

## The Hell of Existentialism

*"So this is hell... I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is-other people!" (Sartre 45)*

This is the famous quote from the play written by Sartre: *No Exit*. One of the protagonists of the play – Garcin, yelled “Hell is other people.” Without knowing the further concept of Sartre’s existentialism, the quote can be easily misunderstood. According to the setting in the play, three people are trapped in hell, located in a room where mirror and torturer show absent. The mirror is the symbol of self-reflection. Instead, without the self-examination, individuals can only perceive themselves through the others. During the process of reflecting others, each one of them could be others’ torturer. In the play, Sartre has used allegorical words to demonstrate his own thoughts, above all, the “look” with others.

For example, because there is no mirror in the room, Inez proposes that she can be Estelle’s mirror. “Suppose I try to be your glass? Come and pay me a visit, dear. Here's a place for you on my sofa.” (Sartre 19) Estelle hesitates for a moment, asked if Inez will hurt her, and then sit beside Inez. For here, Sartre used Inez serves as a mirror to imply the meaning looking into other. In Sartre’s account of “look”, consciousness is reflective. Other is an object from my perspective, and from other’s perspective, I am the object. Sartre state that We can only see ourselves through others, because in the perspective of self-looking, we are likely to hide ourself in autonomy. Individuals are looking into others, but lacking attention to themselves. Furthermore, in Sartre’s existentialism, manifest “I” exist because I am aware my own consciousness . Here the first awareness perceived the second consciousness . In order to explain the concept, it means that “I” divide myself into two parts, the second part detached from my consciousness, and is conscious of my consciousness. In this case, the second myself is similar to the “other”.

Sartre has built an extreme condition in *No Exit*. The especial people who restrict each other. Garcin has a fragile ego to prove he is not a coward. Inez is a lesbian who try to prevent her girl from another man. Estelle can not live without a mirror which never been found in hell. Garcin tried to explain his sin. “When I chose the hardest path, I made my choice deliberately. A man is what he wills himself to be.” (Sartre 43) The words of liberty turn aside with poisonous rebuttal from Inez. Garcin then took Estelle’s suggestion-revenge himself with kiss on Estelle’s lips.

*GARCIN: Will night never come?*

*INEZ: Never.*

*GARCIN: You will always see me?*

*INEZ: Always.*

The hell is designed for the three, one man and two women. It brings a counterbalance position in between them. No one will be happy with other three. This is a sample model to have a existentialism hell. For Garcin, he will never sleep in hell, because the light is permanent on. The look from Inez will always follow him, because he or she can not leave the room.

In Sartre's account of hell is other people, the authority of self-definition is the essence to distinguish whether you are in hell, uring the discussion of three people in the room, they all try to find out the reason of why they are here. Voluntarily or unwillingly, each one of them told the potential sin they committed. In order to "help" each other, throughout the discussion, they tried to exculpate themselves. Garcin, who escaped from the war, claimed that he is a pacifist and refuse to fight. He attempted to convince Inez that he is not a coward. In a room with other two individuals, Garcin have to explain to himself, he is trying to make an approval from others: "I am not a coward". This is a completely contradiction to the free choice of Sartre's existentialism. Individual self-consciousness precedes everything is the core proclaim from Sartre-"Existence precedes Essence." The famous quote expresses the individual consciousness shall determine the essence of himself, including whether he is a coward or not.

The spirit of freedom, is the value that Sartre want to propose. After the WWII, the fire of war swiped over the globe, people lost their house, family and friends. The immense sense of absent overwhelmed people. Existentialism is born to fill the absent. Sartre has depicted a scene pretty much like people living during the war, and use it to satirize the lost of freedom-for stating his own point. To be more specific, the lost of determine yourself. the reason of hell is other people, is becausehen you have no authority to define yourself, lose the freedom to prove that you are right, you are not a coward, and the existence of yourself. Then you are in hell instead.[\[p3\]](#)

In conclusion, from Sartre's point of view, 'the hell is other people' refers to an extreme society where the other dominate "self". It is no surprise that Sartre being a liberalist and freedom advocator, raised the quote like "hell is other people". One's exposed in other's powerful "look", occurs the absent of self-essence, the freedom of define one self. By the tendency of people escaping from other's negative comments, Sartre depicted the worst possibility of others hurting oneself.

However, Sartre's opinion towards the other is an extreme example. He expressed the liberal spirit of judgement given by other, and warned us to maintain the essence of

oneself. Although Sartre made a good perspective on “hell is other people”, he ignored the advantage of powerful “look” from others. The lack of self-awareness of one-self can be covered by a mirror from other’s perspective, (in the condition of not hurting each other). The room in hell is not often be found in modern society, and the look from other are not fully negative, most of time, are positive. We shall distinguish the useful “look” from bad, and be aware the potential “Inez” who is determined to criticize you .

## **Bibliography**

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *No Exit*. New York: Vintage International, October 1989.