claims to have categorized the whole nature of reality as such. These are Being-For-Itself and Being-In-Itself, the analysis that he gives to the existential nature of each of these modes of existence, is of great importance in understanding the Being-for-Other of which he argues that it is an existential structure that is attributed to Being-for-Itself. However, at the same time it conflicts with the nature of this Being-for-Itself. We have tackled the phenomenon of the look as presented in his Being and Nothing, which explains the whole of his argument on interpersonal relationship. Then we have given our own conclusion from the philosophy of Sartre on the possibility of intersubjectivity.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Intersubjectivity, Existence, Being-For-Itself, Being-In-Itself, Freedom, Awareness, Limitation, Encounter and Ontological.

Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to present and analysis the existential foundations of human relationship in light of Jean Paul Sartre's analysis of our being with others in our daily dealings with our own being and that of things in our surrounding. We want to see and critically bring forth the existential ontological interplay that transcends our empirical encounters with one another, so as to grasp our being as it is itself when the Other being other than itself shows up in the world. We shall do all this from the philosophy of Sartre in his book *Being and Nothingness* on his argument concerning Being-for-Other as a crucial existential structure of one's own being. Then his philosophical interpretation of the phenomenon of the look or the appearance of the Other as having a conflictual character to the nature of the subjective self, thus making the whole reality of a genuine relationship with this Other to be existential impossible. From his thoughts, we shall see if at all, we can have really an interpersonal relationship which allows each person inside to embrace the richness of his being.

1.1 The Modes of Being in Sartre's Philosophy

The whole philosophy of Sartre seems to have been centered on giving an account to the two modes in which being exist and manifests itself. Sartre did not start his philosophy with the discussions on the problem of the Other. The world of Sartre comprises two modes of existence namely, Being-for-itself and Being-in-itself of whose existence has contradicting characters. For us to grasp well the main purpose of this paper, it could be of

great use that we start by briefly looking into these two modes of being, but more of Being-for-Other for it is the one that the Being-for-Other will be constituted from. Let us have a look at the Being-for-Itself and how it is described as the being that belongs to human reality.

1.1.1 Being-for Itself as a Structure of Human Reality

Being-for-Itself in its simplest sense means the ontological structure of human reality and in other terms it is attributed as consciousness. Therefore, we can call this mode of being as Human nature, as man or as a conscious subjective self and these are the expressions that our paper will be using whenever we refer to this sort of being. Sartre, influenced by the Hegelian approach towards consciousness as contradiction itself so as to find itself, for it negates itself so as to find itself.¹ Thus, for Sartre consciousness which in this sense it is the human nature as having a vacancy or an emptiness that it seeks fill.

Therefore, the Being-for-Itself in this sense which is the human reality as a consciousness places itself at a distance from its object just as consciousness by its very nature does, it separates itself from that which it is conscious about so as it can be aware of its directedness. For Sartre, this separation between consciousness and its object of intentional creates a gap which consciousness always seeks to reconcile. Meaning that, human being by his very nature has a gap that the whole of his existence seeks to reconcile. It is this gap that enables consciousness with the possibility of judging the object of its directedness in a form of affirming or denying, accepting or rejecting what is true or false about it. This ability that is constituted by the very nature of consciousness is what Sartre identified it to be freedom. Then we see that very ontological structure of the Being-for-Itself as a consciousness is the absolute freedom. Thus, we can argue that human nature has freedom as the essence of its very act of being.

The most interesting point here is that Being-For-Itself, is not what it is at any moment of its being, since it has to negate itself so as to be itself. This can be summarized in the saying of Sartre that, Being-for-Itself is not what it is but it is what it is not.² Therefore, it has an obligation of living its negation in its search to complete itself by means of freedom. Being-for-Itself, exists as an absolute freedom self and it is from that freedom that it relates with the world and with itself. Meaning that, it is from this freedom, that man creates his existence and also the meaning of the world that he exists in. From that angle, we see that the very existence of man is that he is condemned to be free.³ It is from this condemnation that he has the meaning of his existence.

1.1.2 Being-in-Itself as a Structure of World Entities

The other mode of existence that Sartre in his *Being and Nothingness* brings out is Being-in-Itself, which by its very nature it stands in contracts with the one we have seen above. We can say that it is the antithesis of the Being-for-Itself by its very nature of existence. This mode of existence is attributed to worldly objects and entities other than human reality. It is simply there without any transcends, meaning that it is all that it is and it cannot be something else other than what is attributed for it to be. Sartre argues that, Being-in-Itself is simply there and its being there is complete for it is what it is on that moment.⁴ It is complete in the sense that it lacks nothing, it has no gap and it cannot negate its being for it to be as it is the case with human nature. It is full of itself and nothing more can be imagined of it. In it, there is zero emptiness and not even a slightest negation can slip in.⁵ For example, a stone cannot possess freedom to make itself what it is not, as a stone it is what it is in its fullness.

1.2 The formulation of Being-for-Other as an Existential Problem

After having looked at the two modes of being whose nature is of contradiction, we now move to the third mode which in the Hegelian language it is understood as the synthesis of the other two modes. This third mode of existence forms an existential structure that belongs to Being-for-Itself while at the same time it is not its being, for its structure contradicts the very nature of Being-for-Itself. Sartre, in his part three of his work *Being and*

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, Trans. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 43

² Ibid, p. 354

³ Ibid

⁴ Francis J. Lescaie, *Existentialism with or without God*, (New York: Alba House, 1974), p. 290

⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, p. 62

Nothingness, he calls such mode of being as Being-for-Other. In which he intended to describe such mode of being as belonging to the conscious being or human reality, but not of its own making from its own freedom, but rather, it is constituted by the presence of another conscious being with its own subjective freedom. Thus, in this mode, man is thrown into an existence that it is not of its creation, but the existence that is generated by the awareness encounter one has with the Other.

It is from this awareness of the existence of the Other which is done in our everyday relation with ourselves and the world around us, that Sartre aims at critically analyzing its ontological implication of the self and how it reveals an existential problem of interpersonal relationship. This should be considered as the center of all our discussion in this paper, as to analysis the existence that the subjective self has upon encountering the Other. Much more, it is to see if this encounter can generate a genuine interpersonal relationship.

1.2 The Existential Interpretation of the Phenomenon of the Look

The whole Sartrean understanding and analysis of a genuine encounter between the self and the Other and how the possibility that this encountering could result into a real existential relationship is well described in his philosophical existential interpretation of the look. Sartre brings forth in his argument concerning the existential impact that originates from the awareness that a conscious being has when it encounters the existence of another conscious being in the world.

Therefore, it has to be noted that his conceptualization of the phenomena of the look, in this sense is not to be taken merely as the daily interplay that existence between the physical eyes and the things directed upon by this sense of sight. Since for him, the eyes are just considered to be offering a support to the whole reality of the look, meaning that the look as such, transcends this eye and object interplay. Therefore, we need to have an existential understanding of this interplay and see how this phenomenon constitutes the existence of a subjective conscious self. Thus, the Phenomena of the look is taken be to an existential reality that brings forth my individual existence, on the basis of the presence of the Other who is looking at me.⁶ This is well expressed in his own writing as we see below;

When dealing with the look, I cease to perceive the eyes that are looking at me for they are just there in my field of perception but am not in use of them, they are out of play but I feel to be venerable and penetrated by the being of the Other. Therefore, the look by the Other puts the eyes hidden and this Other moves in front of the eyes and penetrates my being.⁷

From the text above, we see that the everyday encounter with the Other conscious being within the reality of the look, its directedness towards the nature of my own existence. It is not only a reality of interplay in the world, but rather it reveals the very ontological structure of human consciousness as a consciousness which has been made open and venerable by the appearance of the Other.⁸

However, within the encounter between myself and the Other who appears, the being that is under investigation is not necessarily that of the Other but is such case it is mine. since what I apprehend the Other as looking at me, I apprehend much more my own existence as been vulnerably seen by this Other.⁹ This is all that centers Sartre's Being-for-Other, as we are now going to see further on what kind of a relation that exist during this encounter.

1.3 A Conflictual Relational Encounter Within the Interplay of the Look

We have seen that the definition of the look here is applied in the same sense as the appearance of the Other or the encounter one has with the Other, we now turn to how such appearance or encounter describes the nature of the subjective conscious self. In dealing with the question of how do we come to be aware of the existence of the Other in our ordinary every day, we shall see that Sartre used his existential understanding of the look as the

⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness; An essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, p.258

⁷ Ibid, p. 257

⁸ Mary Warnock, *The Philosophy of Sartre*, (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1965), p. 45

⁹ Ibid, p. 47

starting point of any existential relationship. However, at first, he argues that the look presents the Other as one among the objects that one encounters in his everyday dealings with the world. But later on, one comes to understand that the appearance of the Other reveals itself as not one among the objects of my creation, but rather, as another subject from whose angle I can also exist as an object. As he argues that;

This person whom I see coming towards me and this beggar that I hear calling my name for help, all exist to me at the first encounter as objects.¹⁰ However, looking at the presence of the Other as an object to me that brings some misunderstanding for the whole existence of the Other is reduced to be only conjectural or ideal, but this Other that I see or hear is not only conjectural or a perfected robot, but also real in its unity of experiences. The apprehension of the Other in our encounter fundamentally reveals to me that the Other is not just as an object but he is as a presence in person.¹¹

Therefore, the awareness of the Other in his uniqueness does not only reveal his personhood as that of mine, but also the Other reveals a self-transcendental existence from which he exists outside my freedom of creation and logic.

Within the look, the Other that I encounter provides itself as a subject which is connected with my ontological structure as the Being-for-Itself and such connection is done at an existential level.¹² Above all, this fundamental encounter with the Other in appearance is not supposed to be understood in any mystic experience, but it is to be grasped in the reality of everyday life in which the Other makes his appearance in a world that I have and I am having a relation with. In illustrating how the appearance of the Other forms an existential mode of the Being-for-Itself, Sartre portrays two metaphors so as not only to show and affirm the existence of the Other as a real subject, but also to show the conflictual nature of a genuine human relationship in the world. Let us now examine the analogies given by Sartre in which the look of the Other changes the ontological structure of the Being-for-Itself.

1.3.1 The Man in the Park

The metaphor of the man in a public park describes the Sartrean approach to the nature of all interpersonal encounters and relationships. Sartre's claim here is to show an existential state in which the appearance of the Other brings out a conflictual mode of being to the nature of the subjective conscious being. The main aim of us bringing out this metaphor in our paper is to show that for Sartre, it is the impossible to have any genuine existential relationship between the self and the Other. In this Metaphors, he gives an existential event in which a man is alone sitting and having a good time in the public park. At this time, he is in control of himself and the whole of his surrounding, he is able to relate and give a meaning to the objects of his surrounding by the use of his freedom

However, after some time he sees another man walking into the park, the very sight of this Other man other than himself in the park, changes the whole existential situation. As he argues

Suddenly I see another man passing by those benches. At first sight, I see this man and I immediately apprehend him as an object but at the same time I see him as a man. I do not only think and see him as an object for if I did so, I could have grouped him in the same parameters that I am ordinarily using to group the temporal-spatial things within the park and I could have just apprehended him as being beside the benches, two yards and twenty inches from the lawn. If I could have done so, then I could have him disappear within the objects around him.¹³

Therefore, we can see here that the appearance of the Other in the same world of the conscious self, reveals a different nature of this Other that is not within the operation of my freedom and knowledge as other objects in this world. For in perceiving him as a man, I see him as detached from these other objects found in the park.

¹⁰ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness; An essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, p. 252

¹¹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness; An essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, p. 253

¹² Robert. D. Cumming, *The Philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre*, p. 188

¹³ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 253

Since, am able to see that the lawn remains two yards and twenty inches away from him and at the same time it is bound to him in a relation that transcends distance and at the same time contains it.¹⁴ From this separate nature of the Other to other objects of the world, I now start to understand myself with a different approach towards my being from that which I had before this Other appeared at the park.

The existential relation that now is revealed between that man and the world of objects manifests a different relation to the one that I had with the same world before the appearance of the man. Slowly I see that this relationship that I had before has entirely started to escape me for I cannot put myself at the center of it anymore.¹⁵ There seems to be a negation between the distance that I established with the lawn and that between the lawn and the man. This awareness brings in experiences of the emptiness in me, for now I see across me the distance which at first, I had established between things distancing itself from me. Thus, the appearance of the objects in my world as I had related to them is now different from that world which I now relate to after the appearance of the man in my universe.¹⁶

Thus, the whole reality of my constitution changes and the Other is seen as stealing the world of my creation and thus making my freedom to be of little use. This other is shifting and giving meaning to this as he sees them and wants them to be, which is of different from the meaning that I had assigned to these things. The relation that I had with the world and the meaning that I had make with the objects of my experience, I see it being regrouped. The Other now creates the same universe in a different way than that of mine. The Other whom at first appeared as one of the objects in my world, now escapes me for he unfolds his subjective existence with the world that was all mine before his coming.¹⁷ At this moment, the whole world of my creation is put into question by this Other's appearance. More to that, is that I start to look at myself as also being part of the objects that this Other as constituted just as at first, I constituted him to be. He claimed that;

When I look at this Other he manifests himself as an object to me since I can see him there, his back against me and two yard from the statue.¹⁸ But then I see this Other looking at me and I apprehend that look to myself as being seen by the Other, then immediately I apprehend the Other as a subject and I look upon myself as becoming a probable object to such Other. I apprehend myself now as an object from the point of view of the Other, I now come to an awareness of myself that am considered as an object to a being that I also see as an object.¹⁹

However, regardless of the appearance of this Other, I still consider the look of the Other not as a manifestation of my act of being as that of an object, for he cannot look at me in the same way as he is looking at the grass on the lawn.²⁰ This now brings in a conflict of understanding myself while grasping and understanding the Other. The metaphor of the appearing of a man in a public park offers the real nature of every encounter with the Other in a world of our dealings. It gives us Sartre's interpretation of how the existence of the Other brings a negative confrontation within my universe and how this Other's appearance puts me in a situation of looking at myself as an object of his appearance in his own universe. The metaphor also shows how the everyday appearance of the Other in a world in which the man is creating and making his meaning, bring an existential conflict to the freedom of the self.²¹ For it limits the absolute freedom that grounds the nature of Being-For-Itself.

Thus, my encounter with the Other leaves me in an ontological conflict with nature of my being. Sartre, can be understood here to mean that in a shared world between the self and the Other, the relational encounter that is born from it creates a limitation of freedom to both sides. Since the Other creates a different meaning to the very world of my experience. This could be the foundation of the ungenue human relationships that have provided strong roots behind our everyday contemporary encounters.

¹⁴ Robert. D. Cumming, *The Philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre*, (New York: Randon House, 1965), 190

¹⁵ Robert. D. Cumming, *The Philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre*, p. 191

¹⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness; An essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, p. 255

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 255

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 255

¹⁹ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness; An essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, p.256

²⁰ Ibid, p. 257

²¹ Francis J. Lescoe, *Existentialism with and Without God*, p. 295

1.3.2 The Man at the Keyhole

After we have seen the metaphor of the man in the park and how the appearance of the Other brings in a conflictual relation of Being-for-Itself with its own very nature, with its surroundings and with the existing Other. Sartre, presents another existential metaphor of the man at the keyhole so as to show how the encounter between the self and the Other within the look brings out the existential problem of the Other. This metaphor, could be seen has having the same interpretation with the one we have seen above, but we have decided to include it also in this paper since it reflects more on what kind of existential mood that the Being-for-Itself occupies after coming to an awareness of its being as venerable to the being of the Other.

He now gives a situation in which the subjective consciousness is in full control of its very nature and with the world around it, with no sense of the existence of the Other. At this time the actions of the self are all directed towards its own awareness and there is no any Other person who such action can be revealed to

Take the experience of being moved by jealousy, curiosity and vice towards the Other. This experience leads me to glue my eyes or ears to the door of the Other so as to hear or look through a keyhole what state the Other is inside the room. I am just alone, meaning that there is no other consciousness of which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them.²² At that moment I am my act and I carry on my shoulder all the justification of my act, all the things around are in a position of offering their potentialities to my own possibilities.²³

At this moment, one has full control of his existence and the existence of all the objects around him.²⁴ This phenomenon can be understood as the private and secrete zone that every human being exists in, a zone that is not known to any Other than to the Self as such. A kind of existence in which one has created an environment in his own way and all the instruments in such environmental life are to be handled with care, for they are the ones that brings forth the possibility of this private zone. Now after a private zone has been created and secured, then man now takes pleasure and start enjoying the end that he has achieved. However, Sartre in this metaphor, he brings in the existence of the Other in such serenity that is being enjoyed by the conscious self. The Other now appears in my private life zone and immediately I feel exposed to this Other and it's no longer a secrete as it was before for it has been made known to the Other. As he argues;

That suddenly one hears footsteps of someone standing there looking at me and I come to an awareness that am looked upon. Such an appearance of the Other immediately affect my being and this other looking at me brings essential modifications in my own structure that I was in. I now look at myself as being seen by the Other and I start to understand myself in that somebody's look at me. Of the sudden I am conscious of myself as not being in control of my situation and I apprehend myself as escaping my own being. An escaping not founded in my nothingness but the one which has its foundation outside my being-for-itself. I now start to understand myself that I am for myself only as I am in pure reference to the Other seeing me.²⁵

At the very moment that I come to be aware of the appearance of the Other upon my private zone, the relationship that I once had with my being and with the instruments around me, it all escapes me and I start looking at myself from the reference of the Other as he has seen me. On such ground, the existential state of moods such as shame, fear and guilty are born within me. I am not ashamed because the Other has seen me, but rather because I feel the experience of being seen or being exposed by this Other. I began to ask myself questions such as; what sort of being does this Other think I am? How do I now exist in his judgment of what he has seen about me? From there I now start feeling guilty of my acts, shame about myself and I become fearful of what may happen to me after now that I have been seen by this Other.

However, at the same time as the *For-itself* I need not to be worried of what the Other has seen about me for I am not defined with what this Other think that I am, since my very nature I am not what I am but I am what am not,

²² Ibid, p. 296

²³ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 258

²⁴ Robert. D. Cumming, *The Philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre*, p. 197

²⁵ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, ; *An essay on Phenomenological Ontology* p. 278

as we have seen with is dictum in our existential analysis of Being-for-Itself as a human reality. Sartre points out that this appearance of the Other, create a conflict of existence with myself for from it, is revealed to me a mode of existence that does not belong to me while at the same time I experiences these existential moods of being shame, guilty and fear which are all on me.

The metaphor of the man at the keyhole portrays how the nature of Being-for-Other exist in an alien world the moment it is encountered by the appearance of the Other. In such an encounter, a human being no longer feels and act in reference to its own nature, but rather, to that of how it exists as it sees itself in the consciousness of the Other. We see here that even in this metaphor the awareness of the existence of the Other in our everyday encounter takes way the ontological structure of Man, by making him to exists as a being in the look of the Other of which at the same time it cannot be the case due to very nature that constitutes Man.

Conclusion

We have seen in this paper, how the appearance of another individual person other than ourselves brings a conflictual atmosphere in our understanding of our own being and with that of the world around us. Thus, the other person as such is a limit and an obstacle to my very act of being and to my participation in the world. Therefore, from the argument of Sartre, it is impossible to have a genuine interpersonal encounter that could develop to a real existential relationship. The Sartrean Being-for-Others could be of relevant to a great extend in our modern societies and the kind of relationships that emerge from it. We see that amongst human greatest desires of the time are privacy of one's life, ability to make one's own chooses about his/her life and to create a surrounding of one's like. However, the presence of the other person and the encounter that is there with each other, it shows how it is so difficult or nearly impossible to achieve such desired life. Therefore, in such case the Other limits my privacy, my freedom and my understanding of the world. Thus, Sartre's Being-for-Others has a place to play in our existential everyday encounter with one another and in our dealings with the world around us. Above all, this awakes in us the awareness that each encounter with one another it is of such great structure to very nature of our own being.

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