

## **Bad Faith and the Other: Sartrean Ontology Related to Seeing and Being Seen in No Exit**

**Amirmohammad Alipour**  
**University of Naples Federico II**  
 Alipourresearch@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

This research proposes to examine Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of existentialism and the two main principles, the presence of others and bad faith in one of the great works of literature, No Exit. Sartre in his existential philosophy explained the mere existence of other people will cause trouble and despair and it is a source of torture for human beings. Through repeating his prominent line 'Hell is Other People,' Sartre indicates the presence of others, which is always in conflict, causes oneself identity to change and become unauthentic due to what we call as bad faith. However, acceptance and forgiving oneself can be the solution to achieving authenticity and value in life. This is the most highly moral explanation of the condition of human life. By closely examining the characters, Garcin and Inez, we will conclude that what would be the key factor for this predicament is taking responsibility for past actions and accepting it no matter what. For Sartre, it is the ultimate answer to the absurdity of life.

**Keywords:** Existentialism, Bad faith, No exit, Jean-paul Sartre, Sartrean ontology, Existential mind, Others, Hell

### **Introduction**

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was a prominent French intellectual who made significant contributions in various fields such as philosophy, playwriting, novel writing, and literary criticism. He is often regarded as the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century. Sartre is widely recognized as a prominent and influential intellectual figure of the 20th century, whose contributions have had a noteworthy influence on the development of existentialism. In "Being and Nothingness," his masterpiece on philosophy, he explores the fundamental question of what it means to be human in a world that sometimes seems devoid of purpose. Sartre's philosophical doctrine emphasizes the autonomy and responsibility of the individual to create their own meaning in life. In addition to his contributions to philosophy, Sartre was a prolific author of plays, novels, and essays.

His play "No Exit," which explores the themes of existentialism and the human condition, is one of his most famous works. The play depicts the principal characters, Garcin, Inez, and Estelle that are trapped in a room representing the afterlife. No Exit is concerned with "gaze" and "the others," which represent the influence of others' presence on our well-being and sense of self. This power held by "the others" negates our independence. Sartre believed that the freedom to make decisions is the essence of existence. If others

convince us that we have no choice, we deny the very nature of our existence. He argued that existence lacks significance and that the condition of humans in this world is unsettling. His lecture, existence precedes essence demonstrates that human beings are initially created with no predetermined roles or purposes. After their purposeless creation, human beings are free to make choices about their lives. With freedom, there comes an absolute responsibility for actions.

In his book, Being and Nothingness (1943) he formulated the existential aspects of subjectivity, being for others, freedom, modes of being, and bad faith. Bearing this in mind, we will consider and examine two aspects of Sartre's philosophical view toward oneself. One is the revelation of the existence of what Sartre calls 'the Other' which is an important key factor in most Modern and Post-modern works. The crucial matter of "the others" dominates the majority of Sartre's works. He describes, "over and over how other people can condemn us, define us, withhold love from us, murder us – in short, take the power away from us to live life as we wish" as Bentley points out (1962, P. 76). Human beings require external validation, whereby they rely on others to provide feedback on their self-image and identity. In other words, individuals have the ability to perceive their own self-image by means of the perspectives of others. According to Sartre, "He recognizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense in which one says one is spiritual, or that one is wicked or jealous) unless others recognise him as such. I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of Another" (1946, P. 9). According to Sartre and his famous line in No Exit which is "Hell is other people", Sartre asserts that the presence of other individuals can be perceived as bothersome. "Through his famous line "Hell is Other People," Sartre wants to shed light on the important relations with others that are always relations of conflict" (Mahdi, 2020, P. 1). He argues that the mere existence of another can cause distress to others due to the competitive nature of subjectivity. In this sense, the individual experiences a sense of objectification rather than being regarded as a subject. This act of permitting individuals to pass judgment on us is what Sartre referred to as "Bad faith". As Sartre mentioned in Being and Nothingness (1943), "It is our natural capacity to deceive ourselves" (P.23). The concept is the human inclination to deny one's true self and perceive oneself as having no choices, leading to inauthentic behavior. This essay discusses how oneself identity is shaped through the presence of others and what would be the product of this predicament is the result of what is called as bad faith.

### **Literature Review**

In Sartre's philosophy, the concept of other is defined in relation with the concept of freedom and bad faith. It is easy to misunderstand Sartre's thoughts regarding the concept of bad faith and its main root cause. Numerous studies

have been published on the importance of the presence of others, bad faith, and its relation to oneself identity. This form of philosophy has been the subject of other general studies; however, this article extends the boundaries and applies Sartre's philosophy by examining *No Exit* in context. One's past deeds reflect on one's present identity only in so far as one identifies oneself with them. In reality, nothing can be undone except what we call as bad faith.

Tirsahar (2017) in her *Bad Faith an Exploration of the Work of Sartre* explained that Bad faith has often been classified as deception and a kind of lie that impact awareness itself.

We usually denigrate people who are in bad faith, but there is a difference between lying to ourselves and lying in the general sense. Lying however, does not have any impact on awareness itself; it is only at the transcendental level that the liar is lying to others for at the same time he is completely aware of the truth which he is hiding (P.1).

*No Exit* is the story of three dead individuals who are unable to justify their existence in hell and are therefore dependent on others. Garcin and Estelle's refusal to identify their essence enables Inez to define both their existence and themselves. The play proves that the inability of a man to define his existence will always lead him toward chaos, disappointment, suffering, and anxiety.

Buzdar (2019) has also illustrated this notion and stated that,

Concept of others' presence is very much highlighted in the play as all three damned souls wait for torture in the hell but no torture arrives till the end. In play, mainly two characters suffer from bad faith: Garcin & Estelle. Bad faith is a form of self-deception. Person suffering from bad faith fails to admit his existence subjectively and independently. It snatches the ability of an individual to act freely and consciously ( P.6).

It is crystal clear that Inez is the one responsible for labeling both Garcin and Estelle, however, accepting such labeling and deception will cause one to seek recognition in others.

Henricks (2006) asserted, "In order to be in bad faith, one must somehow hide from oneself something that one already knows – in other words, one who deceives him/herself must sometimes, at least, know the truth. In recognition of this fact, Sartre allows that bad faith is an extremely unstable state for a human being" (P.2). Garcin is portrayed as having been a deserter who betrayed the trust his comrades had put in him. He has committed a cowardly act and feels this reflects on him; he feels demeaned and diminished by it. In order to solve this predicament Garcin seeks Inez's approval. "GARCIN: So it's you whom I have to convince; you are of my kind. Did you suppose I meant to go? No, I couldn't leave you here, gloating

over my defeat, with all those thoughts about me running in your head" (Sartre 1944, P. 44).

This paper additionally investigates this act of seeking for recognition by proposing a solution.

## Discussion

*No Exit*, a play by Jean-Paul Sartre, is a powerful parable that embodies the main concepts of existentialism. In it, Sartre made the most of the circumstances that governed French theatre during the occupation. *No Exit* is a one-act play with four actors. The play starts off with a valet escorting a man named Joseph Garcin into a room with no windows and mirrors, and the audience soon figures out that it is in hell. Garcin is eventually joined by Ines Serrano, and another lady named, Estelle Rigault. After the guest's entrance, the valet departs and locks the door. Everyone anticipates being tortured by someone, but no torturer appears. Instead, they are left to probe each other's sins, desires, and unpleasant memories, realizing that this is their punishment; they are each other's tormentors. After an argument, they resolve to confess their crimes so that they will know what to expect from one another. Garcin cheated on and mistreated his wife and was executed by firing squad for desertion; Inez is a manipulative sadist who seduced her cousin's wife, Florence, while living with them and convinced her to leave her husband; the cousin was later hit by a tram and Florence asphyxiated herself and Inez by flooding the room with gas while they slept; and Estelle had an affair and murdered the resulting child, causing the father to commit suicide. Despite their disclosures, they continue to irritate one another. With their revelations, they continue to get on each other's nerves. It all starts when Inez wonders about the crimes they committed in their past life. "If only each of us had the guts to tell—" (Sartre, 1944, P. 14). However, before confessing their misdeeds, they chose denial as a defense mechanism.

### Garcin's inner conflict

Joseph Garcin is our prime character introduced in *No Exit*. He first reveals that he was a journalist who ran a pacifist newspaper and was killed because of his political beliefs. However, as the play unfolds, Garcin reveals that he was an adulterer who abused his wife, and he was executed by the firing squad because he tried to run away from his country during a time of war. Garcin considers himself a coward for running away, and he refrains from engaging with the others in the room or begging them to tell him he is not a coward.

"But bad faith is not only contradicting the standards and values a person entertains but also blocking the person from what he is. Additionally, he is trying to create himself as a being that is what he is not" (Tirsahar, 2017, P. 3). When Garcin rejects his positive being and starts to accept this falseness, inevitably the impact on the unconscious mind will manifest on his awareness. Garcin certainly has

something real to come to terms with and Inez stands in his way; she will not permit him to come to terms with his past so he can forgive himself.

INEZ: Now then! Don't lose heart. It shouldn't be so hard, convincing me. Pull yourself together, man, rake up some arguments. Ah, wasn't I right when I said you were vulnerable? Now you're going to pay the price, and what a price! You're a coward, Garcin, because I wish it! I wish it—do you hear?-- I wish it. And yet, just look at me, see how weak I am, a mere breath on the air, gaze observing you, a formless thought that thinks you. Ah, they're open now, those big hands, those coarse, man's hands! But what do you hope to do? You can't throttle thoughts with hands. So you've no choice, you must convince me, and you're at my mercy (Sartre, 1944, P. 45).

“According to Sartre, an individual should use his freedom of choice and free will in all his decisions because freedom is the key to authenticity. Because of the quality of subjective self-consciousness, Inez continues to torture other characters in the hell” (Buzdar, 2019, P. 5).

“I'll tell you later. When I say I'm cruel, I mean I can't get on without making people suffer. Like a live coal. A live coal in others' hearts. When I'm alone I flicker out. For six months I flamed away in her heart, till there was nothing but a cinder” (Sartre, 1944, P. 25). She confirms him in the thought that he is branded. Certainly, he has to be strong and stand against it; but more important than this, he has to be able to forgive himself for the past. Of course, it cannot be undone, but he can change his relation to it. Forgiving himself, which is not the same thing as forgetting what he has done. If he can do this his relationship with Inez will change and she cannot be able to hold him in his past. Being a coward is different as being branded a coward and oneself accepting the label.

Throughout the play, Garcin refuses to accept his condition and deliberately seeks Inez's approval and recognition in a way that his self-identity seems to be vanishing and there we have an unauthentic character.

GARCIN: That's the one and only thing I wish for now. I can't hear them any longer, you know. Probably that means they're through with me. For good and all. The curtain's down, nothing of me is left on earth-- not even the name of coward. So, Inez, we're alone. Only you two remain to give a thought to me. She- she doesn't count. It's you who matter; you who hate me. If you'll have faith in me I'm saved (Sartre, 1944, P. 43).

The presence of others causes a lot of insecurities in oneself if a person is not in good faith and incapable of accepting the misdeeds that are done. Accepting responsibility for one's past actions is the process of giving life value and with a distinct identity and freedom of choice making a human community would be possible. As Sartre points out, “Life is nothing until it is lived; but it is yours to make sense of, and the value of it is nothing else but the sense that you choose. Therefore, you can see that there is a possibility of creating a human community” (1946, P. 13).

### Conclusions

In Sartrean ontological viewpoint and existential philosophy acceptance is the underlying and most important factor that involves human life. Existentialism is optimistic and a doctrine of action. However, there is always going to be a lack of authentic being due to the presence of others that ultimately leads to bad faith, instead of good faith. In the play, Garcin encounters Inez, an individual characterized by sadistic tendencies who stands against Garcin and his true values.

In order to achieve authenticity one must embrace past actions and forgive oneself. I consider Sartre's bad faith as a way of liberation if acceptance will be considered. It makes us aware of the nothingness of the world. Consciousness and freedom of choice should be considered when making decisions and when that happens, the person is aware of the situation and is ready to forgive him/herself. If Garcin have confirmed his own identity, the labeling wouldn't have any value anymore.

### References

- [1] Sartre, J. (2007). *Existentialism is humanism*. Yale University Press
- [2] Mahdi, S.M. (2020). *Hell Being Other People in Jean-Paul Sartre's Play No Exit*.
- [3] Tirsahar, Paria. (2017). *Bad Faith an Exploration of the Work of Sartre*. *Psychology and Behavioral Science International Journal*. 5. 10.19080/PBSIJ.2017.05.555664.
- [4] Sartre, J. (1989). *No exit, and three other plays*. Vintage International ed. New York, Vintage International.
- [5] Buzdar, H. Q. . (2022). *Concept of Others in Sartre's No Exit*. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 39(3), 1075-1081. Retrieved from <http://pjss.bzu.edu.pk/index.php/pjss/article/view/731>
- [6] Henricks, Megan (2006) "Jean-Paul Sartre: The Bad Faith of Empire," *Denison Journal of Religion*: Vol. 6, Article 7