

# The Problem of the “Other”: Where Is the Real “I”?

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**Abstract:** *The article deals with the study of the problem of “The Other” in the context of its influence on the formation and formation of “The I”. The methodological basis of the study is existentialism and psychoanalysis. The paper outlines the transition from the traditional understanding of the relationship “The I” - “The Other” to non-classical - “The Other” - “The I”. The paper considers the conditions for constructing the theory of the existence of “The Other” by J.-P. Sartre, as well as the symbolic theory of “The Other” by J. Lacan. The conclusions about the essence of the phenomena of “The I” and “The Other” are drawn based on the conceptual analysis. “The I” is defined as a field of absence, deprivation in an individual. “The Other” is defined as the Symbolic and the ontological facet of the social. The ambivalent process of interaction between “The Other” and “The I” is also presented. “The I” does not exist initially and a priori but it is formed in the process of filling the lack and void with the symbols of “The Other”. The means is the desire which, by splitting an individual, allows him to perceive and realize his being as self. The article shows that this splitting is dual: on the one hand, the I denies the existence of the Other within myself (sadistic component), and on the other, the I entirely denies its Self (masochistic component). The impossibility of being completely satisfied and identifying self with the objects of the Other allows the I not to become like the Other and perceive self as a self-independent and independent being.*

**Keywords:** *the I, the Other, subject, individual, desire, the symbolic.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Speaking on the problem of the Other, one cannot but note its undoubted relevance. Existing in the modern world, we are simultaneously exposed to two circumstances that paradoxically exclude and complement each other. On the one hand, the development of the information society, the virtual reality and communication extend our boundaries, making the world global and universal. This allows to significantly diversify the ways of interaction and communication, essence and existence, having opened up previously unknown horizons of our personality. However, the same tendency leads to the opposite: due to the unlimited openness of the interaction space, the subjects of this interaction become impersonal, anonymous. The concrete Other blurs, becoming the abstract Other, the signifier without the signified [1]. This inevitably leads to the fact that own “Self” turns into an impersonal sign, a social mask, losing all individuality and depth.

Opposite tendencies are mentioned in the theoretical understanding of the issue. The problem of the Other has historically two vectors of study. Within the framework of the first vector, the Other is considered as “near”, and relations

with the Other as an ontological necessity. Medieval philosophical thought adheres to this position, for example. Within the framework of the second, the Other is defined through such categories as “alien”, “stranger”, and relations with the Other acquire an authentic character. A striking example of this vector is the representatives of classical transcendental philosophy.

A certain synthesis of two vectors takes place within the framework of modern continental philosophy. This article is concerned with understanding the replication of the phenomenon of the Other and its theoretical and problematic unfolding in a postmodern society.

## II. METHODS

The methodological basis of the study is existentialism and psychoanalysis. The basic existential work is the book by J.-P. Sartre *Being and Nothing*. The theoretical foundations of psychoanalysis are considered comprehensively and include both the classical works by Z. Freud and the works by representatives of structural psychoanalysis K. Horney, J. Lacan. It is these two areas that are most suitable for studying the problem of the relationship “The I” - “The Other”. The revision of the classical understanding of the problem of the Other begins, in fact, with existentialism. Psychoanalysis, while problematizing the I, also does not ignore the question of the Other as a necessary element in the formation of the I. The conceptual connection of psychoanalysis-existentialism allows us to consider the ambivalence of constructing relations between the I and the Other, both from the point of view of consciousness and from the point of view of the unconscious.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The absolutization of the individual, the singular, the conceptual opposition of the phenomena “The I” – “The Other” in classical philosophy by R. Descartes and V.F. Hegel became the basis for that criticism of the Cartesian subject, which unfolded in the history of philosophy at the end of the 19th and continued throughout the 20th centuries [2]. The transition from consideration of the problem of the Other as a passive object of cognition to its consideration as an independent object is observed, one way or another, in the field of modern continental philosophy. This transition is determined, in our opinion, by at least two related reasons – firstly, by the need to respond to real social, historical and political challenges that arose at the turn of the century, and, secondly, by the need to assess the role of influence of these challenges and deterministic processes on a person.

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If we use the Hegelian dialectics of the slave and the master to describe the structural difference between classical and modern subjectivity, it will turn out that the Cartesian, i.e. the classical paradigm of the subject is marked by a figure of the master, the sovereign. The I act as the master of its own will and consciousness, activity and autonomy, the bearer of freedom and rights. This domination was possible only through the recognition of the independence of the I from the Other. The modern project of the subject interprets man in a completely new way as the I. According to this new view, man loses his monopoly right to be the sovereign and master of himself and being, becoming an instrument and vehicle of the Other. The modern postmodern project puts at the forefront precisely the image of the I as a slave obeying the master [3]. The Problem of the Other in the History of Philosophical Thought of the 20th century acquired a dual interpretation. Existential tradition viewed it through the experience of consciousness. Analyzing the phenomenon of the Other, J.-P. Sartre formulates four conditions that, in his opinion, are necessary for constructing at least some acceptable theory of the existence of Other [4]. These conditions are:

The essence of the first is that the existence of the Other must be confirmed, and not expressed as an assumption. This means that the existence of the Other is not proved, since this fact simply does not need proof. It is proclaimed as Cartesian evidence.

According to the following condition, the Other must be met, it cannot be constituted. This condition requires the theory of the search for the Other’s foundations in itself, and not just faith that it exists.

The third condition is that the reality of the Other does not have a cognitive nature, both in terms of cognition of external reality and self-knowledge. The Other, first of all, should directly affect my being, and being here and now, in specific empirical realities, that is, ontically. It should not be for me a means of knowing the world.

The fourth condition, however, establishes in what form the Other appears before me when I cognize it. According to Sartre, the Other must certainly appear in my thinking as someone who is not me. Moreover, this negation must be mutual, and only it enables to comprehend the Other.

As can be noted, in the existentialism the Other gains obvious independence from individual being, in contrast to the I, which, although viewed in the field of thought, becomes dependent on the existence of the Other in it. Finding foundations of the Other in oneself through the denial of unity becomes possible only by recognizing the problem of lack. And although the existential version of the solution to this problem leads to the postulation of a deep estrangement of man from being, the very idea of the essence of the I as something that inherently contains absence is of revolutionary importance for the development of the problem of the Other. The psychoanalytic tradition defines the Other through the experience of the unconscious and builds a line of thinking in which the position of the I am not definite and stable. The transition from the “I”-“Other” mode to the “Other”-“I” mode in psychoanalytic theory was due, first of all, to the rejection of the idea according to which the I was considered to be something present in personal being initially, ontologically.

The psychoanalytic project of the subject is built on leveling a certain stable internal subjectivity of man, his essence and integrity. Instead, an understanding of the I as a product, the result of the influence of the Other, is offered. S. Zizek,

analyzing the Lacanian subject, comes to the conclusion that the I is always filled with a certain inner wealth of meanings, always surpassing its symbolic articulation. This excessive signification disguises a fundamental shortage [5]. The purpose of the Other is to give the I a wealth of meanings, to finish constructing the individual to a certain integrity. Here we see that the I is also defined through the problem of shortage, as it were, of the eternal search for the signifier, which would bring it closer to the ontological fullness of being. This, for example, is clearly fixed in the development of the child when it begins to recognize itself in the mirror, trying, thus, to complete its fragmentary perception of the real body to symbolically given to it in the sensations the image of the Other [6].

However, the deontologization of the I was impossible without the ontologization of the Other. In the classical, Freudian, version, the mother or father in accordance with the structure of the Oedipus complex plays the role of the Other. In structural psychoanalysis, the Other broadens its horizons. J. Lacan emphasizes that one can talk about the existence of at least two others: one, with a small letter – any other object that is in the field of interest of the I, the second – the Other with a capital letter, a symbolic order, that which can be defined as one of the moments of social [7]. The ontological basis of the social is the triune structure “Real-Symbolic-Imaginary”. A detailed analysis of them is done by S. Zizek in *The Plague of Fantasy*, describing them as follows: “The Real (“hard” traumatic reality that opposes symbolization), the Symbolic (the sphere of language, symbolic structure and communication), and the Imaginary (the sphere of images, with which we identify ourselves, and which attract our attention)” [8]. All these facets form social reality, but not all of them have full independence. The real stands at the bottom of sociality, is its foundation and fundamental principle. However, it is not a priori and predetermined, i.e. the real is formed only after the work of the symbolic. As J. Lacan writes, “we are not allowed to approach the Real differently (in any plane, not only in the plane of the cognitive), rather than through the Symbolic” [9]. This means that the real arises in the process of symbolization, i.e. always mediated by symbolic influence. That is why, from an ontological point of view, the real can never be achieved. The real, a priori, true essence of man cannot be in any way explicated. The imaginary also turns out to be ontologically not independent, since the sphere of images with which the I can identify itself does not arise from nowhere, it is completely dependent on the Symbolic. Thus, it is the Symbolic, identical with the big Other that turns out to be the only conceivable ontological element.

As already mentioned, the reality of the I cannot be explicated. Only the modus of the symbolic I is real. In this sense, the I, acting as a signifier, becomes the signifier for itself: the chain of signifiers organizes the content of the psychic life - “this, if you will, is a certain “text” - in a metaphorical, broad sense of the word, including things like my daily routine, my typical emotional reactions, my “ideology”” [10-15]. The subject appears to be a barrier to itself: “at first it is split because it is constituted by the Other, and then because it becomes the Other in relation to itself,



thereby acquiring multiplicity, elusiveness, polyphony” [11]. For its realization, the I need to become an obstacle to itself, to be exposed to the threat of decomposition and splitting by the Other.

The splitting of the I am achieved through the inoculation of desire into its field. Moreover, existential tradition and psychoanalytic are unified in this question. Sartre refuses a rational understanding of desire in favor of Freudian sexual attraction. Psychoanalytic attraction consists of two aspects – sadistic and masochistic. Z. Freud emphasizes that one person always has both of these aspects at once, as two sides of the same process [12-16]. Sartre adheres to the same ambivalence. Interaction with the Other necessarily becomes a double negation: on the one hand, it is the negation of the Other (the sadistic component), and on the other, the denial of its I (the masochistic component). That is, interaction always presupposes a simultaneous objectivity and subjectivity of the I. Desire turns, as it were, into the psychological equivalent of total denial, in the sense that it is called to fill the shortage by being a manifestation of the shortage itself.

Besides, the psychoanalytic ontology of desire puts stress on another ambivalence. The very situation of being of the I am possible only if the Other opposes in the final satisfaction of this desire, that is, the situation of desire turns out to be impossible for the subject [13-18]. The I am destined to experience the permanent loss of the object of desire, alienation from the Other [14-17]. Despite this, it is only thanks to this constant loss of the object of desire and the impossibility of fully satisfying the desire that the I become viable to fight for its being and gaining the fullness of being. It is in this ambivalent process of the influence of the Other on the I, while the impossibility of completely identifying the I and the Other lies, in our opinion, the very possibility of self-perception of the reality of its being as the I.

#### IV. SUMMARY

Thus, the study of existential-psychoanalytic theory allows us to draw the following conclusions about the phenomena of “I” and “Other”:

- the relationship between the Other and the I can be both conscious in nature, when the I conceives itself through the Other, and unconscious in nature, when the Other is encrusted in the being of the I and unconsciously affects it.
- the I have no ontological ground and is not a predetermined entity of the individual. The I is defined as the field of absence, deficiency in an individual, the filling of which allows the I to appear as such;
- The Other is defined as the Symbolic, i.e. the ontological facet of the social. It is thanks to the symbolic impact on the reality that other facets of the social appear – the Real and the Imaginary, making up a triune essence;
- The I am formed in the process of influencing the individual of the Other. Emptiness and deficiency is filled with the symbols of the Other;
- An instrument of filling is the desire, due to which the splitting of the void of the I occur. This splitting is ambivalent in nature: on the one hand, the I denies the existence of the Other within itself (the sadistic component), and on the other hand, it denies fully its own I (the masochistic component);
- The I feel a continuous loss of its integrity due to the impossibility to fully satisfy the desire and identify itself with the objects of the Other. In this paradoxical process, the very

possibility of self-perception of the reality of its being as the I take place.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Feeling and understanding oneself as the I, man embodies the symbolic, the social heterogeneity that exists in society. Only thanks to familiarization with the Other, man becomes social. I am not able to fully understand why it is such, why it has taken just such a position in the social structure, however it is a priori ontological absence of the reality of the I that turns out to be necessary grounds for self-objectification and identification of itself as the real I.

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