

# Jean-Paul Sartre

(Part – 2)

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# The For-Itself in Being and Nothingness

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- The structure and characteristics of the for-itself are the main focal point of the phenomenological analyses of *Being and Nothingness*.
- Here, the theme of consciousness's power of negation is explored in its different ramifications.
- These bring out the core claims of Sartre's existential account of the human condition.

# A Lack of Self-Identity

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- The analysis of nothingness provides the key to the phenomenological understanding of the for-itself.
- For the negating power of consciousness is at work within the self.
- By applying the account of this negating power to the case of reflection, Sartre shows how reflective consciousness negates the pre-reflective consciousness it takes as its object.
- This creates an instability within the self which emerges in reflection: it is torn between being posited as a unity and being reflexively grasped as a duality.

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- This lack of self-identity is given another twist by Sartre: it is posited as a **task**.
  - That means that the unity of the self is a task for the for-itself, a task which amounts to the self's seeking to ground itself.
  - This dimension of task ushers in a temporal component that is fully justified by Sartre's analysis of temporality.
  - **The lack of coincidence of the for-itself with itself is at the heart of what it is to be a for-itself.**

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- Indeed, the for-itself is not identical with its past nor its future.
  - It is already no longer what it was, and it is not yet what it will be. Thus, when I make who I am the object of my reflection, I can take that which now lies in my past as my object, while I have actually moved beyond this.
  - Sartre says that I am therefore no longer who I am.
  - Similarly with the future: I never coincide with that which I shall be. Temporality constitutes another aspect of the way in which negation is at work within the for-itself.

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- These temporal ecstases also map onto fundamental features of the for-itself.
  - First, the past corresponds to the **facticity** of a human life that cannot choose what is already given about itself.
  - Second, the future opens up **possibilities** for the freedom of the for-itself.
  - The coordination of freedom and facticity is however generally incoherent, and thus represents another aspect of the essential instability at the heart of the for-itself.

# Bad Faith

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- The way in which the incoherence of the dichotomy of **facticity and freedom** is manifested, is through the project of **bad faith**.
- Among the different types of project, that of bad faith is of generic importance for an existential understanding of what it is to be human.
- This importance derives ultimately from its ethical relevance.
- Sartre's analysis of the project of bad faith is grounded in vivid examples.
- Thus Sartre describes the precise and mannered movements of a café waiter. In thus behaving, the waiter is identifying himself with his role as waiter in the mode of being in-itself.

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- In other words, the waiter is discarding his real nature as for-itself, i.e. as free facticity, to adopt that of the in-itself. He is thus denying his transcendence as for-itself in favour of the kind of transcendence characterising the in-itself.
  - In this way, the burden of his freedom, i.e. the requirement to decide for himself what to do, is lifted from his shoulders since his behaviour is as though set in stone by the definition of the role he has adopted.
  - The mechanism involved in such a project involves an inherent contradiction. Indeed, the very identification at the heart of bad faith is only possible because the waiter is a for-itself, and can indeed choose to adopt such a project. So the freedom of the for-itself is a precondition for the project of bad faith which denies it.



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- The agent's defining his being as an in-itself is the result of the way in which he represents himself to himself. This misrepresentation is however one the agent is responsible for.
  - Ultimately, nothing is hidden, since consciousness is transparent and therefore the project of bad faith is pursued while the agent is fully aware of how things are in pre-reflective consciousness.
  - Insofar as bad faith is self-deceit, it raises the problem of accounting for contradictory beliefs.

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- The examples of bad faith which Sartre gives, serve to underline how this conception of self-deceit in fact involves a project based upon inadequate representations of what one is
  - There is therefore no need to have recourse to a notion of unconscious to explain such phenomena. They can be accounted for using the dichotomy for-itself/in-itself, as projects freely adopted by individual agents.
  - A first consequence is that this represents an alternative to psychoanalytical accounts of self-deceit.

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- Sartre was particularly keen to provide alternatives to Freud's theory of self-deceit, with its appeal to censorship mechanisms accounting for repression, all of which are beyond the subject's awareness as they are unconscious
  - The reason is that Freud's theory diminishes the agent's responsibility. On the contrary, and this is the second consequence of Sartre's account of bad faith, Sartre's theory makes the individual responsible for what is a widespread form of behaviour, one that accounts for many of the evils that Sartre sought to describe in his plays.