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Abstract

The modern tradition has put us in a position to look for the Other from an egoistic, egological perspective. The Other and the self are linked through resemblances and similarities, while concepts such as empathy and consensus, tolerance and affirmative action are building our morality. But all these are conditioned on an egoism inherent in a cartesian cogito. Indeed, as Sartre and Henry have acknowledged, the cogito is the only foundation which we can use. Yet, in a Kantian mannerism, just because knowledge of self and Other start from the cogito it does not follow that such knowledge arises out of it. It is high time to *migrate* from this perspective. Through a phenomenological reduction of Rejection in intimate relationships, I shall trace a link which reveals the Other as, to just borrow a phrase from Marcel, the Ontological Counterpart to Death.

Prolegomena to Altruism: By migrating the concept of the Other, the Other is not an affinity but the ontological counterpart to death.

The Un-Enlighted Other

Ever since Descartes, the Other has been a problem to be solved. We cannot have a direct proof of the existence of other minds as we do not have direct access to them or, as with Berkeley, we do not have a clear and distinct idea of another spirit but just a notion of it¹. For the materialists, as Sartre brilliantly analysed, the Other might not be an issue as they are relying only on material criteria for existential claims. For them, a material body, or a brain, is sufficient proof for the existence of the Other. Yet the problematic nature of the Other creeps back in, in discussions of consciousness where the Other can turn into a “philosophical zombie”, a Sartrean “perfected robot”². Even in the critical tradition, the problem of the Other is not solved by the phenomenologists; it is bypassed transcendently.

This inability to find, to prove that the Other is another like me, has left us with an ego, a cogito trying to find how it is related to the Other through affinities and resemblances. The starting point is always that of the cogito. But this point leaves the Other suspended on the possibility of an adequate justification being formed to treat the Other as oneself – or at best how the Other resembles to my ego. Concepts such as empathy and tolerance, affirmative action and consensus

¹ Berkeley uses the term “notion” only for spirit which we could translate into “psyche” to emphasize the inability or the non-possibility of ever conceiving the psychical part of one’s self

² Sartre, anticipating the modern discussions in reductive philosophies about the Other, admits that it is “infinitely *probable* that the passerby whom I see is a man and not a perfected robot” (Sartre, Being and Nothingness 253)

are all rooted in this ego oriented ontology, a relic of the Enlightenment. What reason do I have to care about the Other?

This is intensified when existential claims are inserted. To borrow Camus's words from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the only truth, the only mathematics in the world is: if Life, then Death³. Heidegger and Derrida understood death as revealing the ultimate potentiality for Being. In this sense, death is a gift, providing the axiological backdrop of human behaviour⁴. This is how we evaluate. How we evaluate our potentialities and make our choices. Yet both in Heidegger and in Derrida, the aporia of Levinas "Why not kill?" and the absurd moment of Camus "Why not kill myself" since I am going to die anyway in a God-less world, are not addressed. And all the more so, if, as Levinas has beautifully analysed, we take the Darwinian-Hobbesian evolutionary account, what reason can you give for not chopping the other as wood and putting them in the fireplace for one's warmth, one's contentment?

Cut the pie however you want, there is no reason why I cannot kill or kill myself. Any rational justification offered, any rational attempt will collapse if, following Nietzsche we deconstruct it to its fundamental premises. A barrage of whys will disintegrate every spec of rational justification.

Does this mean that this is the way human reality is? No. This is a sign that we need to migrate from the destructive egological philosophy we inherited from Enlightenment.

Keeping the Cogito – Migrating from the Ego Cogito

It is undeniable that the ultimate ground of truth is the cogito. And it is also undeniable as Sartre put it that the problem of the Other cannot be solved in as much we are trying to look for the Other as a Kantian Category, that is only structurally, or empathetically in the sense of accessing the Other's phenomenological experience. But that, as Sartre masterly analyzes – to borrow Marcel's characterization – does not mean that we cannot have proof of the Other. The proof of the Other is a presence in my cogito. But this presence in the critical tradition has been construed as a Hegelian dialectic; a war of who's going to dominate whom. The resistance I feel when I try to objectify another is the proof that the other is like me who is trying to objectify me. War.

While this account coheres formally it does not do so existentially. Even if I objectify the Other and dominate them I am still not waived from Charon, from death. I am going to die. So what's the point? To answer these questions we need to migrate from this egological thinking. We need to see what role the other plays or can play in our life. And the best candidate to start with is an intimate relationship where the importance of the other seems to be at its phenomenological peak.

The Other and the Fusion of Horizons

It is in intimate relationships that we can see the phenomenon that Alfred Shutz calls "The Tuning-in of Horizons", that is, the authentic presence of Other in the self. Self and Other merge. The Other is revealed to the self in an absolute certainty. That is what a fusion of horizons is:

³ Specifically, Camus writes about the "cruel mathematics that command our condition" (p. 12)

⁴ In *Being and Time*, death is revealed the condition for making authentic decisions while, for Derrida, in *The Gift of Death*, the absoluteness of death is what grounds the possibility of evaluation, and, concomitantly, any form of axiology

the partners in a primary relationship experience one another as unique personalities in a vivid present, by following their unfolding thought as an ongoing occurrence and by sharing therefore their anticipations of the future plans, as hopes or as anxieties;... to each of the partners the other's life becomes part of his own autobiography, an element of his personal history. What he is, what he grew to be, what he will become is codetermined by his taking part in the manifold actual or potential primary relationships which prevail with the home-group (Schutz, The Homecomer 372)

Self and Other share something in common and they are conscious of this sharing, *ἐπί-κοινόν*. In other words they communicate. They have a shared intentionality, their consciousness are met. Phenomenologically speaking, it is not just that there is a simultaneity as synchronicity of inner time (temporalities). They have realized the possibility of *temporalizing-with-each-other*. In Schutz's words, "each simultaneously shares in vivid present the other's stream of consciousness in immediacy" (Schutz, Making Music Together: A Study in Social Relationships 95), just like making music together. It is *with-and-through-and-by-the-Other* that such phenomenological transcendence becomes possible. It is not just a *pour-soi*. It is a *pour-nous*.

This is a positive description of the phenomenon. The negative description of this phenomenon is when there is not a possibility of fusion of horizons. This, once again, Sartre has brilliantly depicted in his play *Les Mouches*.

Orestes addressing his slave-parent exhales...

No, my good slave, you need not fear; the time for that is past. True, nothing could please me better than to grip that sanctimonious ruffian by the beard and drag him from my father's throne. But what purpose would it serve? These folk are no concern of mine. I have not seen one of their children come into the world, nor been present at their daughters' weddings; I don't share their remorse, I don't even know a single one of them by name. That bearded fellow was right; a king should share his subjects' memories. So we'll let them be, and begone on tiptoe.... But, mind you, if there were something I could do, something to give me the freedom of the city; if, even by a crime, I could acquire their memories, their hopes and fears, and with these the void within me, yes, even if I had to kill my own mother... (Sartre, No Exit and Three Other Plays 61)

This sharing that Orestes is trying to articulate is meaning, *noema*. Something shared between him and the people does not exist. They do not relate. There is no meaningful content of experience between Orestes and the people. His being their King even if by a rightful decree is devoid of all *noema* precisely because they never shared anything together. They have never related. Their consciousnesses have never merged.

This phenomenon of non-relatedness is experienced in rejection in intimate relationships. With rejection the possibility of transcendence is not possible since the *se dépasser vers* is ontologically

conditioned on the Other whose presence is constitutive of the fused horizon which makes the *se dépasser vers* possible. The rejection thrusts us to the nothingness that Heidegger explained. That contracted point of non-temporalizing, not transcending. Since all horizons are constituted of and with the other, the other's rejection bars transcendence, makes the self fall, *ἀπόρριψις* (=rejection). This is the phenomenon that Plato tried to depict with the fall and love in *Phaedro*. While the other gives you wings, rejection makes you fall. The ontological status of the fall is nothingness. No possibility, no potentiality, no horizon opens up. No transcendence is possible.

It is a loss of sense of belonging that one is experiencing. If it is agreed that consciousness as transcendence, as a temporality that temporalizes itself in already being past-future in a projected becoming, then the leap in the future out of a fused past being is a project that cannot be effectuated in all senses of being precisely because one of its constituents (the Other) is no more there. It is not only that there is no possibility of *se dépasser vers*. There is no more the possibility of *se dépasser*. It is the moment when consciousness dies.

Ratcliffe who studies cases of what we refer to as schizophrenia quotes cases of persons describing this very phenomenon. One patient recalls:

It is a state of nonbeing; there is no cure, there is no illness. I was convinced that I was dead, emotionally dead. I have no words to describe this thing that was totally alien to my life experience. [...] the closest I can come is that of a living void; of being condemned to life. And as the ability to live recedes, the most terrifying part of all is that it leaves a certain serenity (Ratcliffe 23)

So how can one get out of this nothingness? Who can motivate us toward something rather than staying in this void? Isn't the Other who opens up the horizons for me? Let us go back to Sartre and the Look. If I am to claim that noise behind me as a possible look toward me, that means that the look is not a look but the Other's (felt) presence in my horizon which arrests my transcendence. In this case, either as a peeping Tom or as just looking through a window the Parthenon and daydreaming, the felt presence of the Other must result in the being seen which is to present to myself my being as being seen. This is an important point which if reduced further reveals that the Other as presence not only arrests my transcendence but 'destroys it'. Human reality no matter how vain can be, it can never create *ex nihilo* or annihilate. It can only create and destroy. But to destroy in its proper ontological meaning is nothing other but to modify possibilities, to turn to a new direction (*κατά-στροφή*), a new turning point. Destruction is simultaneously Creation. Insofar as I live, I am a for-itself, a possibility. Therefore, the Other as a destroyer in my becoming a transcendence-transcended, they motivate me towards__. They motivate me to a new intentionality, a new noema.

If we now retort to the fundamental questions, the self can never provide meaningful answers to the questions Why do I live? Why I am here? What is my *raison d'être*?. Existentially, the Other gives the noema for me. The Noema of my existence is provide by the Other as they motivate me towards a (meaningful) being. The Other gives noema, meaning-mizes the self. It is through this process that the anxiety of the biological death is neutralized. Death stops being an issue not because the self is mesmerized by an ideology, a Heideggerian *They* which propels it to overcome its fear thereof by extrapolating its significance to anyone but the self. With the Other death ceases to become an issue

because the reason of existence has been accomplished by the Other in the modalities of acceptance and recognition. Yes your existence is needed to protect me from the deadly anxiety of death. And I will do the same. We need each other.

Yet this acceptance and recognition is not of the Hegelian dialectical sort – Yes you exist for me. It is of the existential sort - I need you to give meaning to my being, to what I am. In this sense, the Other and the self do not start with an Levinasian *ἀπολογία*, apology. They start with a confession, an *ὁμολογία*. The Other is an *omologos*, an *homologue*, a counterpart; and this counterpart is the counterpart to death⁵.

This way we have come full circle and we can say rephrase Kant and admit that, although knowledge of the self starts with the self, it does not mean that it arises out of the self. Ontological appreciation of the self comes altruistically which is nothing else than a fusion of horizons, through pure intersubjectivity.

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⁵ This phrase comes directly from the work of Marcel who identifies Love for the Other as the Ontological Counterpart to death in *Desire and Hope*.