

6. Why Inez is not in Hell

Beauvoir and Sartre offered markedly different forms of existentialism in the 1940s. Beauvoir held that the individual's chosen projects become progressively more embedded, limiting their outlook, constraining the range of possible projects they might choose, and requiring that any replacement of projects could only be gradual. Sartre, by contrast, held that individuals can simply replace their projects at any time, though generally prefer not to. We have seen that Beauvoir's theory explains what it is to pursue a project where Sartre's does not and that her theory grounds a form of psychoanalysis in *The Second Sex* that departs in important ways from the one outlined in *Being and Nothingness*. We will see in chapter 7 that Beauvoir's version of existentialism is preferable to Sartre's initial version, as Sartre realised by 1952, and that the reason for this lies in their different theories of the role of other people in the development of the individual.

Sartre's initial existentialist theory of relations between people is dramatised in his play *Huis Clos*, which he wrote in the space of two weeks after Camus and two other friends asked him for something they could perform. This was in 1943, the year *Being and Nothingness* and *She Came To Stay* were both published. As it turned out, these three never did perform the play. Sartre staged it the following year, shortly before the liberation of Paris, under the title *Les Autres (The Others)*. This title and the play's claustrophobic atmosphere of continual surveillance and judgment was taken as an allegory of the occupation. Sartre does seem to have intended this dimension of the play, making it all the more remarkable that it was cleared for production by the Nazi censors. Despite its initial mixed reviews, which were perhaps partly because of the occupation, *Huis Clos* has proved to have an enduring and widespread appeal.

It has been produced on stage, on radio, and on film countless times. 'Hell is ... other people!' (*L'enfer, c'est les autres*), a line at the end of the play (HC: 223), has become the most widely quoted, paraphrased, and parodied sentence of existentialism, perhaps even of the whole history of philosophy. Although this does seem to have been a call to resist the Nazis,

colloquially known as *les autres*, the cultural reach of this sentiment far beyond wartime Paris reflects the play's deeper existential theme. This is the scope for dissonance between someone's own self-image and the image other people have of that person. Sartre's point about this dissonance, both in this play and in the section of *Being and Nothingness* that it dramatises, however, are often misconstrued. Before contrasting his theory with Beauvoir's, therefore, we need first to clarify what he meant by that famous line about other people.

1. A Metaphysical Play

The play's three central characters focus their dialogue on the images they each have of one another. This is played out through a triangle of sexual desire. Garcin is attracted only to Inez, who is attracted only to Estelle, who is attracted only to Garcin. These desires structure the play's dynamic, as the narrative unfolds through each character's attempts to seduce one of the others while resisting the advances of the third. Moreover, it is this sexual tension that gradually forces the characters to reveal more information about themselves. But we should not accept the triangle of desire as the basic structure of the play. For according to Sartre's existentialism, as we have seen, desires are expressions of the individual's projects. So we should ask why each character has the sexual desires that they have. In particular, we should ask why their anxiety about their self-image is manifested in this sexual desire in this particular situation.

It is clear throughout the play that Estelle's image of herself as a paragon of femininity is fundamental to her entire outlook. Being attractive to men is the essential structure of femininity, as Beauvoir was soon to argue in *The Second Sex*, in line with a long tradition of philosophical analyses of gender (e.g. Wollstonecraft 1792: ch. 2; Mill 1869: ch. 1). Estelle's basic project is therefore threatened if she cannot confirm her femininity in seducing men. Once she comes to see herself as trapped forever in the company of Garcin and Inez, it is Garcin's desire she needs. The fact that Inez desires her cannot confirm her self-image. She rather takes it as a threat to her femininity. But it is this very need to be desired by men that prevents Garcin from desiring her. For his project is to see himself as a tough and courageous character who is not the coward that he fears other people think he is. Estelle's affirmation of his self-image is too easily won, given her need to please him, so he needs his affirmation from Inez, who seems as tough as he wants to be (HC: 217-8, 222).

By desiring Estelle and refusing Garcin's advances, Inez therefore threatens both their images of themselves. This much fits the standard reading of the play as a morality tale about the dangers of caring too much about one's image in the eyes of other people. On this reading, each of these three is condemned to an eternity of frustration simply by being made to share a room. None of them can be secure in their image of themselves, because they are each permanently seeking confirmation of that image from people who threaten to undermine it. Because they are dead, according to this reading, they can no longer change. None of them can stop seeking the affirmation of their self-image and none of them can affirm the self-image of either of the other two. The moral of the story, on this reading, is that we should not be too concerned with the image other people have of us, but should instead continue to develop our projects (Azzi 1981: 452-3; Bernasconi 2006: 30-4; Cox 2009: 132, 136-8; Detmer 2008: 149-56; O'Donohoe 2005: 85-6; Solomon 2006: 177-85).

Inez, however, poses a problem for this standard reading of the play. What grounds her sexual desires? She sees herself as fundamentally cruel: 'I can't get on without making people suffer', she says, describing herself as a 'live coal in other's hearts'. 'When I'm alone I flicker out', she adds (HC: 203-4). She is quite clear about the suffering she caused other people through the sexual relationship that led to her death (HC: 203). Her place within the triangle of desire therefore manifests this underlying self-image, just as Garcin's and Estelle's desires manifest theirs. But she does not face the predicament that Garcin and Estelle face. Their inability to establish their preferred image in the eyes of the other two threatens their view of themselves as being tough or feminine. Inez, by contrast, is in no doubt about her cruelty and neither is anybody else.

How should we understand this difference? We could view Inez as correctly understanding her cruelty as a project. On this reading, she would be a kind of hero of authenticity despite her cruelty. But this sits uneasily with her descriptions of herself as cruel by nature rather than as a chosen project. Alternatively, we could see her as taking this image of herself as cruel to be a correct description of her fixed nature (Azzi 1981: 438). But then the play would not have the moral that the standard reading ascribes to it, because Inez would be a counterexample to the idea that reliance on other people's image of oneself inevitably leads to frustration. The third option is to see Inez as metaphysically different from the other two characters, as genuinely having the fixed nature that she claims to have. These interpretations agree that the psychological drama of the play is driven by an underlying metaphysical framework, but disagree on what that framework is. To decide between them, we need to consider which view of Inez is best supported by the details of the play.

2. An Ambiguous Situation

The play is routinely described as set in Hell, where these three unfortunate protagonists have been selected to spend eternity in a room together effectively torturing one another by their mutual inability to give one another what they each most want. But why should we accept that this is their situation? Two of them say that it is, Garcin rather speculatively and Inez much more firmly. But if the standard reading is right that these three characters are ordinary mortals who have found themselves here after their deaths, then why should they have any insight into the nature of their new predicament? It is obvious that they are not in Heaven, because they are not enjoying their new situation. But within the Christian eschatological mythology that frames the play, there are two other options. They might be in Purgatory, being punished until they are purged of their sins so that they can progress to Heaven. Or they might be at the Last Judgment, where their eternal destinies are to be decided. The only character who knows for sure is the valet who brings each of them into the room. Under the guise of tact, he studiously avoids saying where they are.

This ambiguity is reflected in the play's title, which has always caused trouble for English language editions and productions. It is often given the title *No Exit* or *No Way Out*, which reflects the standard reading that these characters are now locked into this situation forever. The title *No Exit* is also a nice theatrical pun, since none of the three main characters ever leaves the stage, even when the door to their room is wide open and there seems to be nothing to prevent them from walking out. But these titles are neither literal nor even figurative translations of the original. For the phrase 'huis clos' is taken from French legal terminology and designates a proceeding taking place behind closed doors, in a room with no public or media gallery, as opposed to a proceeding in an open court. For this reason, *No Admittance* might be a better English title than *No Exit*, though it might hinder ticket sales. The literal translation of 'huis clos' into English is 'in camera', which has the same technical meaning, but is unattractive precisely because it is legal jargon.

On the standard reading of the play, this title must be taken to indicate simply that the characters are now locked away from their own world, their own families, friends, and other acquaintances, who cannot see the torture they are facing for the rest of eternity. But the title suggests more than that they are locked away from their own world. For legal proceedings in camera have a specific objective. The participants do exit the room once the objective has been achieved. Such proceedings are not forms of punishment, eternal or

otherwise, but are rather parts of the process of establishing guilt. What the title suggests, therefore, is that the characters are neither in Hell nor in Purgatory, but are facing the Last Judgment of what they have made of their lives. If this is indeed their predicament, then we the audience must be a part of this process itself. We cannot be merely spectators external to the logic of the play. For if we were, we would be analogous to people in the public gallery of an open courtroom, witnessing the proceedings but playing no role in them. This would be a performative contradiction of the play's title.

Since the action is taking place behind closed doors, therefore, we the audience must be in that room as part of the story. Productions of the play are often staged in a way that is consistent with this. Rather than employing the traditional theatrical layout of a raised and lit platform in front of rows of audience seated in darkness, the action often takes place on a floor surrounded by an audience who can see one another's reactions. One advantage of this layout is that it heightens the atmosphere of paranoia. Another is that it subtly reminds us that our self-image depends partly on other people's judgments of our behaviour, which is a central theme of the play. But a third advantage is that it allows each audience member to see the audience itself as sitting in judgment over the characters in the play. Each character's confessions, appeals, and strategies are all met with the facial expressions and bodily postures, as well as occasional laughter and other audible reactions, of an array of people gradually coming to understand what motivates these characters.

If the audience are internal to the logic of the play in this way, internal to the closed room in which the drama unfolds, then not only are the characters facing the Last Judgment, but we the audience are their judges. The characters themselves do not seem to see it this way. For they neither address the audience directly nor are affected by the audience's reactions. They seem oblivious to being watched, as in traditional theatre. But this is exactly as we should expect. The true situation should be withheld from the people being judged for the same reason that psychologists withhold the purpose of an experiment from its participants until it is finished. If the characters knew that their lives were being judged, their words and actions would be calibrated to present themselves in the best light. Each of us wants other people to affirm our positive self-image, as the play itself dramatises. The ambiguity, from their perspective, of the situation that they are thrown into allows them to think that judgment has already happened and that they are now in Hell, destined to question one another for all eternity. Under those conditions, there would be no point in hiding anything. So they gradually bare their souls, which allows us to judge them.

3. Why Inez is an Insider

If we read the play in this way, then we can resolve the puzzle about the role Inez plays in the narrative. For, as we have seen, Inez seems to be different from the other two characters. She seems remarkably unperturbed by the whole situation. She is not struggling to establish her preferred self-image in the eyes of the others in order to convince herself of it. On the contrary, she seems very sure that she is cruel and her behaviour clearly demonstrates her cruelty. She differs too in her relation to the room they are in. Garcin and Estelle are annoyed by features of it that seem to have no purpose other than to annoy these people. The heat, the style and colour of the furniture, the ugly statue that cannot be moved, the paper knife that serves no function, and the lack of any mirrors or other reflective surfaces irritate Garcin and Estelle, but Inez remains entirely unruffled by them.

It is Inez, moreover, who assures the other two that they are all in Hell torturing one another. Garcin assumes at the outset that he has arrived in Hell, immediately asking the valet where the torture equipment is (HC: 182). The valet's answers, however, neither confirm nor deny the assumption. Inez arrives next and the first thing she does is to reinforce the assumption by accusing Garcin of being the torturer (HC: 186). Estelle arrives without any apparent presumption of where she is, but Inez alludes to being in Hell in conversation with her before asserting it firmly without any hint of doubt or regret. 'We're in hell, my pets, they never make mistakes, and people aren't damned for nothing', she declares (HC: 194). She even taunts Estelle with the idea. 'A damned soul', she tells her gleefully, 'that's you, my little plaster saint' (HC: 194). It is Inez who then claims that the reason there is no torturer is that they have been selected to torture one another, 'as in the cafeteria, where customers serve themselves' (HC: 195). Earlier on, it was Inez who described the annoying features of the room as evidence that they are in Hell, even though she is not annoyed by them. 'Nothing was left to chance', she declared. 'The room was all set for us' (HC: 192).

All of this is rather puzzling if Inez is what she claims to be. But if her role is to bring the other two to admit the reality of their lives, then the room does not need to be designed to annoy her and she has nothing to fear from her situation. She can play her role best by leading the other two to believe that they are already in Hell so they think they have nothing to gain from hiding anything about themselves. If this is her role, moreover, then it would make sense for her not to have the metaphysical structure of human existence, but rather to have precisely the fixed nature that she believes herself to have. Given the aim and

strategy, her role in this Last Judgment would be filled better by a demon than by a mortal or by an angel. Inez is indeed, as she says, dependent on making people suffer; her essence precedes her existence (HC: 203-4). But she can play this role only if the others do not realise that she is different from them. Her story of her past life is thus essential.

Her declaration that they will all torture one another is also essential, despite its tension with her saying she is uncommonly nasty, which itself implies that she will in fact do most of the torturing. Her mask slips a little again when Estelle asks why anyone would set up the room exactly as it is. 'I only know they're waiting', Inez replies, perhaps truthfully. 'You don't even know what they expect', she adds (HC: 192). Garcin becomes suspicious about her calmness and apparent knowledge of the situation. 'You've given us quite enough hints', he tells her; 'you might as well come out with it' (HC: 193). Inez replies that she is 'as much in the dark as you are', but soon asks directly what the others have done that has led to them being 'here' (HC: 193). At one point, she calls the other two 'my pets' and at another she praises Estelle's facial expression as 'quite diabolical' (HC: 194, 198).

Sartre has used these slips, I suggest, to indicate her role to us, an audience who can read or watch the play more than once, while allowing her to cover her tracks quickly within the temporality of the play itself, in order to prevent Garcin or Estelle from reaching the conclusion that she is different from them. Sartre gives us a clear hint in a brief exchange when Inez starts to describe her cruelty. Garcin responds by claiming to be rather cruel himself, to which Inez responds 'No, you're not cruel. It's something else'. Garcin asks what she means and she replies simply 'I'll tell you later', before returning quickly to describing herself (HC: 203). Sartre's clearest hint to us about her centrality to the play, however, is her name. He called her 'Inès', which English translators have rendered 'Inez' to avoid mispronunciation. The theatre director Ralf Tognieri has pointed out that her original name thus comprises the final two letters of 'Garcin' and the first two of 'Estelle', indicating her position 'at the heart of the play' (2013: 1).

If her position were too obvious to us, however, the play would be less captivating. Two structural features of the play prevent this. One is that the three main characters share the audience's attention equally. They have an equal number of lines. Their triangle of sexual desire allows the narrative to incorporate conversations between each pair, attempting to exclude the third. Each character delivers soliloquies. It is this equality that leads to interpretations of the play as presenting three characters facing the same situation together, differentiated only by their social backgrounds. The second feature is that if any of the three

is focused on as the lead character, it is more likely to be Garcin than either of the other two. He enters the stage first and his conversation with the valet initially sets the scene. He delivers the eminently quotable line 'Hell is ... other people!' and soon afterwards delivers the final line of the play, 'Well, well, let's get on with it ...' (HC: 223). Inez, by contrast, enters the stage neither first nor last, but between Garcin and Estelle. This nicely echoes the structure of her name that Tognieri points out, but nevertheless serves to obscure her centrality.

4. Garcin's Progress

These features that make Garcin more prominent than the other two, however, are not merely a device for ensuring that Inez remains a subtle and intriguing character rather than too obviously a demon forcing Garcin and Estelle to face the reality of their lives. For although Inez is central to the dramatic structure of the play, the metaphysical picture presented by the play is best illustrated by the progress that Garcin makes. According to the standard reading, there is no quest or discovery in this narrative because none of the characters can make any progress. 'They are all *done with*', writes Robert Solomon, for example, 'with nowhere to go, nothing to learn, and nothing to do' (2006: 179). The moral of the tale, on this reading, is found in contrasting their inability to change with the inherently dynamic structure of our existence. While they cannot escape their predicament, we can choose to concentrate on developing ourselves through our own projects without being too concerned with other people's views of us. But this reading is mistaken. For the characters do change: they come to a settled view on where they are, learn about one another's pasts, and realise that they will continue to irritate each other.

Garcin's progress structures the narrative of the play: he begins by exuding a false bravado about the torments he thinks he is about to face, then relates his exploits in life through a similarly macho persona, but under questioning from Inez he soon admits that he is genuinely unsure whether he is courageous or cowardly. Was his attempt to escape across the Mexican border really the courageous act of a pacifist taking an immense risk in order to stand up for his principles, as he would like it to have been, or was it simply a cowardly desertion driven by fear of gunfire? This action is genuinely ambiguous. Had he succeeded in setting up a pacifist newspaper, his escape might come to be seen as heroic. But that would not entail that it had been heroic at the time. The newspaper might rather have later redeemed an act that was cowardly at the time. This problem is compounded for Garcin by the fact that he died before reaching the border.

In coming to understand this ambiguity, Garcin makes progress away from his initial position of viewing himself as tough and courageous by nature. The ambiguity is repeated in the play itself when the door to the room opens, apparently allowing any or even all of the three to leave. None of them do. How should Garcin understand his decision to remain? Is he courageously staying to continue his project of convincing Inez of his toughness despite the problems that she and Estelle pose for him in this room? 'It is because of her I'm staying here', he declares (HC: 219). But is he really just scared that leaving might result in worse torture in another room? Garcin comes to realise that he is tortured by the divergence between the way he sees these ambiguous events and the ways in which other people might see them. His view of himself as fundamentally tough and courageous is perennially challenged by the fact that these actions can be read in the opposite way. Hell is other people for Garcin because the source of his torture is ultimately that there are perspectives on his behaviour that conflict with his own.

Garcin ends the play with an unambiguously courageous attitude. 'Well, well, let's get on with it', he says, finally having abandoned his attempts to avoid other people's judgments of his behaviour (HC: 223). In making this progress, Garcin contrasts not only with Inez, who has been certain and clearly right about her own character from the very beginning, but also with Estelle, who faces a similar predicament to Garcin's but seems to be making no progress at all. From the start of the play right to the end, Estelle is concerned only with confirming her femininity. Garcin's concern with his self-image is accompanied by a drive to find his salvation. He encourages the three of them to 'bring our spectres into the open' in the hope that this might 'save us from disaster' (HC: 201). This aim leads him to make progress towards correctly understanding himself. Estelle, by contrast, seems to think that her salvation lies in seducing Garcin and thereby affirming her self-image. She is, in a sense, a one-dimensional character. But her lack of depth is not a flaw in Sartre's portrayal of her. It is a feature of the character herself, one that he has portrayed very well.

If the characters are in Hell, then neither Garcin's progress nor Estelle's inertia amount to anything at all. For if nobody is going anywhere, any change is insignificant. But if we read the play as set at the Last Judgement, with Inez as a demon whose job is to bring the deceased to admit the reality of their lives, as I have argued that we should, then Garcin's progress and Estelle's inertia make sense. Garcin is mistaken to think he is in Hell being tortured. He is simply finding painful the process of coming to recognise, confess, and regret his sins. We the judges are coming to understand his basic sin, just as we understand

Estelle's. But unlike Estelle, Garcin is also starting to understand it himself. He is making progress towards the point at which he might be absolved by genuine remorse. By the end of the play, he might indeed be approaching his salvation. Estelle, by contrast, ends the play in the same position she was in at the start. She has not even begun the process of discovery that her situation is designed to elicit.

5. Why Garcin is in Hell

One of the disadvantages of Garcin being more prominent than the other characters has been a tendency among readers and viewers of the play to take him as a role model throughout the play whose lines express Sartre's existentialism. 'Hell is other people' is thus often taken to be the central message of the play, a moment of insight that encapsulates Sartre's pessimism about human life. Personal and social relations can only ever be based on conflict, on this reading; 'no human relationship can ever be either stable or satisfying' (Thody 1981: 423). Twenty years after the play was first published, Sartre pointed out that this was a misunderstanding. 'It has been thought that what I meant by that was that our relations with other people are always poisoned', he said, but 'I mean that if relations with someone else are twisted, vitiated, then that other person can only be hell' (NE: 199). Far from being a role model articulating a deep insight into the human condition, then, Garcin has misread his twisted, vitiated relationships with his roommates as revealing the basic structure of all relations between people.

In what way are these relationships twisted? It is not simply that Garcin takes seriously the views that other people have of him. In describing the play, Sartre affirms that 'other people are basically the most important means we have in ourselves for our knowledge of ourselves' (NE: 199). From the unreflective perspective of the individual, the world appears as a set of social meanings and directive reasons. This dimension of 'being for-itself' is structured by the projects that the individual has undertaken, the values that they pursue, as we saw in chapter 3. But the reliance of the reasons encountered in experience on the projects that the individual pursues is not evident from that unreflective perspective. Impure reflection on our experience does reveal, according to Sartre, that the reasons we find in our experience match our desires at the time, as we have seen (3.4). But impure reflection does not reveal the origin of those desires and, like the rest of an individual's experience, impure reflection is itself structured by the individual's own projects.

Garcin's impure reflection on his own experience and motivations, for example, is structured by his project of seeing himself as a courageous hero. Through that lens, his desire to escape to the border does not look like a cowardly desire to escape from the war, but looks instead like a heroic desire to make a stand against the war. The public dimension of our existence, according to Sartre, provides a useful corrective to the inevitable distortions of impure reflection. As our words and actions can be witnessed by people who do not share our projects and might not have projects in common with one another, the views that other people form of us can be useful sources of information about ourselves. Other people mostly lack the extent of our own experience of our behaviour, of course, and are viewing us through the lenses of their own projects. But it remains that I would know myself better if I took a variety of partial perspectives into account than if I relied only on my own. I would come to know myself through what Sartre calls my 'being-for-others' (B&N: 245-6).

The play should not be read as recommending that we should prefer our own image of ourselves to the views that other people have of us, therefore. The idea that we should get on with pursuing our projects without regard for other people's judgments of our behaviour is profoundly opposed to Sartre's existentialism. For on his view, we cannot be sure what our underlying motivations, our deepest projects, even are without considering other people's judgments. Indeed, as we saw in chapter 5, Sartre's existentialism stands in the Freudian tradition of viewing our behaviour and more immediate motivations as manifestations of deeper motivations that might be hidden from us. We might need the help of an existentialist psychoanalyst to uncover the projects that are causing thoughts and actions that distress us, according to Sartre, where one effect of those projects themselves is precisely to distort our own reflective thought about ourselves in such a way as to conceal those projects.

If the problem Garcin faces is not generated by his taking seriously the judgments that Inez and Estelle make about his behaviour, then what does generate it? In his discussion of the play, Sartre went on to say that 'I am indeed in hell' if 'I am situating myself in total dependence on someone else' (NE: 199). Garcin has made himself too dependent on other people's views of him by trying to understand his own behaviour as the manifestation of an inner nature. He sees himself as having a set of essential properties that explain his behaviour. He wants to be essentially a hero, but worries that he is essentially a coward. He is thus reliant on other people to affirm that he is essentially courageous. For if they collectively see any of his actions as cowardly, this undermines his self-image because

courageous heroes simply do not do cowardly things. According to Sartre's existentialism, Garcin should see himself as no more than a set of projects that he pursues and can change. The views of other people could then help him to identify his projects, so help him to change them if he is unhappy with his behaviour. He would not be locked into the Hell of having his most fundamental conception of himself perennially challenged by those around him.

6. The Sins of Garcin and Estelle

It is not Garcin, therefore, but Inez who delivers the line that encapsulates Sartre's central message in the play: 'You are', she tells Garcin, 'your life, and nothing else' (HC: 221). This is what Garcin, under the leadership of Inez, is making progress towards understanding. He first comes to understand that his own actions are ambiguous, so cannot be seen as unequivocally manifesting some particular fixed nature, whether it is the one he insists on or the one he denies. By the end of the play, he is beginning to undertake a genuinely courageous project towards the situation he takes himself to be in. These are necessary steps towards understanding and overcoming his underlying state of existential sin, which, according to Sartre's existentialism, is the state of bad faith, the project of viewing oneself and others as having fixed natures. This is what Sartre meant when he said that the play describes the 'living death' of people who have become 'encrusted in a set of habits and customs' that they are unhappy with but they 'do not even try to change'; this project of bad faith makes people 'victims of judgments passed on them by other people' (NE: 200).

Estelle is in the same position. Her relations with other people, like Garcin's, are poisoned by her project of seeing people as having fixed natures. Estelle sees herself as being essentially defined by femininity as traditionally understood, which symmetrically matches Garcin's view of himself as essentially tough and courageous, since these are features of the traditional view of masculinity. Her underlying sin is bad faith, just as Garcin's is. Both of these characters have behaved terribly towards the people around them while they were alive. But they recount these stories as though these actions are not what is most important. They each focus their attention instead on the question of the kind of people they really are. In a sense, they are right to do so. For it is this obsession with their natures, with seeing themselves as essentially feminine or masculine, that is the basic state of sin underlying the more immediate sins for which they think they are now being punished in Hell, although they do not yet understand this.

It is because Estelle simultaneously saw herself as essentially feminine and tried to prove this femininity through her behaviour that she made the decisions that led to her crime. It is because Garcin wanted to prove his essential machismo through his behaviour that he treated his wife abominably. In both cases, their bad faith, their project of seeing people's behaviour as manifesting fixed natures, allowed them to see their own behaviour as the inevitable result of their own fixed natures, even though they were choosing to behave that way in order to prove that they have a particular fixed nature. For on their view, people are courageous or feminine in the same way that people are tall or thin, or objects are hard or soft. Rather than accept responsibility for their behaviour, therefore, Garcin and Estelle viewed these as simply products of the interactions between their essential characteristics and those of the people around them. This is part of what Sartre means when he describes bad faith as akin to the Christian notion of original sin (B&N: 431-2, 434n; see Webber 2009: 143-4). It is an ongoing state that causes the individual to commit the particular sins they commit.

We should not conclude from this, however, that the play presents a consequentialist argument that bad faith is wrong because it leads to morally bad behaviour. Such an argument would need to rely on a further moral theory to substantiate the intuitive view that the ways that Garcin and Estelle behaved towards the people around them were indeed morally wrong. Sartre does want to condemn their behaviour as morally wrong. But he holds that this kind of behaviour is wrong because it is a manifestation of bad faith. More precisely, he wants to argue that we are morally required to treat people as beings whose existence precedes their essence, rather than as having any fixed nature. Bad faith is wrong, in Sartre's view, because it is the failure to meet this moral requirement, not because it causes behaviour that fails to meet some other moral requirement. We will consider Sartre's argument for this moral requirement in chapter 9, then in chapter 10 will see that Beauvoir presents a more promising argument for the same conclusion.

Estelle and Garcin, meanwhile, are struggling with the same underlying existential sin, which has taken the form of identifying with the socially dominant view of femininity for her and with the socially dominant view of masculinity for him. Inez, by contrast, identifies with a fixed nature that defies the social norms for her gender. But she is also different in not facing any dissonance between her preferred self-image and the way other people see her. Everyone can readily agree that she is cruel. She demonstrates what people would be like if they did have fixed natures. Our actions would not be ambiguous, there would be no ineliminable disagreement over our character traits. The standard reading of the play is

mistaken, therefore, to view the three characters as fellow mortals facing the same predicament. It is equally mistaken to see the characters as condemned to an eternity without change: Garcin's progress towards his salvation structures the play; Estelle's lack of progress serves as his counterpoint. And the standard view is mistaken to see the play as dramatising a pessimistic view of our relations with one another, as though it were a basic existential truth that other people are Hell.

7. Bad Faith and Other People

The message of the play is rather that bad faith inevitably vitiates our relations with one another. The standard reading is partly due to Sartre's treatise *Being and Nothingness*, published the year before the play, having standardly been read as arguing that relations between people are fundamentally based on conflict. But this misunderstands the structure of *Being and Nothingness*. It is not a series of discrete analyses of aspects of the basic structure of human existence, but the progressive elaboration of a single vision of both the basic structure of human existence and the particular form that Sartre considered it to have in his cultural context. The theory of bad faith near the start of the book aims not only to uncover the structures of human existence necessary for self-deception to be possible, but also to diagnose a particular attitude towards human existence that Sartre considered to be socially pervasive. His analysis of relations between people is developed within the context of that diagnosis. It aims to show that relations between people are always conflictual when they are poisoned by bad faith (Webber 2011; see also Beauvoir EA: 46; Fanon BSWM: 24, 117 n24).

Because it is framed by his theory of bad faith, it is a mistake to think that Sartre's theory of relations between people could be assessed by comparing it with the findings of early developmental psychology or animal psychology. For example, Kathleen Wider has argued against Sartre's theory on the basis of evidence that babies and toddlers can imitate the facial expressions of other people and recognise when other people are imitating them, an ability that seems to demonstrate an innate sense of fraternity with fellow human subjects that is not present in the child's dealings with other objects. Moreover, the way infants pursue shared goals through this imitation may well be fundamental in developing their ability to set and pursue goals and projects of their own. For these reasons, argues Wider, Sartre is mistaken to think that 'the self's fundamental relation with the other is one of conflict' (1999: 195). Instead, we should conclude from early developmental psychology

that our 'original relation with others' is cooperative and 'involves self-discovery and possibly even self-creation, rather than alienation' (1999: 195, 203).

Conversely, findings of animal psychology have been cited in support of the view attributed to Sartre that relations between people are fundamentally conflictual. George Stack and Robert Plant have argued that 'human responses to being stared at' should be understood as 'a replication of the prey-predator relationship in simpler life forms' (1982: 365). They describe a continuum across the animal kingdom of responses to being looked at. The presence of eyes, or even fake eyes, is enough to induce in some creatures a tonic immobility response that is designed to prevent predators from gaining further information about the animal's location from its movement. The eye-like patterns on some insects, fish, birds, and animals seem to ward off predators by inducing a similar fear response in them. Primates and other large animals tend to respond to a fixed stare with fear, which in turn leads either to aggression or to a submissive aversion to the gaze. Fighting among children is often preceded by staring. In this context, argue Stack and Plant, the conflict that Sartre sees as the basis of human relations is simply a further elaboration of this fundamentally aggressive nature of eye contact.

Sartre does not hold, however, that conflict is a fundamental feature of human existence. If he did, he would be contradicting the basic tenet of his existentialism. For the slogan 'existence precedes essence' means that an individual's behaviour is ultimately driven by the values, or projects, that they pursue and that they can abandon. The desire that other people affirm one's own self-image cannot be a basic feature of an individual's outlook, on Sartre's theory, for as we have seen in chapter 5 the idea that all desires express underlying projects is central to his existentialism. The relevant project here is the bad faith of seeing oneself as having a particular fixed nature, which in Garcin's case is the nature of being essentially macho. For this reason, the developmental psychology that Wider cites does not conflict with Sartre's theory. It rather presents an account of the development of the capacity to view other people as having perspectives on the world, and on oneself, that differ from one's own perspective. This is consistent with the idea that this capacity generates a specific kind of desire in the context of the project of bad faith, the desire that one's preferred self-image is affirmed by other people from their perspectives.

For the same reason, Stack and Plant are mistaken to think that the theory of conflict that Sartre elaborates in *Being and Nothingness* and dramatises in *Huis Clos* could be supported by the findings of animal psychology. However, this is not yet to say that the findings they

summarise are irrelevant. For these could rather be interpreted as threatening Sartre's theory that the conflict he describes results from a pervasive project that people need not pursue. The continuum of animal fear responses to the gaze of others might rather suggest that the conflict is a feature of human nature, an inbuilt feature of our evolutionary inheritance. The evidence Stack and Plant mistakenly take to support Sartre, that is to say, might instead present a challenge to the fundamental tenet of his existentialism.

In a further irony, however, the reason why this challenge to Sartre's theory would fail is itself indicated by Stack and Plant in their own criticism of the theory that they mistakenly attribute to Sartre. They argue that Sartre overlooks the transformation of the primordial animal fear response in human contexts of attention, interest, and attraction. In these contexts, they argue, our animal response to the gaze of others is not experienced in its raw form, but grounds very different emotional feelings (1982: 370-2). Sartre's actual view, however, is that a bodily response owed to our animal ancestry can never be experienced raw. It can only be experienced as transformed into a particular emotion by the individual's projects and situation. The conflict engendered by the views that other people have of oneself is not primordial or independent of one's own projects, according to Sartre's initial form of existentialism, but is a transformation by the project of bad faith of our basic bodily response to the gaze of others.

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