

The Hole

Jean Paul Sartre

Commentary and **Text**

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Socrates and Lao-tzu offer a standard against which we may understand Jean Paul Sartre's view of the human world as presented within his essays on *The Hole* and *Ethical Implications* (found within essays entitled *Existentialism and Human Emotions*). That standard is self-knowledge. Sartre dramatizes the radical result any human being experiences for the lack of self-knowledge through his play entitled ***Huis Clos*** translated as *No Exit*; that result is living in the state of hell.

The initial scene in the play observes that all exists are closed, that is, the room in which all the actors find themselves after each one dies has no windows, no doors and no mirrors. Yet, the audience finds that one item each of the three "players" carries as part of his or her biological reality takes the place of any "exit", specifically any mirror, namely, each participant's eyes. Yet, the readers or audience finds that rather than a person's eyes being a means of escaping, the human eyes are no exit, rather, they are a trap for anyone who seeks escape - the eyes "trip up" any person seeking escape from the reality of their lack of self-knowledge because all of their eyes have no eyelids. So, not only are one's eyes a "window" to one's soul, but the eye itself acts as a mirror, reflecting the one who looks therein.

Sartre so uses the human eyes within this play that, on the one hand, they provide a mirror in which the person speaking sees him or herself and, on the other, the person listening exposes his or her soul to the speaker - thus, neither the listener nor the speaker can hide from the "other" and neither can escape from reality, that is, *the self as it has made itself to be*, not as a listener or a speaker might want the person listening or the person to whom one is speaking to think! This state Garsin describes as "hell is other people".

Again, the words of Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth century Dominican echo: "Philosophy is not about what men say, but about the way things are". Sartre also contends: Philosophy is not about appearances, the disguises with which people clothe themselves, but the bare, nakedness of the soul, or who they are within since Sartre claims Philosophy is a way of "...explaining man in the world". So, this play exposes each person as to *how each one acts* as the Truth of *how each one is*. Here, we remember four fragments of the sixth century B.C. Heraclitus of Ephesus, three about sight and seeing and one about speaking and acting:

12. Eyes are more accurate witnesses than ears.

13. Eyes and ears are bad witnesses to men having barbarian souls.

11: The things of which there can be sight, hearing and learning
- these are what I especially prize; and

10: To be temperate is the greatest virtue. Wisdom consists in speaking and acting the truth, giving heed to the nature of things.

The path to self-knowledge is knowing that one does not know, and Plato classified such knowledge as **areté** or excellence (usually translated as virtue) because the possession of it allowed a human being to act according to human nature. This self-knowledge results in a person being virtuous and fosters healthy living. The lack of such knowledge is, however, contrary to nature, results in a person being vicious and leads to diseased living. The Eastern Lao-tzu echoes Plato's view:

To know that you do not know is the best.
 To pretend to know when you do not know is a disease.
 Only when one recognizes this disease as a disease can one be
 free from the disease.
 The sage is free from the disease.
 Because he recognizes this disease to be a disease, he is free
 from it. (**Tao**, # 73)

Self-knowledge affects any and all knowledge a person has about others and the world in which that person lives. The view anyone has of self literally colors all subsequent knowledge because such self knowledge projects an attitude through which the person views, everything the person sees, hears, touches, smells, tastes and feels.

Jean Paul Sartre wrote a small book, entitled **Les Mots**, literally, The Words, initially published in 1964 which many look upon as Sartre's autobiography. An excerpt taken from the original French edition, side by side with this editor's translation provides us insight into Sartre's view of himself, or, his self-knowledge:

The Words, J.P. Sartre

(The editor's translation follows.)

Things would have been fine if my body and I had got on well together. But the fact is that we were an odd couple. In misery a child doesn't ask himself questions: suffering *bodily* resulting from needs and sickness, this unjustifiable state justifies his existence - this hunger, this danger of perpetual death is founded upon his right to live. He lives in order not to die. As for me, I was neither rich enough to think I was predestined nor poor enough to feel my desires as demands. I performed my alimentary duties, and God sometimes - rarely- blessed me with the grace that enables one to eat without disgust, namely appetite. Breathing, digesting, nonchalant defecating, I lived because I had begun to live. I was unaware of the violence and savage demands of that gorged companion, my body, which made itself known by a series of mild disturbances much in demand among grown-ups. At the time, a self-respecting family was in duty bound to have at least one delicate child. I was exactly what was needed, since I had almost died at birth. The family kept its eye on me: they felt my pulse, took my temperature, made me stick out my tongue: "Don't you find him a bit pale?" "It's the light." "I assure you, he's lost weight!" "But, Papa, we weighed him yesterday." Beneath those inquisitive looks I felt myself becoming an object, a flower in a pot. I would finally be put to bed. Suffocating with heat, simmering under the sheets, I lumped my body with its discomfort: I did not know which of the two was undesirable.

Sartre states that his body and he did not get "on well together"; then, he supports this statement by describing how his family treated him: gazing at him. He felt himself "becoming an object, a flower in a pot...suffocating with heat". His grandfather, a pharmacist "did not speak a word to his wife for forty years":

At the table, he expressed himself by signs; she (his grandmother) ended by referring to him as 'my boarder'. Yet he

Les Mots

C'eût été parfait si j'avais fait bon ménage avec mon corps. Mais nous formions, lui et moi, un drôle de couple. Dans la misère, l'enfant ne s'interroge pas: éprouvée *corporellement* par les besoins et les maladies, son injustifiable condition justifie son existence, c'est la faim, c'est le danger de mort perpétuel qui fondent son droit de vivre: il vit pour ne pas mourir. Moi, je n'étais ni assez riche pour me croire prédestiné ni assez pauvre pour ressentir mes envies comme des exigences. Je remplissais mes devoirs alimentaires et Dieu m'envoyait parfois - rarement - cette grâce qui permet de manager sans dégoût - l'appétit. Respirant, digérant, déféquant avec nonchalance, je vivais parce que j'avais commencé de vivre. De mon corps, ce compagnon gavé, j'ignorais la violence et les sauvages réclamations: il se faisait connaître par une suite de malaises douilletts, très sollicités par les grandes personnes. A l'époque, une famille distinguée se devait de compter au moins un enfant délicat. J'étais le bon sujet puisque j'avais pensé mourir à ma naissance. On me guettait, on me prenait le pouls, la température, on m'obligeait à tirer la langue: "Tu ne trouves pas qu'il est un peu pâlot?" "C'est l'éclairage." "Je t'assure qu'il a maigri!" "Mais, papa, nous l'avons pesé hier." Sous ces regards inquisiteurs, je me sentais devenir un objet, une fleur en pot. Pour conclure, on me fourrait au lit. Suffoqué par la chaleur, mitonnant sous les draps, je confondais mon corps et son malaise: des deux, je ne savais plus lequel était indésirable.

shared her bed and, from time to time, made her pregnant. She gave him two sons and a daughter; these children of silence were named Jean-Baptiste (Jean Paul Sartre's father), Joseph and H  l  ne. H  l  ne married, late in life, a cavalry officer who went mad. Joseph did his military service in the Zouaves and retired at an early age to the home of his parents. He had no occupation. Caught between the stubborn silence of one parent and the shouting of the other, he developed a stammer and spent his life fighting words. Jean-Baptiste wanted to prepare for the Naval Academy, to see the ocean. In 1904, at Cherbourg, the young naval officer, who was already wasting away with the fevers of Cochinchina, made the acquaintance of Anne Marie Schweitzer (Jean Paul Sartre's mother), took possession of the big, forlorn girl, married her, begot a child in quick time, me (Jean Paul Sartre), and sought refuge in death. (*Les Mots*, p. 9)

If we reflect upon Sartre's description of his grandfather and mother as well as his father, mother and his birth, we see it to be more personally "projective" than historically descriptive. This is Sartre's reconstruction of the relationship between his grandfather and mother as well as that between his mother and father.

The following sentence within *Les Mots* provides emphasis to this view. Sartre says: "Dying is not easy". He then proceeds to describe his mother as following her mother's example:

...my mother preferred duty to pleasure. She had not known my father well, either before or after marriage and must have wondered at times why that stranger had chosen to die in her arms. He was taken to a small farm a few miles from Thieveries; his father came to visit him every day in a cart. The sleepless nights and the worry exhausted Anne Marie; her milk dried; I was put out to nurse not far away and I too applied myself to dying, of enteritis and perhaps of resentment. At the age of twenty, without experience or advice, my mother was torn between two unknown moribund creatures. Her marriage of convenience found its truth in sickness and mourning. I benefitted from the situation: mothers of the period nursed their babies, and for a long time. Were it not for the luck of that double death-struggle, I would have been exposed to the difficulties of a late weaning. So, weaned by force, I was prevented by fever and stupor from feeling the last snip of the scissors that cuts the bonds between mother and child. I sank into a chaotic world full of simple hallucinations and defaced idols. Upon the death of my father, Anne Marie and I awoke from a common nightmare. I got better. But we were victims of a misunderstanding: she returned lovingly to a child she had never really left; I regained consciousness in the lap of a stranger. (*Ibid.* pp.9-10)

"I regained consciousness in the lap of a stranger" coupled with "Beneath those inquiring gazes I felt myself becoming an object, a flower in a pot" provide two insights into Sartre's self-knowledge and give perspective to Sartre's statement that "...Philosophy (will) not disappear because philosophy is not a way of interpreting the world but of a way of explaining man in the world". Sartre's explanation of himself in the world is rather negative to say the least, but worse, it is negative about the sexual relationships between grandfather and grandmother, father and mother, indeed, most pointedly of women because he clearly describes both his grandmother and

his mother as sexually doing their "duty". Here we find the very basis of Calvinist theology, namely, the Kantian view of "duty" as the driving force of human existence. But, looking at this sexual "duty" in the light of the essay on *The Hole* clearly partakes of the characteristic as being "open" to the men for the sake of being filled!

Yet, is this a fair assessment of Sartre's view of philosophy? Well, in an interview he gave for *Playboy* magazine, Sartre states that "...man's freedom has always been man's freedom in man's human condition". Yet, if he views philosophy as an "explanation of self in the world" "... (of) man in the world, ... (of) ... the historical process", Sartre's *Les Mots* is philosophy because he explains "...his own subjectivity, his needs, his feelings, his sensations in an objective world..." This "objective world" is, however, terribly "subjective", so one may question whether or not Sartre makes any distinction between these two terms. Within the *Playboy* interview, Sartre describes his novel *Nausea* as "...the story of a man sickened by the purposelessness of evil in the universe".

What, however, is the purpose of studying Sartre's obvious projection of his being a victim? Two beneficial reasons seem plausible. First, Sartre seems to describe the view the twentieth century occidental world has of the body, a person's first home from the womb and last home in the tomb and of the physical world, called planet earth. That view is one of dissatisfaction, of discomfort and the consequent effort to change both, to control both, to perfect both in the human image and likeness through science. So, the *pour-soi*, or *for-itself* seeks to inject itself into the material world as a veritable penis to render same pregnant with human rationality! Secondly, so many contemporary human beings are dissatisfied with being who each one is and, therefore, strive to be other than they are. So, again, the *pour-soi*, or, in *for-itself* seeks to impregnate the unique and, therefore, virginal self with other, to join the group, to be popular, to be rich, to be famous, to sublimate the spiritual with the physical, just as the majority of the Athenians did during the time of Socrates - they seek to fill up the emptiness of their self-knowledge with popularity, wealth and reputation, denying that wisdom consists in knowing that we do not know!

However, this same Sartre states that "Man is condemned to be free with other free men" while at the same time claiming that "freedom is being able to make choices, admitting to oneself the needs and feelings on the basis of which these choices are made and accepting one's responsibility for making them". So, if "... Freedom is being able to make choices...", presumably Sartre made the choice to be a victim of his sickness and his grandparents and parents intra-personal relationships because Sartre accepts responsibility for the dysfunctional sexual relationships between his grandfather, grandmother, father and mother. Indeed, how can he accept responsibility for his mother's plight after his father died? Unless, of course, this Sartre, raised a Calvinist, means that he accepts the responsibility for being guilty for what he terms the "purposelessness of evil in the world" especially in relation to how his immediate family members used, did not use or abused sexuality? Or, maybe Sartre merely thinks that the "bad" relationship he had with his body and the "bad" relationships his family members had with their bodies, any such human body relationship is just plain "bad" or "evil"?

Sartre's essay *The Hole* is not polite, but it is powerful. Sartre's word pictures are sometimes revolting, however, they are always effective. If we place Sartre's (*pour soi*) "for-it-self" and (*en soi*) "in-it-self" within the context of the philosophers, they amount to nothing more or less than the

contraries about which Heraclitus spoke, the **yin** (moist, soft, female principle) and **yang** (dry, hard, male principle) discussed by Lao Tzu or **Poros** (fullness, plenty) and **Penia** (emptiness, need) as discussed in Plato's myth explaining love within his Symposium.

Of course, each set presents some difference, however, all have an analogous description within *The Hole*. Indeed, we can even wonder whether or not "For-it-self", as described by Sartre, could not be depicted as the ability to be open to *Truth*, yet, the decision not to submit to any one *true* - so an apt analogy might be the decision of a human being to remain a virgin rather than become, as we describe it today, "sexually active". The "in-itself", on the contrary, characterizes all beings other than humans, those which Sartre sees merely to exist *as-they-are*. Such "in-itselfs" do not seek to be *other-than-they-are*. They literally have no appetite to be anything else than themselves so Sartre calls them the un- or non-conscious. "For-it-selves", however, have the rational appetite so they are conscious. Again, Sartre's distinction echoes the Greeks description of human being, namely, the "speech animal", having **logos**, or reason as that which differentiates human being from all other beings.

Sartre describes his maternal grandmother as "aging and cynical...(who "thought she was indispensable" (p.10); his maternal grandfather as "thoughtless, domineering, controlling". Indeed, both his grandparents considered his mother as a thoughtless woman "to have "...taken a husband who had not worn well (and so) "...guilty of not having foreseen or forestalled her husband's death". Sartre concludes:

There is no good father, that's the rule. Don't lay the blame on men but on the bond of paternity, which is rotten! To beget children, nothing better to have them, what iniquity! (p.11)
So Sartre concludes that "to beget children...(is)...iniquity", but, as we have seen, Sartre was a sickly child and felt himself becoming an object of attention and concern.

I was unaware of the violence and savage demands of that gorged companion, my body, which made itself known by a series of mild disturbances, much in demand among grown-ups. At the time, a self-respecting family was in duty bound to have at least one delicate child. I was exactly what was needed, since I had almost died at birth. The family kept its eye on me; they felt my pulse, took my temperature, made me stick out my tongue: Papa, 'Don't you think he's a bit pale?' 'It's the light.' 'I assure you, he's lost weight!' 'But, Papa, we weighed him yesterday'. Beneath those inquiring gazes I felt myself becoming an object, a flower in a pot. (p. 56)

So this Sartre who divided his world up into two irreconcilable categories or categories, a **pour soi**, a "for-itself" and an **en soi**, an "in-itself" thought himself to be an **en soi**, an "in-itself" in the eyes of his parents. Yet, he blames his parents for this because they looked upon him through their minds, as "for-it-selves", or conscious humans and, therefore, they literally sought to fill up the holes in their lives with his life!

Plato offers an historical analogy within the Apology. Socrates counters the decision of his peers, politicians, poets and crafts-people to sell out human happiness and good, the good of the soul, wisdom, in their choice of the mundane goods of wealth, honor and reputation. So, Socrates accepts the emptiness of knowing that he does not know as living according to nature and, therefore, of being human; thus, he is wise. Socrates remains satisfied to

know that he does not know and continues to seek the happiness of human wisdom, rather than to try and fill up that emptiness by pretending to know what he does not know, thereby identifying human happiness with wealth, honor and reputation. A practical example confronts us daily. A prostitute prefers to sell her body for money, just as some business people sell their minds for a contract, a job, a raise or a promotion. Others prefer to conserve the health and welfare of their bodies as well as that of their minds, regardless of what money, honor or reputation any "sell-out" would return.

Remember Sartre writes this essay on *The Hole* as a descriptive essay so he draws from the sexual **mores** of his time; thus, his use of castration to describe the "for-it-self", a conscious human subject seeking to be an "In-it-self", an unconscious object might apply more to social practice than to personal theory. Thus, so many twentieth century occidental humans seek to become unconscious to who they are by becoming rich, honored, known rather than a unique individual person! Indeed, another way of becoming unconscious is to clamor for rights and thus, ignore one's unique responsibility to be who one is! As a matter of fact, if we move Sartre's description out of the realm of psychology and the human desire "to fill a hole" and move it into the realm of Physics we find nature's abhorrence of a vacuum. Sartre merely calls attention to the fact that a conscious human being seeks to fill the "vacuum" of that human desire for truth, beauty and goodness with some, any concrete, material object. Sartre castigates such people. Indeed, in the context of this ethics' course such people are committing suicide, that is, seeking to fill the emptiness of knowing that we do not know, forcing humans to seek wisdom with the fullness of human knowledge and satisfaction with such limited knowledge, whether that be the wealth, honor and reputation of the majority of the Athenians or the tawdry satisfaction of Ivan Ilych of being equal with his peers!

Since nature abhors a vacuum, perhaps we humans face only one choice: the choice to be responsible and ethical. If we avoid this choice, namely, to be responsible and ethical, then we face the inevitable alternative fact that by default we choose to-be-other-than-we-are capable of being, so we act morally. Therefore, we do not act because we decide to do the right thing. Rather, we act because we are told to act a particular way; we do what we are told and do what others do rather than decide whether or not our act itself is right or wrong. We do the things we do merely because doing them is hassle free and we receive money, recognition and/or acceptance from such conformity. Being moral means that we "don't make trouble", "don't rock the boat", "do as we're told", are not "shit disturbers".

The implied truth within Sartre's prose description would seem to be as simple as it is profound: our human desires exceed our grasp because our appetites of intellect and will naturally seek the fullness of truth, goodness and beauty, however, the beings of our experience offer only partial gratification because of their partial participation in truth, goodness and beauty. Thus, we, like Socrates, have a choice to make: to be spiritually hungry and thirsty in this temporal garden where only physical manifestations of truth, goodness and beauty solicit our human desire to be fulfilled, or to look for satisfaction in these physical manifestations of truth, goodness and beauty because we are paid to do so?

Perhaps Ivan Ilych's tendency to be moral and successful, acceptable to his peers, is the effort to be "all things to all men", and thus to reject being ethical in order to avoid the necessity to take hemlock as Socrates did. We term this the desire to live in such a way as to avoid death, something Krishna tried to convince Arjuna is impossible for human beings within the

Gita. To live as a human means to risk dying merely because to be human is to be mortal, and, thus, to be limited. So also, to live as ourselves, unique and irreplaceable means to risk dying merely because to be who we are is to die to many, if not most people who fear more than they love.

We humans are like Tantalus, the wealthy mythic king, son of Zeus and father of Pelops and Niobe. His eternity became modded upon his greed, lust and gluttony consisted in standing in water tied to a tree loaded with food; but, as he raised up his mouth to eat, the limb with fruit lifted just out of his reach and as he lowered his mouth to drink, the water receded just below his reach.

So, we must accept our human existence as limited, mortal, as a mixture of pain and pleasure, yet, where the desire to know the truth must be satisfied with knowing only partial truths. Just as Tantalus was emersed in water, so we are emersed in existence. Just as the water subsided when Tantalus sought to drink and the fruit receded from his grasp when he sought to eat, so our desire for truth exceeds our grasp of knowing and loving. Truth recedes from our intellectual grasp to know, just as goodness extends beyond our volitional grasp of the known-good. We, like Tantalus, are frustrated because we are mortal but desire to be immortal. To be human, therefore, means to be frustrated, in Camus' terms to live within an absurd world. To choose otherwise is to commit suicide.

Our human search for truth and love must remain frustrated as we live on earth. Of course, Camus described this same situation within his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*, as he depicted a spiritual Sisyphus chained to human nature as a physical rock, doomed spiritually to desire the perfection of truth, goodness and beauty while able only to achieve partial truth, goodness and beauty. Augustine expresses such a frustration: "Our hearts are made for you, Oh Lord and they will not rest until they rest in You". Browning vented this same frustration: "That our desire exceeds our grasp, or what's a heaven for?"

Text

*In itself the **hole** is the symbol of a mode of being which existential psychoanalysis must elucidate.*

We can not make such a detailed study here. One can see at once, however, that the hole is originally presented as a nothingness "to be filled" with my own flesh, the child can not restrain himself from putting his finger or his whole arm into the hole. It presents itself to me as the empty image of myself. I have only to crawl into it in order to make myself exist in the world which awaits me. The ideal of the hole is then an excavation which can be carefully molded about my flesh in such a manner that by squeezing myself into it and fitting myself tightly inside it, I shall contribute to making a fullness of being exist in the world. Thus, to plug up a hole means originally to make a sacrifice of my body in order that the plenitude of being may exist; that is, to subject the passion of the For-it-self so as to shape, to perfect, and to preserve the totality of the In-it-self. (We should note as well the importance of the opposite tendency, to poke through holes, which in itself demands an existential analysis.)

Here at its origin we grasp one of the most fundamental tendencies of human reality - the tendency to fill. We shall meet with this tendency again in the adolescent and in the adult. A good part of our life is passed in plugging up holes, in filling empty places, in realizing and symbolically establishing a

plenitude. The child recognizes as the results of his first experiences that he himself has holes. When he puts his fingers in his mouth, he tries to wall up the holes in his face; he expects that his finger will merge with his lips and the roof of his mouth and block up the buccal orifice as one fills the crack in the wall with cement; he seeks again the density, the uniform and spherical plenitude of Parmenidean being; if he sucks his thumb, it is precisely in order to dissolve it, to transform it into a sticky paste which will seal the hole of his mouth.

* We find here an instance of Plato's distinction between appearance and reality. Frequently, human beings as well as philosophers, being human take as reality what is only appearance. Sartre attributes such "rational" motives to a child's actions, but such a supposition is questionably objective. Sartre's description is certainly symbolic and an example of every human being's tendency to identify with an object in order to be fulfilled. But, if Sartre's description is more literal than figurative, it is arguably "projective". Sartre may be projecting his frustration, perhaps even self-destruction as a result of his Communist sympathies during World War II, as well as his bi-sexual tendencies. Sartre continually found himself betrayed because of what he hoped for. We can all identify with such frustration and betrayal as we reflect upon times we have identified ourselves with some person, movement or organization to solve some problem, only to find that the problem worsens in spite of our involvement or the existence and efforts of that person, the movement or the organization. Such moments are present in such places as Jamestown, Waco, Texas, even politically. Serious human problems are never solved; they might be better managed, but they continue or recur.

Text

This tendency is certainly one of the most fundamental among those which serve as the basis for the act of eating; nourishment is the "cement" which will seal the mouth; to eat is among other things to be filled up.

It is only from this standpoint that we can pass on to sexuality. The obscenity of the feminine sex is that of everything which "gapes open". It is an appeal to being as all holes are. In herself woman appeals to a strange flesh which is to transform her into a fullness of being by penetration and dissolution. Conversely woman senses her condition as an appeal precisely because she is "in the form of a hole."

Commentary

Sartre's Calvinism asserts itself here. To be a spiritual being, as rational within a material body is to suffer, indeed, to die. Sartre, however, identifies woman's biological being, her vagina with the open invitation to "sin". Literally, woman's receptiveness, like earth's receptiveness is an open invitation for seed to lose its identity and thus, to die. So, also, to be human is an open invitation to be someone, something else, literally, to lose one's identity and to die, or to retain one's identity and live. So, to be human is the invitation to "sin". This is the reason playwright Sartre says "Hell is other people" through Garcin in *No Exit*: Herein Sartre also states: "Man is a useless passion" simply because both other people and love offer the opportunity for commitment, and commitment means to identify, to hope and so to suffer and to die. But, any such identification and hope means betrayal, as Sartre was betrayed politically by Communism and sexually both by men and women so all such hope and identification is useless, hell. Sartre comments in *The Words*:

Things would have been fine if my body and I had got on well together. But the fact is that we were an odd couple. When a child is unhappy, he doesn't ask himself questions. If he suffers bodily as a result of needs and sickness, his unjustifiable state justifies his existence. His right to live is based on hunger, on the constant danger of death. He lives in order not to be. (pp. 55-56)

Camus, on the other hand, notwithstanding the fact that he claims to have left Catholicism, draws upon Catholic Christianity within his works, notably, the *Myth of Sisyphus* and the *Stranger*, as well as the *Rebel*, observing that he had the habit of living before he had the habit of thinking and the goodness he experienced overwhelmed the evil he recognized to be present in the human world; Camus was incarnate, in the flesh before his thought took him out of his body!

Text

This is the true origin of Adler's complex. Beyond any doubt her sex is a mouth which devours the penis - a fact which can easily lead to the idea of castration. The amorous act is the castration of the man; but this is above all because sex is a hole. We have to do here with a pre-sexual contribution which will become one of the components of sexuality as an empirical, complex, human attitude but which far from deriving its origin from the sexed being has nothing in common with basic sexuality, the nature of which we have explained in Part III. Nevertheless the experience with the hole, when the infant sees the reality, includes the ontological presentiment of sexual experience in general; it is with his flesh that the child stops up the hole and the hole, before all sexual specification, is an obscene expectation, an appeal to the flesh.

We can see the importance which the elucidation of these immediate and concrete existential categories will assume for existential psychoanalysis. In this way, we can apprehend the very general projects of human reality. But, what chiefly interests the psychoanalyst is to determine the free project of the unique person in terms of the individual relation which unites him to these various symbols of being. I can love slimy, the greasy, a hole, etc. That does not mean that for me the slimy, the greasy, a hole, etc. have lost their general ontological meaning, I determine myself in this or that manner in relation to them. If the slimy is indeed the symbol of a being in which the for-itself is swallowed up by the in-itself, what kind of a person am I if in encountering others, I love the slimy? To what fundamental project of myself am I referred if I want to explain this love of an ambiguous, sucking in-itself? In this way, tastes do not remain irreducible givens; if one knows how to question them, they reveal to us the fundamental projects of the person. Down to even our alimentary preferences they all have a meaning. We can account for this fact if we will reflect that each taste is presented, not as an absurd datum which we must excuse but as an evident value. If I like the taste of garlic, it seems irrational to me that other people can not like it.

To eat is to appropriate by destruction; it is at the same time to be filled up with a certain being.

Commentary

Again, Sartre restates his basic theme: to be human means to die; to be a "for-itself" means to seek to be filled up and to become an "in-itself"; to seek to know and to love means to identify with the objects of our knowledge and love and, thus, to deny who we are. Here, Sartre illustrates this theme

through the one activity necessary for a moral being to continue to life, namely, to kill by eating, to die by identifying, a theme which the *Gita* also emphasizes.

Text

And this being is given as a synthesis of temperature, density, and flavor proper. In a word, this synthesis signifies a certain being; and, when we eat, we do not limit ourselves to knowing certain qualities of this being through taste; by tasting them we appropriate them. Taste is assimilation by the very act of biting the tooth reveals the density of a body which it is transforming into gastric contents. Thus, the synthetic intuition of food is in itself an assimilative destruction. It reveals to me the being which I am going to make my flesh. Henceforth, what I accept or what I reject with disgust is the very being of that existent, or, if you prefer, the totality of the food proposes to me a certain mode of being of the being which I accept or refuse. This totality is organized as a form in which less intense qualities of density and of temperature are effaced behind the flavor proper which expresses them. The sugary, for example, expresses the slimy when we eat a spoonful of honey or molasses, just as an analytical function expresses a geometric curve. This means that all qualities which are not strictly speaking flavor but which are massed, melted, buried in the flavor, represent the matter of the flavor. (The piece of chocolate which at first offers a resistance to my tooth, soon abruptly gives way and crumbles; its resistance first, then its crumbling is chocolate.) In addition, they are united to certain temporal characteristics of flavor; that is, to its mode of temperalization. Certain tastes give themselves all at once, some are like delayed-action fuses, some release themselves by degrees, certain ones dwindle slowly until they disappear, and still others vanish at the very moment one thinks to possess them. These qualities are organized along with density and temperature; in addition, on another level, they express the visual aspect of the good. If I eat a pink cake, the taste of it is pink; the light sugary perfume, the oiliness of the butter cream are the pink. Thus, I eat the pink as I see the sugary. We conclude that flavor, due to this fact, has a complex architecture and differentiated matter; it is this structured matter - which represents for us a particular type of being - that we can assimilate or reject with nausea, according to our original project. It is not a matter of indifference whether we like oysters or clams, snails or shrimp, if only we know how to unravel the existential significance of these foods.

Generally speaking, there is no irreducible taste or inclination. They all represent a certain appropriative choice of being. It is up to existential psychoanalysis to compare and classify them. Ontology abandons us here; it has merely enabled us to determine the ultimate ends of human reality, its fundamental possibilities, and the value which haunts it. Each human reality is at the same time a direct project to metamorphise its own For-itself into an In-itself-For-itself and a project of the appropriation of the world as a totality of being-in-itself, in the form of a fundamental quality. Every human reality is a passion in that it projects losing itself so as to found being and by the same stroke to constitute the In-self which escapes contingency by being its own foundation, the Ens causa sui, which religions call God. Thus the passion of man is the reverse of that of Christ, for man loses himself as man in order that God may be born. But, the idea of God is contradictory and we lose ourselves in vain. Man is a useless passion.

Commentary

* Being human, therefore, to Sartre, means to live frustrated because our abilities seek a perfection which we can not achieve: human intellect seeks fullness of knowledge and human will seeks fullness of love. But, we humans are doomed to a lack of fulfillment so each human is literally a useless passion. Now, given these, as it were, existential facts, what are humans to do; how are humans to act? Sartre follows this analysis of *The Hole* with "Ethical Implications". The fact Sartre speaks of "Ethical Implications" is evidence that any moral behavior, such as that of Ivan Ilych within *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, or that of the politicians, poets and crafts-people within Plato's *Apology*, or, indeed, that of Estelle or Garcin within *No Exit* means to deny "being-for-itself" which makes a human being to be human. The ontological fact that human nature consists uniquely in being **speech animals**, as Greeks described humans presents us with an irrevocable human condition of being a "useless passion".

Ethical Implications

Text

Ontology itself can not formulate ethical precepts. It is concerned solely with what is, and we cannot possibly derive imperatives from ontology's indicatives. It does, however, allow us to catch a glimpse of what sort of ethics will assume its responsibilities when confronted with a human reality in situation. Ontology has revealed to us, in fact, the origin and the nature of value; we have seen that value is the lack in relation to which the for-itself determines its being as a lack. By the very fact that the for-itself exists, as we have seen, value arises to haunt its being-for-itself. It follows that the various tasks of the for-itself can be made the object of an existential psychoanalysis, for they all aim at producing the missing synthesis of consciousness and being in the form of value or self-cause. Thus, existential psychoanalysis is moral description, for it releases to us the ethical meaning of various human projects. It indicates to us the necessity of abandoning the psychology of interest along with any utilitarian interpretation of human conduct - by revealing to us the ideal meaning of all human attitudes.

Commentary

* Sartre's comment "By the very fact that for-itself exists, as we have seen, value arises to haunt its being -for-itself" reminds us of Camus' comment: "...the mind that aims to understand reality can consider itself satisfied only by reducing it to terms of thought". (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, "An Absurd Reasoning," p. 12) Both Sartre and Camus are struck by the fact: the very power defining the human animal's difference from all other animals is itself the humans' greatest weakness, namely, reason. They are confounded by a simple fact which oriental philosophers understand and accept: rationality which is the strength of human being is its weakness, so any strength is a fundamental weakness of the being having that strength! Reason's effort to achieve unity effects diversity, so the very power characterizing human life is a power denying humans the unified life for which we strive. (Surely both views parallel the story of *Genesis*, namely, that the very freedom within limits Y-hw-h provides Adam and Eve resulted in them seeking an unlimited freedom and, therefore, resulted in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. They traded their innocence for knowledge of good and evil!) The affirmation of unity which human reason promises denies the very hope it itself promised. Reason, as the pride of human existence, lies to us humans. Who or what then can we humans trust, given the fact that the rationality by which we are defined is untrustworthy and the humans who claim to be the voice or reason betray us?

Sartre expresses anger at this situation. The very existence of "for-itself", literally, the existence of human consciousness, our ability to reflect and our consequent awareness that we seek "truth, goodness and beauty" which we do not possess, turns against us. Thanks to this rational and volitional desire for "truth as good", we are haunted by the tendency to identify with "wealth, honor and reputation" as the "Truth as good" we seek. Sartre reiterates what Socrates concluded. Socrates found that very wisdom which he sought he lacked so he concluded that our desire for wisdom means to lack that which we desire and to recognize and acknowledge this means that we are wise! This reflection haunts us because to exist as human being means to desire to have what will not satisfy our desire! To be human, therefore, means to be a mixed being, spiritual and material, so Truth as Truth, Good as Good, Beauty as Beauty can not satisfy us as **embodied** spiritual beings, notwithstanding our desire. Truth, Beauty and Goodness as we know and love them and as they present themselves as embodied within material beings who attract us, never can satisfy us as embodied **spiritual beings**. The net result is being human is a useless passion, **useless** because it can never attract, **passion** because it can never fulfill.

Text

These meanings are beyond egoism and altruism, beyond also any behavior which is called disinterested. Man makes himself man in order to be God, and selfless considered from this point of view can appear to be an egoism; but precisely because there is no common measure between human reality and the self-cause which it wants to be, one could just as well say that man loses himself in order that the self-cause may exist. We will consider then that all human existence is a passion, the famous self-interest being only one way freely chosen among others to realize this passion...