

The Notion of Being-in-the-World: As Being-in-Itself and Being-for-Itself

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Abstract

This paper attempts to explicate the understanding of being in terms of Sartre, how he differentiates two ways of being: being-in-itself and being-for itself. I have tried to present and analyze Sartre's notion of Being-in-the world and explain how the being-for-itself constantly strives for being-in-itself. In this sense I have tried to show that Sartre's understanding of Being is a relevant approach which can help in creating a qualitative life for oneself and not be bogged down to the mere given-ness of our being.

Introduction:

The understanding of Being is a complex and significant issue, which is not a new concern but it has a long history dating from pre-socratic to post-socratic to that of the contemporary thinkers. Sartre, the French existentialists have given a constructive method of understanding Being-in-the-world. He claims being is not what it is but it is what it is not, which means that Being is not to be merely taken as existing but it exists for some purpose or for creating meaning out of one's own Being. My paper is structured into three sections: The first section deals with the idea of Being, What is Sartre's understanding of Being? Where I have explained in what way is his study of being similar to that of Heidegger, here I have explained how his idea is constructive in nature. In the second section I have dealt with the Sartre's two categories of being- being in itself and being for itself. I dealt with the nature of human being which inculcates both categories, and this is itself the unique feature of being a human. Here I have discussed the structure of being-for-itself: facticity and transcendence In the third section I have tried to explain that Sartre's attempt is a relevant approach in understanding one's state of being, which can further help in creating a meaningful life and not be bogged down by the pre-given meanings of one's life.

The notion of Being:

What is being? Being is that which exists; Being is existence. Being is what it discloses to one self; in its awareness. It is neither hidden, nor is it revealed, what is revealed is only a part of being and this is not the end of revelation. It reveals and yet to reveal in all possible ways. It is Being-for-revealing and not revealed being¹. Being is what it appears where being and appearance cannot be taken in opposed sense because what is appearing is being; it is the measure of the being. Being is not in isolation but it is to be understood as that which is the totality of its activities and yet to form activities. In traditional metaphysical understanding being was taken as that which is reality and appearance was considered opposed to each other, where appearance was taken as that which is transient

¹ Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness* p.5

or that which changes. As what was transient cannot be taken as real and what was real cannot be grasped because of human limitation. Being, then, was considered to be the fundamental and ultimate element of all that is, which was considered as that from which everything emerges. Philosophers have tried to give a foundational account of being. Heidegger shifts the understanding of being from something over and above the appearances to something which can be apprehended in appearing. Sartre follows this idea and asserts that it is an unnecessary attempt to identify a being behind that what is appearing. There is no bifurcation of appearance and essence, as appearance does not conceal its essence, essence is what is created, not what is there behind what appears as such. Being is not different from what it appears but being is what is appearing.

1.1 Being-in-the-world

Sartre puts forth the question then, what is the relation we call being-in-the-world? What must being and world be in order to be related? This question situates understanding of my being in the world, it is the concern I have towards my own self, I ask with an attitude how am I doing today? Every question I ask about myself, I stand before a being which questions itself. Being is disclosed to me by some kind of immediate access-boredom, nausea. I come to understand my being through the mood I hold. Like Heidegger uses the terminology of being-in-the-world to understand being in terms of how it makes sense of one's existence. Being as always involving within the world. Heidegger postulated that, the world 'is', and that this fact is naturally the primordial phenomenon and the basis of all ontological inquiry. For Heidegger the world is here, now and everywhere around us. We are totally immersed in it. Being-in-the world means thrown into the existing culture with a purpose already in process, being is not be taken as fixed, which is contained in the world. This idea of being in the world is taken to be a kind of involvement in the world. Being and world need not be seen in the opposed sense but in a unitary way where my being cannot be detached from the world. I cannot to freeze myself to understand my being or the being-in-the world because it is always in process.

Sartre's understanding of being in the world is little different, it is mostly concerned with how man is in the world and he specifies his understanding basically to human, and his projections in the world. He does not explain like that of Heidegger as being already in process where I understand my being through the things I encounter in my everyday life, but in a way is much concerned with human than its relation to the world. But for Sartre Being is revealed-revealing to me in the projects I take. Heidegger and Sartre both started with the same method in understanding being, by questioning being, and shift from jotted substantive nature as being something out there, detached from what is existing, something independently existing, to something I am here and now. Heidegger took an inward method of understanding being, where understanding of being lies in making sense of my situatedness, as I am already in the world along with the others, being cannot be grasped because it is already ahead of. My being is understood in the world, in the environment I belong. Things are not out there in the world apart from human beings, but it refers to the meaningful presence of things to our corresponding needs and interests, whether practical or theoretical. Sartre adopted the similar method in understanding the notion of being, being is not to be seen in terms of that what is real and detached from my locatedness. Being is not that what is real and is different from that what is variant as

unreal but being is to be taken as that what is appearing and yet to appear, being is what is revealing and yet to reveal. Even he started with the method of questioning being, where questioning plays an important role of being-for-itself. It is because of consciousness being the heart of for-itself urges to ask question, which further bring forth the possibility of negative reply. Questioning entails freedom and rescues being-for-itself from being being-in-itself. This method employed by Sartre is constructive in the sense that he uses the notion of transcendence as overcoming the mere situatedness.

Being in itself and Being for itself

Now, the question may arise what kind of being are we talking about? Since we all appear different in the world so Being is taken of two kinds : One is the being-in-itself, which is the character of entities i.e fixed and full of positivity i.e the object hood and the other is the being-for itself which is the nature of being human, a conscious body i.e the subjecthood. Sartre asserts that both have mutually exclusive characteristics.

Human being involves two fundamental categories: it can be both in-itself and being for itself, where it has combination of both in itself and for itself which is the ontological root of our ambiguity. As Being has both these dimensions, and it is this because of which humans can be called as unique in its understanding. The most important aspect of Being –for itself is that it has the capacity to pose a question onto one’s own being, by the ability to question presupposes then we take a distance from what it is in-itself. Our ability to question oneself is the ability to negate the defining characteristics as being-in-itself. Being for itself is separated from in –itself by negation, which allows taking a distance and questioning one self. The being-for-itself is able to question its being-in itself and this is capable since being is never exhaustive and is faced with a question.

In the conceptual understanding: Being in-itself: being is uncreated, nor is it created by anything, neither does it creates anything. It does remains just as it, of being unaware of itself, Being is itself. There is neither in nor out, is it just as what it is and remains the same as it is, there is no activity, nor passivity, it is just neutral, solid and self-contained. It is self contained in the sense that is what it is beyond the world of creation. Sartre says, it is pure plentitude, rigid and pure object hood about which we cannot speak much.² A stone is a stone; it is what it is; and in being just what it is, no more and no less, it is as it is. It is about the exhaustiveness of its characteristics. That which is complete is not subject to any change until a third force is applied for any change. This idea of being can be compared to that of objects like: trees, rocks which are complete and independent.

Being for-itself: For-itself is fluid, non-self-identical, dependent, incomplete and empty which changes from within because human beings constantly makes themselves. Since the for-itself (like man) lacks a predetermined essence, it is forced to create itself from nothingness. For Sartre, nothingness is the defining characteristic of the for-itself. Being for-itself is co-extensive with consciousness, where consciousness itself is beyond itself and graspable. It is because of being conscious; we understand our incompleteness where human finitude is the hallmark of human existence. There is no foundation as it can never posses its being as it is but being conscious leaves room for restlessness. Human being is

² Reynolds, Jeck. *Understanding Existentialism* p. 59

beyond fixity and not determined to the causal laws. We never possess a being as we can possess a thing as we are moving from moment to moment within ourselves and even rising and falling from our possibilities.

Human beings are being-for-itself but it has a structure of in-itself since it has a body of which I have been given, a spatial dimension. This in-itself in human is not taken as a fact of the in-itself like the entities but it is called as facticity. This facticity is the first person givenness of my locatedness and it is temporally extended. Facticity represents the in-itself part of for-itself, it is because of the conscious body and not being merely as a body of the entities I am aware of the lack I am. Being-for-itself as it is a lack, and because of this lack, I seek for the possibilities to give a completeness of my being which is not yet. I constantly strive to give an appropriate character of my being-in-the-world. This Human finitude is faced in the state of anguish. Because we are limited beings we can choose one and not the other. Anguish³ is the immediate consciousness of one self⁴. It is a state of confronting our finitude where even after choosing we go through the state of disappointment of not choosing other option. We are angst because we as dynamic beings have fleeting capacity and at the same time we keep falling behind our possibilities. We seek to ground our existence to make it secure, in seeking for security, we seek to give our existence the self-contained being of a thing. The being-for-itself strives to become being-in-itself to attain the tree-like and unshakable solidity of a thing. But at the same time it cannot become so because of the underlying feature of being conscious, it is because of this which lets being-for-itself to be human or else it will be just like a mere thing. This seems to be like a playfulness of being human, because at one point it is conscious being because of which being can transcend the given situation and at the same time it feels disappointment of being able to transcend and strive for the thing-like characteristics which at the same time is an inappropriate exercise. What I am is not only known how we perform in this world but is constantly changing and is engaged in purposefulness. We are not in-itself but for-itself, not fixed but uphold a purposeful engagement.

2.1 Human existence is composed of two inseparable aspects: facticity and transcendence

Human being is both facticity and transcendence at the same because it is the both – a givenness and negating this mere givenness. Existence is about understanding the state of being, the state of situatedness in time in a particular way. Its situatedness cannot be taken as a mere fact, as a state of affairs, in which it is packed, which is there independent of our existence. Rather this situatedness is my givenness, and it is my experience of my situatedness. This 1st person givenness which is termed as facticity, It is my body, my physical locatedness in a particular environment and not like something outside of me. It is part of our facticity that we are born into a certain society, with certain physical and social attributes, and that we find ourselves in situations not directly of our choosing. The question may arise Will this givenness of mine of being physically located exhaust who am I? Sartre says human existence always transcends, or moves beyond (negates, or nihilates to use Sartre's term) these facts about our circumstances. We are always free to

³ Anguish in the face of the past and of future. Recognition of freedom and responsibility.

⁴ Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness* p.63

think of other possibilities, other kinds of lives, and to negate the given situation that we are currently in. Human existence must always transcend these brute facts about our lives that we cannot change. We can, and must, always leap beyond these facts to create further projects, and we are always free to interpret these facts in various different ways. The fact that we may belong to certain community, we have certain identity does not, according to Sartre at least, fix our being. Being-for-itself is freedom and it functions by negating the in-itself of the facticity, in its own terms⁵. It is because of our consciousness we constantly negate our mere givenness and resists our uncomfortableness in being dragged to worldly characteristics. In other words, I am not just the sum of my past scores I obtained, not just a student of center for Philosophy or role that I play as a daughter of my parents, and any human subject, for Sartre, is always aspiring towards and projecting future goals, and this is only possible by negating that which is. Human being is aware that he/she is for some purpose and not merely bodily givenness, this is the realm of consciousness. Consciousness functions through negating the facts of facticity as negating the elements of what already is given. Facticity is the sense of mere lack of my givenness, but my givenness is not something concealed or packed but there is an openness which compels me to confront to the possibilities available and at the same time encounter the state of anguish because of not having done otherwise. Human has possibility to become what I am not, and it is because of the facticity that we realize that have possibilities. In this way we can say that being-for-itself(possibilities) is grounded in being-in-itself(facticity). I am not merely known by the givenness but I the activities I take, and these actions defines that I have the capacity to transcend the mere locatedness. In this way moving beyond what is being given as facticity, being for itself has another structure of transcending the facticity.

The life to be lived:

Sartre believes that man is constantly engaged in the task of self construction, the task which is never completed and we take up endless projects where we make and re-make those projects. There is nothing essential about human life but only the predicament of being born and a possibility of death, essentiality lies in being situated where differences lie in overcoming those situations. I am what I am because I make sense of myself, I am by what I give meaning to myself not like the characterization already suited for me, like that of an object, we are in verge of constructing meaning. Being-for-itself is essence less, and even if we try to give any essence it is freedom.

Freedom is the focal point in Sartre's philosophy, where freedom itself is nothingness. Freedom implies possibility of self-transforming one's self. People always exist without a pre-given plan, and they provide themselves a foundation and implement their own plans. It is only in freedom to choose amongst my possibilities I discover my facticity, in being confronted with my givenness. Freedom lies in responsibility of one's choice because he not only chooses for one self but for the whole humanity. One cannot say that freedom lies in escape from the facts of life, in this sense it is not freedom. Here it is more of hiding from oneself the possibilities or the truth of life.⁶ One can never escape the facticity because it is the ground in which one realizes the ability of one's freedom.

⁵ Reynolds, Jeck. *Understanding Existentialism* p.58

⁶ Sartre, Jean Paul. *Being and Nothingness* p.74
Bad faith

Human being is surrounded by numerous possibilities open to him/her, and being aware of having possibilities unfolds his nature as being unique. It is the realization that nothing outside can compels us to be or to do anything and consequently that the failure and success of our lives depend on ourselves. For him human must constantly choose to sustain and alter their chosen projects. The question may arise do we always have choices? Sartre believes that we have choices and the most important to that is we must not escape the choices. Mostly people flee their dense of freedom into self-deception. They take their future to be fixed in the way like the past is fixed, they want to interpret actions to be mechanical, fixed and necessary because this would eliminate their responsibility. They start believing that future is given in the same way as pasts are, they start taking their social definitions to be open in the way the future is. They take their social roles to be necessary when in fact their duties can always be re-interpreted. The authentic life put forth the situation they inherent, actively choose their projects, because people are what they choose, since they constantly transcend what they have been, and remain open to new projects and tasks. Sartre believes that the inauthentic persons want to be like things, constantly escaping their open nature. Human being is on one hand the being in itself, in terms of the given features of the bodies, in their pasts, in the historical realities they inherit. It is the facticity which reveals my givenness but with this givenness human also has the capacity to transcend the state of its mere fallenness to something purposive, a capacity to overcome the situatedness of one's self

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