

Sartre – A Sketch For the Theory of Emotions

Introduction:

Sartre embarked on a process of identification, and discovery, which resulted in a 'theory of emotion'. He surmised that 'emotion' was something of ourselves: it characterises our own human reality: and, as such we can do nought else but take full responsibility for its existence. Understanding human reality, too, is not something that comes into being from the outside; it assumes its own being within ourselves. It is given life, and takes on a form of our own choosing. Hence, here too, emotion as a form of human reality, describes the relationships between that which is, symbolically, represented within our own consciousness, and we can do nought but accept full responsibility for the extent to which relatedness may shown.

Critique of Psychology –

It is argued that psychology draws it's resources from experience and divides them into two types: that which may be derived from spatial-temporal perception, and that which may be derived from reflexive experience. The aim is to arrive at 'psychological facts' about human behaviour inherent in experience.

It is suggested that facts or defined by what one should meet in the course of investigation given the statement of a given hypothesis or series of hypotheses. It is argued that there is no attempt to show how these 'facts' may be related, nor to show how facts derived from the investigation of one form of human existence may be similar to those derived from the investigation of another. But much credence is given to showing to what extent one form of human existence may be different from another.

Further, it is argued that man is more than the sum of the collated 'facts' derived from investigation. It is not possible to determine that which may be ascribed to be 'man' before all the facts have been collated and their degree of relatedness has been shown to be true to greater or lesser extent. To align oneself with that which has be shown to be true/valid, reliable, absent of reactionary effect, and therefore, generalisable without saying something about that which man is not, deters from discovering that the very essence of that which is man. Indeed, to carry out positivist activities without due consideration of the conditions in which such findings are to be located (context), also, detracts from discovering the true essence of man; and of '*dasien*', being-in the world.

Applied to concept of emotion, psychological investigation might begin from the standpoint that emotion exists, primarily, because that is our experience: arguably, both the experimenter, and the experimentee, experience emotion to a greater or lesser degree. The psychologist sets out to derive the 'facts' of emotion inherent in experience. Sartre points out that, often, the situations within which the scientist observes emotion bare relation to his/her own ideas of possible situations within which an emotion may be experienced (ibid, p8), and thus the findings from such studies may not be said to be objectively derived.

In reference to Heidegger, Sartre goes on to suggest that human reality is reflected in each of us as individuals, and any attempt to delineate one form of human reality from another is "difficult". How do you objectively measure emotion without first relinquishing yourself of all

knowledge of its very fact and essence? The assumption that it is possible to understand emotion as experienced by others, by understanding emotion as it is experienced by self, remains invalidated. Possibly, because it assumes that as members of the human race, we all share the same experience of emotion, and it expresses itself in much the same way as in ourselves does in others. But Sartre points out that this understanding is, ultimately, mine (ibid, p13). This, in my opinion must be clearly stated.

In evaluating the emotions from a peripheric theoretical standpoint, Sartre argues that explanation of emotion becomes reduced to a process – a series of facts within which the emotion may be shown to occur. This approach gives little if any indication of the true essence of that emotion. From a phenomenological standpoint (i.e. Husserl), Sartre argues that it is not possible to derive essence from a series of facts where the “relatedness” of associated ‘facts’ have not been shown, (ibid. 11). Emotion may then best be explained as ‘consciousness that is organised’, and indicative of consciousness, itself. The psychologist seeks to state points of fact, (i.e. that emotion simply ‘is’, and what emotion does). S/he does not seek to describe, define, no explain emotion beyond these statements of ‘fact’, nor does s/he accept arguments that this aim should be met.

Sartre argues that this interpretation of that which is observed is “not good enough”. He wants to know what the very essence of emotion is. He suggests that this may be inherent in that which emotion, signifies. He argues that by investigating emotion, scientifically, you are expected to investigate emotion in isolation of other variables that might affect the outcome of experimentation and devalue the findings. Sartre argues that this renders the observed emotion as being ‘dead, non-psychic, in-human’ (ibid, p16). It may well be true that an emotion is meaningless beyond that which it has been shown to be when taken out of context, but to assume that it somehow, dead, non-psychic, or inhuman detracts from its very origin. Perhaps this is what Sartre is referring to: emotion has no significance when it bares no relation to human reality, and exhibited out of context. Emotion for Sartre is a form of human reality; and the converse it true, that human reality is a form of emotion. It is not something that imposed from the outside, but inherent in man’s very being. Similarly, man can not reduce experienced emotion to a series of bodily function/manifestations, these sensations must necessitate a process from which meaning may be derived. The question remains then, what does emotion signify? Without such explanation, emotion remains dead, non-psychic, and inhuman.

An Experiment in Phenomenological Psychology: the classical theories

In critique of peripheric theory Sartre begins suggesting that physiological changes that occur when an emotion is experienced can not fully explain the emotion observed. He describes the physiological changes that occur in the experience of ‘joy’, and those of ‘anger’, and asserts that the only difference between the physiological changes is the intensity with which they are experienced. It could be argued that this is all that is required for this type of experiment, but Sartre asserts that this is not good enough; such explanations signify nothing. In consideration of William James’ peripheric theory on how sensation is manifested as psychological reality, Sartre suggests that consciousness may be described as a ‘group of psychological phenomena’, and he argues that emotion may be perceived as an organised and describable structure (ibid, p24).

Sartre then goes on to consider the possibility that emotion is a ‘lesser’ form of behaviour: ‘a setback behaviour’: that is exhibited when one is unable to maintain that behaviour which expends too much psychic energy. Sartre recounts extracts from ‘Janet’, and notes how those

engaged in 'confession' sometimes find that the very process of 'confession' is too much to bare, and their behaviour changes to one which seems less 'difficult'. Almost as if, the energy so created is expended (ibid, p27), rather than withheld, intrapsychically diffused, or hidden. Emotion is evident of a setback; it has been reduced to a setback behaviour. But what does this signify, asks Sartre? A defensive reflex as suggested by Wallon; an inferior/less difficult form of behaviour invoked as a means of eluding the more difficult behaviour as suggested by Janet, and James; or is emotion indicative of transformation of form (ibid, p29)?

This 'transformation of form' was derived from Sartre putting himself in the position of someone who had transposed themselves within a situation of conflict from being argumentative to expressing anger: from being argumentative to being angry. Phenomenologically, the context has been stated, and internal dialogue has given possible reasons for assuming this transformation. However, Sartre could not derive a valid explanation as to how this transformation took place without involving consciousness. The idea that mental transformation could be automatic, and that individuals may not be fully conscious of the processes involved, was not evident to Sartre. For Sartre, we must each be aware of the transformation that takes place, and so become fully responsible for our behaviour.

The Psychoanalytic Theory

Emotion can only be understood where signification is, also, identified. Emotion therefore has purpose; it is functional, (e.g. gratifying, provide a means of avoidance/escape, etc.). Sartre, however, questions the principles of psychoanalytic explanation. Sartre argues that psychoanalytical interpretation considers the phenomenon of consciousness to be the symbolic realisation of a desire repressed by censorship, but this desire is not implicated in its symbolical realisation. The desire is entirely separated from that which it signifies. Hence, emotion is not implicated in its symbolic realisation in that we are conscious of it, but it completely separate from that which is signified. Though part of the event, emotion remains readily identifiable as something that may exist completely separate of that event. Sartre gives the example of a fire, and the people who lit that fire (ibid, p45).

From this, Sartre goes on to suggest that signification of emotion; the signification may only be located within consciousness itself, and hence we must be fully aware of this adaptation. Psychoanalysts would refute this claim requesting that those who refute this "consciousness" explain why some people are not aware of this adaptation. Sartre argues that such claims may be validated by referring to those who would master their fear, calm their anger, and hold back their sobs' (ibid, 49). This implies that people are aware of this adaptation, and choose to delude ourselves: exercise 'bad-faith': of the non-existence within our consciousness. Perhaps some aspects of consciousness are not evaluated with the same diligence as those who would think about the reality of being-in-the-world. Therapy often gives us the opportunity to examine the interrelatedness within the client's behaviour – to identify the signifier, and that, which is signified.

A Sketch of A Phenomenological Theory Of Emotion

Consciousness of emotion as a reflective structure of consciousness identifies 'the signifier', and that which is 'signified', but in relation to what? To say you are, and to behave accordingly, but in relation to what is it that you are afraid: angry with whom, and in which situations? Is it necessary to reflect back on the world to experience 'emotion'? Sartre does suggest that there is some relatedness between point specific reactions to the perceived world, and the perception of the world in general, inferring that we are able to generalise about 'being-in-the-world', and enter into a state of consciousness which may appear to bare no relation to that which is,

actually, taking place. It may well be that the individual is experiencing the world, differently, to others who are seeking to gain some insight into this individual's perception, but 'how' do you determine which state of consciousness is a true reflection of that which is taking place?

Sartre suggests that there is 'to-ing and fro-ing' from a state of reflective consciousness, to one of unreflective consciousness. Sartre gives the example of writing. He says that he is aware of his writing; that he intuitively knows what he is going to write even before it is written. The act of writing does not require any reflection on the behalf of the writer; perhaps if it did s/he would not make as many mistakes. But how can you be aware of something, and yet not fully conscious of it?

Perception of the world as a difficult place full of traps, decoys, and furrows

Emotion then conceived as a transformation of the world's perceived structure – a change from one that is differentiated, to one which is not (ibid, p65). This is a kin to moving from the 'specific', to the 'global' response. The individual generalises about the perceived experience. When faced with that which gives rise to tension; or that which appears difficult; consciousness enables us to view the "problem", event, person(s), or situation, differently. There is no need to view the situation, reflectively. In the same way, emotion may be used to, intentionally, view a situation in different way - to intentionally change the quality of experience (ibid, p60). It could be argued that expressed emotion could, theoretically, change the experience of a situation by offering others the opportunity to alter their response to you; assuming others are aware of the transformation that has taken place within you. In which case emotion would signify tension in relation to a given situation, and by signalling alarm provide a means by which such tension could be made more 'tolerable'. The self is revealed and others are "asked" to respond.

Sartre suggests that this transformation of the experienced world is as if by 'magic', and that we believe that which has been created anew (ibid, p61). Sartre differentiates between emotion that is expressed passively, and that which is expressed, actively, but emotion itself seems to enable the individual to communicate that which s/he finds difficult in the expectation that others will somehow, magically, understand that which remains unsaid.

The issue of fainting is espoused to reflect the desire to be rid of the object of impending danger. This achieved by ridding oneself of the conscious experience of the dangerous object. Sartre relates the physiological changes to a conscious desire to change the quality of that fearful experience. In fear, the emotion signifies a desire to eliminate the obligation to seek new ways of being-in-the-world. Active fear, also, seems to signify a 'magical' desire to be rid of the fearful object; to change the quality of our experienced consciousness and so diminish the tension experienced. Passive sadness, it is argued signifies a means by which the 'actor' seeks to 'dim the light', to express our powerlessness to act; to change the quality of our experienced consciousness. Sartre differentiates between the experience of 'Joy-feeling', and 'Joy-emotion'. He argues that Joy-feeling is a truly adapted state, but that Joy-emotion is characterised by certain impatience'. Joy signifies the possession of something pleasant; real, imagined, or anticipated (ibid, 69).

Sartre in evaluating the very nature of emotion sets out to show what these emotions may signify. He has yet to determine their very structure. He has already alluded to the possibility that they are part of our consciousness. This suggests that their structure may resemble that of consciousness. He separates behaviour as evidence of felt-emotion, and consciousness of the behaviour that signifies emotion from the emotion itself, to conclude that 'emotion is a

phenomenon of belief' (ibid, 75). This relates thought to emotion by pointing out ways in which the consciousness is able to, fictitiously, portray itself to signify one thing, but actually believes something else (ibid, 72). It does not only signify that 'when all paths are blocked, consciousness precipitates into the magical world of emotions', as this may also be shown to occur when all pathways are open, e.g. the diminution of life (i.e. sadness), or the enlargement of it, (i.e. joy).

Sartre suggests that emotion is 'an intuition of the truth' (ibid, p81); or at least, that which is believed to be true. Emotion is not a static thing, it is a transmutable thing; it changes with time; and, in so doing portrays a picture of the world that is believed to be true to greater or lesser extent. That which is observed appears to us through emotions (ibid, p81). It takes on qualities reflected in our emotions. Qualities, which are indicative of the very nature of that which is observed, seem to be invoked whenever the same 'object' recurs. This gives the object the power to transcend the here-and-now, and take on a life all of its own. It consumes and disfigures new/different experiences. Through sentient ability and physiological change, we infer qualities about the world that is 'an intuition of the absolute and do so without apprehension.

Intention facilitates the process of differentiation between that which may be construed as a weak emotion, that which is not. But it may be that the intensity of emotion may be indicative of the degree to which we evaluate the world. 'In emotion, consciousness is degraded, and abruptly transforms the 'determined world' in which live into 'a magical world' (ibid, p83). In this sense, it seems reasonable for Sartre to give credence to the magical quality of consciousness that is emotion. He argues that it is way in which we understand our being-in-the-world'. Our being-in-the-world is given meaning; it signifies something; we become 'irrational syntheses of spontaneity and passivity'. The world appears to us in this way out of necessity, and without it our very being would be wholly dependent on reason (ibid, p84). Hence, the meaning inherent in an external object becomes degraded; transformed into emotion by a process of passivity.

Conclusion:

The purpose of Sartre's expose on the theory of emotions was 'to serve as an experiment for the establishment of 'a phenomenological psychology'. In it, he outlined his ideas on that which may be derived from psychological theory on emotion, through psychoanalytical theory on emotion, to culminate in an idea of signification, or meaning, of emotion. He uses examples of emotions to illustrate the possibility that emotion is more than a series of psychological fact; it has meaning; it signifies something. From a phenomenological approach, it may be possible to give some idea as to what various emotions, actually, signify. He concludes that 'emotion signifies the totality of the relationships of human reality'; it is 'a modification of being-in-the-world'. This modification is said to be 'magical' in some way; and as such can only provide an essence of human reality. Each emotion is constructed out of that which is perceived, and rarely reflects that totality beyond that which is intended. Sartre maintains that the pursuit of factitiousness may prove problematic where discipline alignment is deemed the ideal.

Chronology

1905 June 21	Born to Jean-Baptiste Sartre and Anne-Marie (Schweitzer) Sartre.
1905 October 20	The General Strike of Russia, leading to the formation of the first Soviet in St. Petersburg.
1906 November 17	Jean-Baptiste dies.
1907	Sartre and Anne-Marie move in with her parents: Karl "Charles" Schweitzer, noted writer and music historian, and Louise. Anne-Marie's cousin is Albert Schweitzer.
1909	Sartre suffers from a cold or influenza, causing leucoma in his right eye. He loses some sight in the eye.
1911	The Schweitzers move to Paris.
1913 October	Dr. Eymard Sartre dies.
1914 June 28	Assassination of Austrian archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo signals the start of World War I.
1914 August 1-23	Various European nations formally declare war against each other.
1916 January 29	Germans launch an air raid on Paris, using the Zeppelin Fleet.
1917	Anne-Marie marries Joseph Mancy. The couple settles in La Rochelle.
1917 April 2	America declares war on Germany.
1917 November 7	(October 26, according to old Russian calendar) The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia.
1917 November 8	Lenin assumes the chair of the Council of People's Commissars.
1918	Writes novel <i>Götz von Berlichingen</i> .
1918 November 9	Revolution in Berlin.
1920 February	German Workers' Party changes its name to the National Socialist Party.
1922	Writes the short <i>L'Ange du morbide</i> and begins the novel <i>Jésus la Chouette</i> , which he does not finish.
1923 August 10-13	Riots in Germany, lead by unions and National Socialists.
1925 January 16	Trotsky dismissed as chair of people's Military Council.
1926 October	Stalin expels Trotsky and Zinoviev from Politburo.
1927	Writes thesis <i>L'Image dans la view psychologique</i> .
1927	Trotsky expelled from Communist Party.

December 27	
1928	Fails agrégation.
1929	Meets <u>Simone de Beauvoir</u> . They both take the agrégation. He places first, she places second.
1929 January 31	Trotsky exiled from Soviet Union.
1930	Inherits portion of grandmother's estate.
1931	Publishes <i>La Légende de la vérité</i> and starts writing <i>Nausea</i> .
1934	Writes <i>La Transcendance de l'Ego</i> .
1935	Grandfather, Karl "Charles" Schweitzer dies.
1935 Fall	Relationship with de Beauvoir and Olga Kosakiewicz.
1936	Alcan publishes <i>L'Imagination</i> . Sartre writes the short stories <i>Erostrate</i> and <i>Dépaysement</i> .
1936	Series of government changes in France, the result of power struggles between the left and moderates.
1936 July 18	Spanish Civil War begins.
1937	The journal <i>Recherches Philosophiques</i> publishes <i>La Transcendance de l'Ego</i> .
1938	Writes about 400 pages of <i>Le Psyché</i> and begins writing <i>La Age de raison</i> . Publishes the stories <i>La Chambre</i> , <i>Intimité</i> , and <i>Nourritures</i> (originally titled <i>Dépaysement</i>).
1938 April	Publishes <i>La Nausée</i> (<i>Nausea</i>).
1938 September 7	French government activates all reserve military personnel.
1940 June 14	German troops enter Paris.
1940 June 21	Sartre is taken prisoner by German army.
1941 March	Escapes from German stalag. He founds the resistance group <i>Socialisme et Liberté</i> , which is dissolved within the year. <u>Maurice Merleau-Ponty</u> , a student of <u>Husserl</u> and acquaintance of de Beauvoir joins the group.
1941 December 8, 11	America declares war on Japan, then Germany.
1943 June 2	Meets <u>Albert Camus</u> .
1943	Writes <i>Huis clos</i> in two weeks. Finishes <i>Le Sursis</i> and <i>Réflexions sur la question juive</i> , published in 1946.
1944 July	Escapes from Paris with de Beauvoir.
1944 August 25	Allied troops enter Paris. The liberation of France does little to change the instability of the French government.
1944 Fall	Forms <i>Les Temps Modernes</i> , which is to remain a popular journal.
1945 January	Stepfather, Joseph Mancy, dies.

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1945	Refuses the Légion d'Honneur.
1946 November 8	The plays <i>Morts sans sépulture</i> and <i>La Putain respectueuse</i> premiere.
1946 November 10	French elections are marked by Communist and Socialist gains, leading to a Socialist-Communist coalition government.
1948 February	Joins the Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire (RDR).
1950	Denounces Soviet labor camps, after defending them in several articles.
1952	Publishes <i>Saint Genet</i> .
1952 May 28	Communists demonstrate in Paris.
1952 August	Publishes public reply to <u>Camus</u> ' essays on rebellion in <i>Les Temps Modernes</i> .
1953 May	<u>Merleau-Ponty</u> parts with Sartre, leaving the staff of <i>Les Temps Modernes</i> .
1954 January- February	The former Allies meet to discuss German autonomy. The Soviet Union vetoes proposed free elections in Germany.
1954 May- June	Visits the Soviet Union for the first time.
1954 December	Elected president of the Franco-Soviet Association.
1955 May 5	Occupation of Germany officially ends, but troops remain.
1955 June	<u>Merleau-Ponty</u> publishes <i>Les Aventures de la dialectique</i> , which includes a chapter attacking Sartre for <i>ultra-bolshevism</i> .
1955 October 2	France withdraws from the United Nations over perceived interference by other nations in the Algerian-French Revolt.
1956 November	Condemns Soviet intervention in Hungary.
1956 December	Martial law is declared in Hungary. Once again, Sartre is forced to recognize the totalatarian nature of the Soviet Union.
1958 December 21	Anti-communist De Gaulle elected president of France, just two months after radical-socialists had formed a coalition government. In many ways, De Gaulle's rise is a result of Soviet actions.
1959 September 24	The play <i>Les Séquestrés d'Altona</i> premieres.
1961 May	Maurice Merleau-Ponty dies.
1961 July 19	A bomb explodes near Sartre's apartment, 24 Rue Bonaparte.
1962 January 7	Another bomb attack prompts Sartre to move.
1962	Sartre visits Russia three times during the year. He is also elected as vice-president of the Congrès de la Communauté Européenne des Ecrivains

	(COMES). He steadfastly remains a supporter of Marxist ideals.
1962 July 3	Algeria wins independence from France and soon after joins the Arab League.
1963	Received by Krushchev in Soviet Georgia. Sartre will make regular trips to the USSR in coming years.
1964	Refuses the Nobel Prize in literature.
1965	Again elected as vice-president of COMES.
1965 January 25	Begins adoption process of Arlette Elkain.
1968	After appearing on Czech television in support of the Prague Spring, Sartre once again is faced with the true nature of the Soviet Union when it crushes Czechoslovakian reforms with tanks.
1969	Sartre's mother, Anne-Marie, dies.
1969 May	Supports Communist candidate for French presidency.
1969 November 12	The Soviet Union expels Solzhenitsyn from the Union of Soviet Writers. Sartre remains publically loyal to the Communist Party.
1970 November 9	De Gaulle dies.
1971	Publically breaks with Fidel Castro.
1972 May 22	American President Richard Nixon becomes the first President to visit Moscow.
1974 February 13	The Soviet Union deports Solzhenitsyn and revokes his Soviet citizenship.
1976	Sartre leads a campaign of 50 Nobel prizewinners for the release of Mikhail Stern, a political prisoner in the Soviet Union.
1976 April 15	In Spain the Union of Workers convenes its first congress in 44 years.
1976 April 25	Portugal has first elections in 40 years. The Socialist Party wins most seats.
1976 November 7	Accepts a doctorate from Jerusalem University.
1977	In an interview, Sartre declares that he is no longer a Marxist. The interview appears in <i>Lotta Continua</i> .
1977 May 17	Israeli Labour Party defeated after 29 years in power.
1978 February	Visits Israel.
1978 March 12	In French elections leftists parties win an absolute majority for the first time.
1980 April 15	Dies at 9 p.m. in a Paris hospital while in a coma.

Works

 *Emotions: Outline of a Theory*, Essay: 1936 (*L'Imagination*)

- Transcendence of the Ego*, Text: 1937 (*La Transcendance de l'Ego*)
- Nausea*, Novel: 1938 (*La Nausée*)
- Being and Nothingness*, Essay: 1943 (*L'Être et le Néant*)
- The Flies*, Play: 1943 (*Les Mouches*)
- No Exit*, Play: 1944 (*Huis Clos*)
- The Age of Reason*, Novel: 1945 (*L'Age de raison*)
- Existentialism and Human Emotions*, Text: 1946 (*L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*)
- Anti-Semite and Jew*, Essay: 1946 (*Réflexions sur la question juive*, written 1943)
- The Respectful Prostitute*, Play: 1947
- Dirty Hands*, Text: 1948 (*Les Mains sales*)
- Saint Genêt*, Biography: 1952
- The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Text: 1960
- The Family Idiot*, Critique: 1982

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