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# NOVELIST-PHILOSOPHERS

## V—JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

### *Conclusion*

#### 3. SARTRE'S VIEWS ON THE EXISTENCE OF OTHERS

##### *(a) Outline of the Problem*

It is not easy to bring oneself to doubt that other persons exist. A philosopher like Fichte may come to the conclusion that 'the world is my idea', but even if such a view can be made internally self-consistent, it is excessively repugnant to common sense; indeed to refer to common sense at all would seem already to imply its rejection. Nevertheless the belief that there are other persons and that they have experiences which are similar to one's own has not been found easy to justify, and I do not know that any philosopher has yet given a satisfactory account of it. In the first instance the difficulty seems to arise from the fact that each person's experiences are assumed to be private to himself. The basis of this assumption is itself not very clear, but I take it to be logical rather than empirical in character. That is to say, it is not, in my view, merely an empirical matter of fact that one person cannot literally think another's thoughts or feel another's emotions, but a logical consequence of the rules which govern our use of language; so that if, for example, 'I am unable to feel your toothache', it is not through lack of sympathy, or for want of a sufficiently ingenious experimental technique, but because an expression like 'feeling another's toothache' does not have a meaning; and this is a consequence of the fact that our criteria of personal identity are such as to make it impossible *a priori* for different personal histories to share a common term. But if the experiences of another person are thus, by definition, made inaccessible to my observation, it is difficult to see what reason I can have for believing in their existence. I have the evidence of my senses to support my belief in the existence of other human

bodies; but what justification can I have for assuming that 'behind' the phenomena which constitute another human body are thoughts and feelings and perceptions which are analogous to my own?

The most common answer is that my belief in the existence of these inaccessible experiences can be justified by an argument from analogy. The suggestion is that I have learned that my own inner experiences are correlated with certain states and movements of my body, including my use of language, and that my observing similar manifestations in connection with other bodies entitles me to infer that they are associated with similar experiences. When put in this way the argument seems plausible, but it becomes less so when it is stated more exactly. For it must be remembered that the similarity which I discover between the conditions of my own body and those of other bodies is a similarity between different sets of my own sense-data. The premise is, therefore, that I have learned that certain visual, tactual and auditory sense-data are associated with certain introspectible thoughts and feelings, and that I apprehend other sense-data which are similar in quality to the members of the former class, but differ from them in being differently located in their respective sense-fields. With what then, am I to infer that the members of this second class are associated? The answer which completes the analogy is 'with similar thoughts and feelings'; but the trouble is that unless I already have reason to believe that there are such things as other persons' experiences I must presumably take these similar thoughts and feelings to be, not the thoughts and feelings of others, but unconscious experiences of my own; and this conclusion, besides being generally false, is not what the argument was intended to establish. Furthermore, there is something uncomfortably mysterious about this conception of another's private world which I posit as lying behind the appearances that afford me the evidence of his physical existence. It is disturbingly reminiscent of the animistic belief in imperceptible spirits. To this it may indeed be objected that the other person's experiences are believed to be immediately accessible to his observation, if not to mine. But could it not equally have been supposed that the imperceptible spirits were conscious of themselves?

In face of this difficulty some philosophers have taken the course of defining the experiences of other people in terms of

their sensible manifestations. That is, they hold that all that can be meant by saying of another person that he is having a certain experience is that he displays what would normally be described as the external signs of the experience in question, or at least that he would display them if certain other conditions were fulfilled. Thus, to say of some other person that he was, for example, in pain would, in this view, mean no more than that his body was in one or other of the observable conditions which are ordinarily taken to be indicative of pain, where these bodily conditions may be understood to include the verbal responses that certain questions would evoke. I think that this theory may be developed in such a way as to meet some of the more obvious objections that can be brought against it, as, for example, the possibility that the person is acting a part or lying; but apart from the fact that it is somewhat shocking to common sense, it has the defect of drawing what seems an excessively sharp distinction between the statements that one makes about other people and the apparently similar statements that one makes about oneself. For when I say of myself that I am in pain I do not intend merely to describe the perceptible condition of my body; I am referring primarily to a feeling of which I am directly aware. This asymmetry can indeed be removed by the adoption of a thoroughgoing behaviourism, according to which my own thoughts and sensations are themselves to be identified with their outward 'signs'; but, whatever the convenience of this theory, it does not seem to cover the facts of my experience. Moreover, I do not see how even the behaviourist's propositions are to be supposed capable of being verified unless the subjective element is, explicitly or tacitly, re-introduced.

(b) *Sartre's Concessions to Behaviourism*

Sartre's general position is very different from that of the behaviourists, but with regard to this problem of other persons' experiences he appears to adopt their standpoint. Thus he introduces his remarks about the human body with the statement that 'it is in its entirety that *l'être-pour-soi* must be corporeal and in its entirety that it must be consciousness'. 'There can be no question', he continues, 'of its being *united* to a body. Similarly, *l'être-pour-autrui* is wholly corporeal; there are in this case no "psychical

phenomena" to unite to the body; there is nothing *behind* the body. But the body is wholly "psychical". And later on, after declaring that 'my perception of another's body is radically different from my perceptions of things', inasmuch as I perceive it always as a whole and in reference to a situation which indicates it, he asserts that being an object for another person is strictly equivalent to being a body. '*Seul existe pour moi le corps d'autrui avec ses différentes significations*;' and these signs do not refer to anything beyond the body, to '*un psychisme mystérieux*'; '*elles se réfèrent au monde et à elles-mêmes*'. In particular, Sartre continues, '*ces manifestations émotionnelles ou, d'une façon plus générale, les phénomènes improprement appelés d'expression ne nous indiquent nullement une affection cachée et vécue par quelque psychisme, qui serait l'objet immatériel des recherches du psychologue; ces froncements de sourcils, cette rougeur, ce bégaiement, ce léger tremblement des mains, ces regards en dessous qui semblent à la fois timides et menaçants n'expriment pas la colère, ils sont la colère*.' We shall see later on that this is not the only or even the principal way in which Sartre conceives of others, but this statement plainly gives reason to the behaviourists, so far as it goes. It is true that he proceeds to criticize them on the ground that they have 'lost sight of man's principal characteristic' which is his '*transcendance-transcendée*', and that they have failed to recognize that the Other Person (*Autrui*) is '*l'objet qui ne se comprend qu'à partir de sa vie*'; but the validity of these highly dubious propositions is not, I think, relevant to the particular problem with which we have so far been dealing.

I have mentioned as a possible objection to a behaviouristic analysis of the statements that one makes about another person's experiences the extent to which they are thereby made to differ from the statements that one makes about one's own; but it may be that Sartre would consider that this objection did not touch him, since he dismisses the whole notion of subjective sensations as 'a mere psychologist's dream'. He does, however, draw a sharp distinction between 'my own body', which he variously describes as a centre of reference which I live but do not cognize, as an instrument of which I cannot use any instrument to serve myself, and as the situation of the *pour-soi* in the world, and the other's body, which appears to me '*comme un point de vue sur lequel je peux prendre un point de vue, un instrument que je peux*

utiliser avec d'autres instruments'. At the same time he seems to allow that I can in some measure adopt another's point of view towards my own body, and he does in fact say that it is by means of the concepts of 'Autrui' that I know my body. '*Le mal que je souffre, je peux le viser dans son En-soi, c'est-à-dire précisément, dans son être-pour-autrui. A ce moment je le connais, c'est-à-dire que je le vise dans sa dimension d'être qui m'échappe, dans la face qu'il tourne vers les Autres.*' In addition, between the primitive stage at which I merely live my body, and the stage at which I know it, Sartre finds another level of existence for it at which it becomes what he calls '*le corps psychique*'. This *corps psychique*, which is described as '*pur corrélatif noématique d'une conscience réflexive*' is said not to be known, inasmuch as the reflexion to which it corresponds is not yet cognitive; '*elle est affectivité en son surgissement originel*'. None the less, '*ce corps psychique, étant la projection, sur le plan de l'en-soi, de l'intra-texture de la conscience, fait la matière implicite de tous les phénomènes de la psyché.*' Thus as far as the field of empirical psychology is concerned, Sartre appears to reach a position which is not markedly different from that of the thoroughgoing behaviourists. The trouble is, however, that he does not content himself with the field of empirical psychology, either in respect of others, or, as we have seen, in respect of oneself.

(c) '*Autrui-sujet*'

So far we have been dealing only with the existence of others as objects of one's own knowledge; but it is Sartre's contention that they are also revealed as 'subjects'. As such, they are not, properly speaking, known; but their existence is required as 'the concrete and transcendent condition of my own objectivity'. The theory seems to be that in certain states, such as those of shame and pride, I am aware of being an object and that this carries with it an awareness of the existence of Another as a subject who observes me. Thus, '*ma liaison fondamentale avec autrui-sujet doit pouvoir se ramener à ma possibilité permanente d'être vu par autrui. C'est dans et par la révélation de mon être-objet pour autrui que je dois pouvoir saisir la présence de son être-sujet.*' To this the obvious objection is that to assume that I am in fact an object for someone else is to beg the question; and if the premise is merely that I have the impression of being observed, this may very well occur without its actually being the case that anyone is observing me. Sartre's

answer to this is that it is true that in any given case in which I think that some particular person is observing me I may conceivably be mistaken; but all that this proves, according to him, is that I may be mistaken about the identification of 'Autrui' with some particular object of my experience; it does not impair my certainty of the existence of 'Autrui' in general. 'En un mot', he says, '*ce qui est certain c'est que je suis regardé, ce qui est seulement probable c'est que le regard soit lié à telle ou telle présence intramondaine*'; and again, '*Qu'est donc, en bref, qui est apparu mensongèrement...? Ce n'est pas autrui-sujet, ni sa présence à moi; c'est la facticité d'autrui, c'est-à-dire la liaison contingente d'autrui à un être-objet dans mon monde. Ainsi ce qui est douteux, ce n'est pas autrui lui-même, c'est l'être-là d'autrui.*' But what is this mysterious Other which is not necessarily identical with any given person? It looks as if Sartre is using 'autrui' as a name, in which case he is making a logical error of the same type as we have detected in his use of 'le néant'. And how can it be certain that I am being watched when it is not certain that anyone is watching me? It may be certain that I have the feeling of being watched, and this may reasonably be taken to involve a belief on my part that other subjects exist. But what we require is a logical justification of this belief; and this, so far as I can see, Sartre makes no attempt to provide.

One reason why he does not provide it is that he tries to avoid describing the situation in cognitive terms. Thus he declares that 'mon moi-objet', through which the existence of 'autrui-sujet' is somehow revealed to me, is not 'connaissance' but 'malaise', and that the other, the fact of whose existence I realize 'par la malaise' is not 'connaissance' either but '*le fait de la présence d'une liberté étrangère*'. But this seems to me a case of what Sartre himself would call *mauvaise foi*. For the question is not whether I do or do not in fact go through the process of inferring the existence of my 'object-self', and 'the other-subject' as its correlative from the manifestation of my 'disquiet', but whether this inference, if I were to make it, would be justified; and if there is no valid ground for making it, then the reference to my disquiet, though it may help to account for my belief in the presence of other subjects, is in no way a guarantee that this belief is well founded. To say, as Sartre does, that '*mon arrachement à moi et le surgissement de la liberté d'autrui ne font qu'un*' or that the other appears to

me 'comme un être qui surgit dans un rapport originel d'être avec moi et dont l'indubitabilité et la nécessité de fait sont celles de ma propre conscience' is surely to beg the question. For let it be granted that I have experiences which seem to testify to the influence of other subjects; they still remain my experiences, and, as such, they cannot possibly be identical with, or even contain, the fact that other subjects exist, still less that these other subjects are free. The most that they can contain is my reflective or unreflective acceptance of these facts, which is by no means the same thing. The existence of others may indeed be posited as a hypothesis to account for certain such features of my experience; but an assumption of this sort will at best provide me only with what Sartre would call '*autrui-objet*'. It cannot justify a belief in the existence of the transcendental subject, '*le moi qui n'est pas moi*', which he is here seeking to establish.

(d) *Our relations with one another*

In the second part of this essay I have given some account of Sartre's idea of the temporal self-pursuit in which a person, as something which exists *pour-soi*, is, by his principles, condemned to be engaged. '*Le pour-soi*', he explains, '*comme néantisation de l'en-soi, se temporalise comme fuite vers. Il dépasse en effet sa facticité—ou être donné ou passé ou corps—vers l'en-soi qu'il serait s'il pouvait être son propre fondement.*' But since it is impossible for the *pour-soi* to be, in the requisite way, responsible for itself, it never succeeds in rejoining the *en-soi* which it both flees and pursues. When, however, one is in the presence of another subject then, according to Sartre, the flight of the *pour-soi*, which exemplifies one's freedom, is objectified by the other and thereby turned into something which does exist *en-soi*, not indeed for oneself but for the other. Thus, '*pour autrui je suis irrémédiablement ce que je suis et ma liberté même est un caractère donné de mon être*'. Sartre says of this turning of my 'flight' into something objective that I 'feel it as an alienation which I can neither transcend nor know'. Nevertheless he insists that I do feel it and that I am therefore bound to adopt some attitude towards it; and it is on my choice of this attitude that, in his view, all my 'concrete relations' with others ultimately depend.

In this position, two main courses are supposed to be open to me. On the one hand, I may resent the fact that the other, merely



by observing me, enters into possession of 'the secret of my being' which he keeps locked up outside my reach; and I may therefore try to repudiate the being which the other bestows on me by the expedient of exchanging our respective roles. '*Je puis me retourner sur autrui pour lui conférer à mon tour l'objectivité, puisque l'objectivité d'autrui est destructrice de mon objectivité pour autrui.*' Alternatively, seeing that the other in his freedom is responsible for my être-en-soi, I may try to gain possession of this freedom without impairing it. For '*si je pouvais, en effet, m'assimiler cette liberté qui est fondement de mon être-en-soi, je serais à moi-même mon propre fondement.*' In the former case, I am said to 'transcend the transcendence of the other', in the latter, 'to absorb this transcendence in myself, without robbing it of its character of transcendence'. These two projects are logical contraries, and each is brought forward by the failure of the other. Moreover, since they each contain an internal contradiction, both are bound to fail. Thus Sartre depicts one's concrete relations with others as based upon a circle of frustration from which it is impossible ever to escape.

An example of the case in which one tries to 'absorb' another in order to 'recover' oneself is found by Sartre in the experience of love. According to him, what the lover desires to possess is essentially the freedom of the person whom he loves. '*Il veut posséder une liberté comme liberté.*' Consequently, he aims at making himself loved by the other, and it is indeed in the desire to make oneself loved that loving is said by Sartre to consist. But if loving is to be defined in this way, it will follow that the love for oneself which is aroused in the other person will be in its turn a desire to be loved. Thus 'A loves B' means that A desires that B shall love A; but since 'that B shall love A' means that B shall desire that A shall love B, the original proposition becomes 'A desires that B shall desire that A shall desire . . .' *ad infinitum*. Sartre perceives this consequence, but instead of concluding, as one would expect, that there is something wrong with his definition, he takes it as a proof that the enterprise of loving is self-destructive. '*J'exige que l'autre m'aime et je mets tout en œuvre pour réaliser mon projet; mais si l'autre m'aime il me déçoit radicalement par son amour même; j'exigeais de lui qu'il fonde mon être comme objet privilégié en se maintenant comme pure subjectivité en face de moi; et, dès qu'il m'aime, il m'éprouve comme sujet et s'abîme dans son objectivité en face de ma subjectivité. Le problème de mon être-pour-autrui demeure*



*donc sans solution, les amants demeurent chacun pour soi dans une subjectivité totale; rien ne vient lever leur contingence ni les sauver de la facticité.* No doubt this escape from contingency is an impossible achievement. But are we really to believe that it is the essential object of love?

The contrary case, in which I try to 'transcend the transcendence' of another by bestowing on the person in question the status of an object is illustrated by the phenomenon of sexual desire. In this situation, my consciousness is said to 'become flesh' in order to bring about the corresponding incarnation of the other. What I wish is to possess the other's body, but not merely as a thing or as an instrument. I wish to possess it as the incarnation of the other's consciousness. But this too, we are told, is an end that it is impossible to realize. For in the physical process of its attainment both my body and the other's become mere instruments in my world, and the other person, the 'transcendence' which I am trying to appropriate, inevitably escapes me. In this extremity my desire to possess the other may develop into sadism, just as the desire to be possessed, and so possess oneself, which is the object of love, may emerge as masochism; but this recurrence to extremes does not save me. The end remains in each case unrealizable because of the inner contradiction of the aim.

It is Sartre's view that these contrasted sexual attitudes, which he treats, paradoxically, as part of the structure of the *pour-soi*, provide the framework of all our social behaviour, so that the primitive circle of frustration is made by him to cover the whole field of human relationships. Not surprisingly, he finds as a result that the other's freedom, which can neither be abolished nor appropriated, may well appear intolerable, and this accounts, in his view, for the phenomenon of hatred, which he believes to be directed, not against any particular human being, but against all other human beings in the person of one. '*Ce que je veux atteindre symboliquement en poursuivant la mort de tel autre c'est le principe générale de l'existence d'autrui.*' But even if I succeed in killing the person in question Sartre holds that I do not thereby attain my end. For, though I destroy his present existence, I cannot abolish the fact that he has existed; and this means, according to Sartre, that my 'being-for-him', which is what I am really anxious to do away with, remains petrified in the past,

and so more than ever beyond my reach. Thus, '*la mort de l'autre me constitue comme objet irrémédiable exactement comme ma propre mort*'; my hatred is cheated of its object by its very success and *le pour-soi*, having failed in this last despairing attempt to emancipate itself from *le pour-autrui*, continues to oscillate indefinitely between the two original attitudes, which have previously been described.

These analyses of human behaviour seem to be of considerable psychological interest, but, to my mind, they are open to the serious objection that they do not correspond empirically to the way that most people actually behave. No doubt, if there were good *a priori* grounds for supposing that people were bound to treat each other in the manner that Sartre describes, we should be justified in looking beyond the empirical evidence, which goes to show that they do not; but this would be to assume the truth of Sartre's general view about the *pour-soi*, which I have already given reasons for holding to be false. As it is, I think that he has given us a fair account of the reasons why certain people feel frustrated and of the forms which this frustration may assume; but neither on logical nor on empirical grounds do I think that he is justified in taking this special type of frustration to be a necessary feature of all human experience.

## MEMOIRS OF THE LATE PRINCESSE EDMOND DE POLIGNAC

BEFORE the Franco-German War of 1870 my parents lived in Paris, on the Boulevard Malesherbes, in a large apartment near the Parc Monceau, and there my sister and three of my brothers were born. During the war, at the time when the Commune was impending, my father was advised to leave France, and so came to England with my mother and six children.