

CHAPTER NINE

Sartre: Being-in-itself, For-it-self and Self-Knowledge

The Hole is not a pleasant essay; Huis Clos, No Exit is not a polite play. Yet, both are speaking about the human being's tendency "to cover up," "to fill up" any vacancies, any holes. Both dramatize Sartre's preoccupation with human beings being "other".or moral rather than being "self".or ethical This dramatization provides a contemporary analysis of the Greek word, aletheia, translated in English is "truth." The Greeks list its meaning as a, the alpha privative, meaning "not" and lethein, the verb, meaning "to forget"."to hide"."to bury"."to cover up"; thus, the Greeks looked upon truth as what is "open". (h)onest, or just "being." The poem "I am a Rock" seems as good an introduction to Sartre's The Hole and No Exit as any other in the attempt to understand Sartre's criticism of how contemporary human beings seek to avoid freedom of self-assertion and seek the slavery of other-imitation through "fulfillment."

I am an island. I build walls".

A winter's day
 In a deep and dark december,
 I am alone.
 Gazing from my window to the streets below,
 On a freshly fallen, silent shroud of snow
 I am a rock. I am an island.
 I build walls
 A fortress deep and mighty that none may penetrate.
 I have no need of friendship. Friendship causes pain.
 Its laughter and its loving I disdain.
 I am a rock. I an island.
 Don't talk of love, well,
 I've heard the word before.
 It's sleeping in my memory
 I won't disturb the slumber of feelings that have died.
 If I never loved, I never would have cried.
 I am a rock. I am an island.
 I have my books and
 My poetry to protect me.
 I am shielded in my armor.
 Hiding in my room, safe within my womb,

I touch no one and no one touches me.
 I am a rock. I am an island.
 And the rock feels no pain.
 And an island never cries.

Simone de
 Beauvoir,

a rock feels no pain; an island never cries".

Sartre's confidant, describes the "existentialistic way" as incorporating:

...into the doctrine (metaphysical) the concrete and dramatic aspect of experience and purpose, not some sort of abstract truth, but my truth, as I realize it in my own life...this also explains why existentialism often chooses to express itself through fiction, novel and play...The purpose is to grasp existence in the act itself in which it fulfills itself." (Litterateur et Metaphysique, p. 5)

Obviously, Simon's "rock".thus, Simon, feels no pain because it feels nothing; it is a "being-in-itself" and has no consciousness, no "being-for-itself".as it were, reaching out to know, or, in Sartre's words "appropriate" something "for-itself." Simon's "rock".in the view of de Beauvoir, is Simon's "truth, as I realize it in my own life." Simon prefers to be a rock, rather than to be rational because he seeks stoical non-involvement, absence of pain, and, thus, avoidance of love, a prerequisite to which is avoidance of conscious knowing—after all, love follows upon the known because love seeks to be united to the good as the conscious mind presents it to the will as "known."

**I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
 ne taste: my taste was me".**

Another poem, this one by
 the Jesuit Gerard Manley Hopkins,
 echoes a similar sentiment, namely,

the pain of conscious, rational existence, however, it differs from the Simon poem. Hopkins retained hope in God's redemptive love and, therefore, conserved hope and love of himself as made in the image and likeness of God, namely, free to share goodness, something which Sartre would never do!

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I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day,
 What hours, O what black hours we have spent

This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went.
 And more must, in yet longer light's delay.
 With witness I speak this. But where I say
 Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
 Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
 To dearest him that lives alas! away.
 I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
 Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
 Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse
 Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
 The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
 As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

A Socratic truth underlies Sartre's and Simon's description of the "rational, conscious" being, or being-for-itself. Socratically, man is wise when he knows what-he-does-not-know. Man is free precisely in so far and only when he realizes that he does not know and, therefore, is aware of his ignorance; thus, he perceives that he is limited. Knowing that one is ignorant is, for Socrates, the antithesis of thinking that one knows, when, in fact, one does not know; the former is humble acceptance of being a wise human being, the latter, an arrogant commitment to wealth, honor and reputation as being "wise".

Kierkegaard, on the contrary, is convinced that to be human is "to be in error". apparently a variant of Martin Luther's view that original sin consists in the devil entering into human nature when Adam and Eve disobeyed; furthermore, this "to be in error" means that humans must take the "leap of faith" and "open up to Christ's saving promise" by admitting that we "is in error" and do not want "to be saved"—yet, arrogantly looks to science and/or rationality for salvation. Kierkegaard, therefore, wants humans to acknowledge "that we are dependent upon God" and such a "giving up" results in our allowing God to take over; this means "salvation." Sartre, of course, has no place for such a "leap of faith", for such would be "bad faith". namely, seeking freedom through dependence. Tolstoy's point, however, is similar to Kierkegaard's, namely, human material goods are empty and the human must "let go" before he or she can fall through the bag and find peace in "letting loose."

No Exit and Self-knowledge

Huis Clos presents
Sartre's view of the human

the eyes are the windows into the soul.

condition, that is, that human beings try to escape from the fact that we are a "conscious being".namely, a being for-itself, and, thus, "to be empty".to be "nothingness".by seeking to be something, that is, a being in-itself. We humans seek to be something other than as we is in other people's "eyes"; thus, human beings seek to fill up this rational "nothingness" with "thingness".whether that is wealth, honor or reputation. Humans seek to fulfill his for-itself (consciousness) with and by an in-itself (some form of unconsciousness), or something that will make us "feel" that we are "full" of meaning, when, in fact, our very meaning is to be limited, both empty and full, or, half and half, but never one or the other.

"Eyes" are the central and basic point of No Exit, and thus, is consistent with Plato's view that anthropos, Greek for human being, is composed of the words, an, or eyes and thropos, or turned up, a descriptive definition of rational animal. However, none of Sartre's "players" have eye lids; thus, no one of them can "shut" their eyes—so any exit from seeing themselves as reflected in other people's eyes is "closed." Indeed, the room in which the play takes place has "no windows" so none of the participants can exit the scene by "looking outside." Furthermore, no mirrors are in the room so none of them can "check" their appearances in an outside source. Heraclitus had several observations about what men with "barbarian souls" saw when they "looked" with their eyes—particularly when they were

confronted by the
glitter of gold.

to look is not to see; to be empty is not to be filled

In short, Sartre dramatizes in No Exit how the human being seeks to renounce the reality of conscious being by desiring to "be other" than we is—thus, contends Sartre, the human being does not want to take the responsibility for "being-conscious".that is, "be as lack"; we do not want to face up and accept our "nothingness".rather, we seek to be "unconscious", an in-itself, instead of "lacking unconscious", and being "free"; we seek, rather to be a non-thing, not determined. So, human science, according to Sartre, becomes a "useless passion" because science is a useless attempt to fill the emptiness of "human consciousness".or for-itself with knowledge; as a matter of fact, in the process of "filling up".science leads human beings away from accepting human limitation because it rekindles within humans the hope that we will find out, be filled-up. Indeed, one wonders whether or

not the discovery and pursuit of nuclear energy is not a further proof of Sartre's contention, namely, that science brings the human being to self-annihilation, or a destruction of our very conscious being; so we wind up destroying that which we seek to save.

Huis Clos' title, its to be other than I am is not to be me. basic emphasis upon the eyes of its players, as well as the lack of both windows and mirrors, with the exception of the reflection of oneself in the eyes of the other, set the stage for Sartre's criticism of the rational human being through Inez, Estelle and Garcin. Some 2,300 years earlier, Aristotle observed that the "eyes are the windows of and to the soul." Human eyes are those instruments through which man's inside state manifests itself to the outside—thus, the eyes are the windows to the interior being of a person; and they are also those senses which reflect outside appearances, that is, reflect the values of other people and things, such as wealth, reputation, honor and so forth. The eyes, therefore, show a person to be unauthentic or authentic, a hypocrite or honest, whether that person is the subject perceived or the "subject reflected."

Interesting, in this regard, is the fact that although Sartre claims that an irreconcilable gap exists between the subject (consciousness, or the for-itself) and the objective (non-conscious, or in-itself), he uses the eyes as his demonstrative instrument to dramatize the human condition. Yet, in fact, the eyes are both the mirror of the world of appearances (or the instruments whereby the in-itself comes "inside" of man) and windows into the soul (or, the instrument whereby the "inside" of man manifests itself as a for-itself to the "outside" world). Thus, notwithstanding Sartre's contention of this irreconcilable gap, the eyes of the human being are a type of instrument thanks to which the subjective is objectified (for-itselfs relate to others) and the objective (things, or in-itselfs) can be subjectified!

To be spiritual hungry can not be assuaged by material goods.

Eyes, therefore, are the one media whereby man can achieve honesty, that is, recognize the nature of the world, or, the world as constituted by two kinds of being, for-itselfs and in-itselfs and accept the responsibility of being a for-itself, or, can manifest hypocrisy, that is, seek to be a "thing" and, thus, "castrate".to use Sartre's term, his for-itselfness or consciousness. This use of the eyes, then, seems to contradict Sartre's contention, namely, that an irreconcilable gap exists between the objective (the in-itself) and the subjective (the for-itself) because it is the eyes which

allow any union of recognition to occur and it is that union of recognition which is necessary for

Sartre's criticism of the human, conscious condition in what he calls his "descriptive ontology".

To live sexually is to die rationally; so also, to live rationally is to die sexually.

When Inez says to Estelle: "Sit down. Come closer. Closer. Look into my eyes, what do you see?" And Estelle responds: "Oh, I'm there! But, so tiny I can't see myself properly". the statement of Estelle has all the characteristics of the Oracle of Delphi. The meaning is equivocal: it could mean: "I am small in your eyes" and, thus, am not properly reflected as I am because of you. Or, it could mean: "I am small".and your eyes reflect me as I am, rather than as I thought I was. The French is more precise: "Je suis toute petite. Je me vois tres mal". Literally, "I am all small. I see myself very badly".or "very evil".as having become a for-itself. The drama becomes all the more poignant when the reader or observer realizes that Inez is a confessed lesbian and that, although Estelle is a self-proclaimed heterosexual, she is attracted to Inez, fights it, then gives in and becomes ashamed and guilty. Inez herself shares in this guilt both because her relationship with Estelle manifested a dependence and her attraction to

to want to be other than they are is to want to be dependent.

Garcin occasions a shame.

Estelle states how she stands in this room of No Exit. None of the players can get away, escape who they are vis a' vis what they have made themselves into, namely, "small" by the fact that they have tried to fill the hole of nothingness, that is, their human consciousness, the for-itself who each is with a thing, that is, an in-itself, and thus, live their lives in and through reflecting things (in-itselfs), rather than living as a human reality (for-itselfs). All the self-reflection and the self-knowledge which each of these characters discovers becomes self-condemning because all their self-knowledge reveals that each of them has betrayed the nature which each is, that is, a human conscious being wherein freedom lies. Each has rejected being free by acceptance of being dependent.

The interesting aspect of Huis Clos is not the room setting, however, but rather the fact that Sartre, following the analysis of the human tendency to fill up holes in his essay, "The Hole", has portrayed the human being as losing his or her identity because he or she has engaged in sexual activity.

Sartre contends that to live rationally means to die sexually; and to live sexually is to die rationally. Suicide can be avoided only by existing as we are, empty, a “useless passion”. Sartre has identified the “fall” of the human conscious being, the being-for-itself to be found in that human being’s attempt to fill up his or her emptiness through sexual action with a physical body, a thing, or being-in-itself.

This is very interesting in the light of the analysis of Adam’s “fall” within Genesis as was described within the “Chapter One.” Yet, even Socrates’ criticism of the politicians, the poets and the craftspeople within the *Apology* was based on them “losing” their meaning because they identified themselves with wealth, honor and reputation, rather than emphasizing virtue and the perfection of the soul. This criticism reflects upon the human body in the sense that these people showed more care for the comfort of the exterior body than they showed for the care of the interior soul. One wonders, however, if Sartre conversely would praise the celibate state reflected through the nun, monk or priest as authentic, for-itself! - Perhaps, the Calvinist background of Sartre, and the part the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Trinity taking on a complete human nature, played out in A. D., has more of a bearing on his rejection of being human than Sartrean scholars have heretofore realized.

Inez is a conscious for-itself: “I’m always conscious of myself - in my mind. Painfully conscious.” She is aware that she is a lesbian and she acts as a lesbian; therefore, she is authentic. Her pain comes from the fact that she has emotions seeking completion, that is, emotionally, she seeks to achieve “unity” that the heterosexual custom approves of, namely, that between woman and man and seeks union with other women, both being an unauthentic desire to be a for-itself. Again, the French is more precise: “Moi, je me sens toujours de l’interieur.” “Me, I am always conscious myself of the interior (of myself).” (Reflect on the fact that she describes herself as “dried up” on p. 30.) Thus, “l’enfer, c’est les Autres” because the presence and predominance of customary heterosexual behavior for Inez continues to remind her that she is “nothingness”.that is, “unfulfilled.” In addition, Inez’s reality reminds other “customary” heterosexuals, such as Estelle, that the customary heterosexual relation is “non-fulfilling” for human beings as “conscious”.or “nothingness”:

I crept inside her skin (said Inez), she saw the world through my eyes. When she left him, I had her on my hands...(p. 27) For six

months I flamed away in her heart, till there was nothing but a cinder. One night she got up and turned on the gas while I was asleep. Then she crept back into bed. So now you know. Nor, is the relationship between Inez and Garcin any better.

“Hell is other people”.

Garcin is a goujat, that is, “dirt”, “filth” worse than a “bastard”; although a man might have a mistress, and thus, be unfaithful and this might be socially acceptable, no man would do as Garcin did. Garcin brought the mistress home, had sexual relations with her in his and his wife’s bed and then “consciously” tormented his wife by the fact that he had his wife bring her husband and his lover breakfast in bed. Then he turned to the mistress, in front of his wife, while eating the breakfast she prepared and said: “elle nous apportait le petit déjeuner au lit.” Then he added, “reflectively”: “Mais oui, mais oui, le goujat bien-aimé.” “But yes, but yes, (I am) a well-loved brute.” Garcin has “consciously”.as a for-itself been “passionate”.namely, been desirous of an in-itself-for-itself unity; thus, he “willed” himself, a for-itself and conscious being, into an in-itself, a non-conscious “thing”.namely, by his own admission a goujat, or a “brute-beast.” He had traded his rational being for physical pleasure and done so consciously and willfully. He had used his self-knowledge viciously and, thus, exceeds the “unrighteousness” manifested by the politicians, poets and craftspeople described by Socrates. Garcin is dead to rational, but alive to brute animal being.

When both Estelle and Garcin ask why the three of them are in this room, Inez responds with the question: “Qu’avez-vous fait?” (“What have we done?”.p. 15) Their actions have brought them to this room. What actions? The basic action of being dishonest, of being a coward. Inez sums up the result: “l’enfer, c’est les Autres.” “Hell? Hell is others.” The simple fact is that none of them need a separate torturer; each is the other’s torturer. Since their eyes are lidless, none of them can escape from each one’s own reflection in the other’s eyes. A poem from e.e. cummings, a man who died of the complications of syphilis and schirrhuses of the liver, reflects this “hell”:

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Humanity i love you
because you would rather black the boots of
success than enquire whose soul dangles from his

watch-chain which would be embarrassing for both
 parties and because you
 unflinchingly applaud all
 songs containing the words country home and
 mother when sung at the old howard
 Humanity i love you because
 when you're hard up you pawn your
 intelligence to buy a drink and when
 you're flush pride keeps
 you from the pawn shop and
 because you are continually committing
 nuisances but more
 especially in your own house.
 Humanity i love you because you
 are perpetually putting the secret of
 life in your pants and forgetting
 it's there and sitting down
 on it
 and because you are
 forever making poems in the lap
 of death Humanity

i hate you.

The fight to be who we are is the fight to live against the enticement to die.

Again, in his i six
 non-lectures, cummings states something with which Sartre could only
 agree:

To be nobody-but-yourself in a world which is doing its best,
 night and day, to make you everybody else-;means to fight the
 hardest battle which any human being can fight, and never stop
 fighting.

The one thing which all three players within Huis Clos have in
 common is the fact that each is a coward. Inez ran away from herself being a
 lesbian by “making people suffer, like a love coal. A love coal in other’s
 hearts.” (p. 27) She would not take responsibility for her life-style; she had
 to implicate others and then feed off their “fall.” Thus, she sought to have
 others “unite” with her; therefore, she sought a “com”-munity of people who
 were as “faithless” as was she.

Estelle ran away from the act of intercourse whereby she “con”-ceived the child; she threw the child into the lake, thereby destroying the result of her sexual union, thus, trying to cover up, even deny the act itself whereby she conceived (something which seems replicated in the act of abortion). She refused to take the responsibility of the effect of her sexual actions—one wonders what Sartre’s comment upon the common action of “abortion” would have been. (Given the technology of the age and the variety of birth “control” options, we must look far and dig deep for any excuse to have an abortion, if we can reason from Sartre’s portrait of Estelle.)

Inez: “We have nothing at all but our lives”.

Garcin would not take responsibility for his being a passivist so he hopped a train and left town. Then, he would not take responsibility for the fact of his marriage so he laid with a mistress in his own house and bed; but, in addition, he had his wife bring breakfast while shouting about his being “bien-aimé gojat”. or a “well loved brute.” Thus, each of the players makes the other conscious of the fact that cowardice is the common “in-itself” that each had made for each one’s “for-itself.” In Inez’s words:

To be human is “to be in error”.

One always dies too soon - or too late. And yet one’s whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it, ready for the summing up. Tu n’as rien d’autre que ta vie. (You have nothing at all but your life.)

Finally, each of our lives is as it is because: “Seuls les actes décident de ce qu’on a voulu.” (p. 44) “Each of our acts decide who we want to be”. Thus, choose before we act; but, know, be conscious that we are nothing, only a “hole”, that is, a lacking, so that we will not seek to become an in-itself (a thing, dependent upon, trying to fill up the hole which none can do, no one, that is who is rational).

Sartre concludes that to be human means to be conscious; and to be conscious means to be free. The torment of consciousness is not to identify subjective human consciousness with object un-consciousness. Humans must accept being free and being lack; to seek to be full is to deny the freedom which consciousness is. Freedom precludes our intellectual desire to identify and our physical desire to unite. Our intellectual desire seeks to identify with objects, to be other than we are; our sexual desire seeks the

union of physical love as fulfillment. Both desires deny our reality. We, therefore, must accept this ontological desire to seek as our “in-itself-for-itself” and not to opt to be full - such a desire converts to the desire to be God. The condition of human freedom, then, is the acceptance of being as the human is, namely, limited. Rejection of being limited is living in bad faith and being condemned to live as the three players within *Huis Clos*, morally and hypocritically, rather than ethically and honestly.

