

INTERSUBJECTIVITY

The concept 'Intersubjectivity' is one of the most crucial and subtle areas for the understanding of existentialist thought. It is true that for Kierkegaard the relation between man and man gets relegated to the secondary position. For the 20th Century existentialists, however, intersubjective relationship, though seen from diverse angles, remains an essential ingredient of human existence. Obviously, a distinction must be made between Heidegger and Sartre on the one hand and such thinkers as Buber, Marcel and Camus on the other. While for the former the intersubjective tends to remain only a dimension of the self, the latter see it as central to human existence.

Heidegger's concept of intersubjective relationship remains the vague 'we' of the *Mitsein* - a being with others which expresses itself in solicitude and not in the Sartrean conflict between one person and another. No doubt, for Heidegger, *Dasein* and not *Mitsein* is the most basic concept. But, even Sartre's stress on conflict and particularity enables him to go no farther than the 'I-It' or the subject-object relationship. Karl Jaspers, Merleau Ponty as well as Camus, Buber and Marcel go beyond mere man-thing connection to inter-subjective communication where the 'other' really exists in the radical 'I-Thou' (*Je et toi*) context. The distinction is significant both morally and epistemologically.

Despite Heidegger's emphasis on *Dasein ist Mitsein*, his definition of existence as 'toward death' effectively denies any ontological status to intersubjectivity. For him, 'death' is one's 'ownmost, not-to-be-outstripped, non-relational possibility.' "With death", he says, "Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality for being. . . This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein's Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer-being-able-to-be-there. If Dasein stands before itself as this possibility, it has fully assigned to its ownmost

potentiality-for-being. When it stands before itself in this way, all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone. This ownmost non-relational possibility is at the same time the uttermost one." (Being and Time, p.294).

Heidegger's peculiar stance that makes death the pinnacle of authentic existence leaves little scope for it to be considered as ultimately intersubjective. For him as for Kierkegaard, there is little difference between the relation to the 'crowd' and the direct interpersonal relationship which deepens rather than endangers one's existence as a 'single one.' They see relation to others either as a secondary product of one's lonely relation to God (as in Kierkegaard) or as one's own anticipated death (as in Heidegger). Consequently, it is least possible for them to join hands with Buber in the recognition that I become a self with other selves and am confirmed in my uniqueness through being made present by others in dialogue.

It will be wrong to compare Buber's 'I-Thou' relationship with intersubjective relations in general. According to Buber, a man may have an 'I-Thou' relationship with nature, art, science as well as with other human beings. It includes a reality of 'overagainstness', separateness and an 'inner-worldly monastic solitude'. In the 'I-Thou' relationship the partners are neither two nor one. On the other hand, they stand in an interaction in which each becomes more deeply himself as he responds more fully to the other. This includes both life and death. He writes: "A great relation exists only between real persons. It can be strong as death, because it is stronger than solitude, because it breaches the barriers of a lofty solitude, subdues its strict law, and throws a bridge from self-being across the abyss of dread of the Universe". (Between Man and Man, p.175).

Sartre appears even less enthusiastic about genuine intersubjective relationship. For him, I know the other as a subject only when his presence affects me or when I become aware of the fact that he is trying to turn me into an object (just as I try to do to him). I do not actually know the 'other' directly but only as a part of my own consciousness. Even the fact that I am aware of the 'look' of the other does not in the least mean that I am aware of how the other really sees me. I see his eyes seeing me, but I do not see through his eyes. Thus, Sartre rules out, in advance, the possibility of 'each to each', direct knowledge of the other as a 'Thou'. He is

never fully in a position to divest himself from Cartesian mind-body dualism and the Cogito remains for him the one certain starting point. Consequently, his concept of intersubjectivity fails to transcend the universe of isolated consciousness that divides one man off from the other.

Marcel, on the other hand, sees intersubjective relations in the context of human intimacy particularly in the family circle. For him, intersubjectivity is diametrically opposed to ego-centricity which he qualifies as the 'isolation of the self' and a sort of death. It is generally agreed that one cannot claim to nurture his personality alone or in social isolation. Marcel elevates this common-place to the status of a metaphysical principle. He argues that the self is essentially hetro-centric and accordingly, self-knowledge can only begin in communion with others. He remarks: "I communicate effectively with myself only to the degree that I communicate with others." (Du Refus a L'invocation. p.150). It seems that subjectivity, for Marcel, is actually intersubjectivity. In other words, self is constituted by its relation with others - the presence of the self is simultaneously the co-presence of the 'Thou.'

Jaspers has viewed existential communication from various angles stressing upon dynamic and dialectical nature of intersubjectivity. He visualises a process in which the participants become what they are as persons confront each other in their historical setting. Consequently, communication is designated as bringing of the self into being rather than the transmission of something already in existence. For Jaspers, therefore, there can be no self outside the communicative situation - selfhood comes into being in the give and take of human contact.

According to Jaspers, the most extreme form of existential communication is philosophy. In philosophising, people constitute themselves as unique persons beyond their particular structures. Philosophic truth is a function of this communication. Such truth can take place only in a dialogue where two authentic selves seek to clarify their being. Jaspers thus points out that we are ultimately faced with the problem of discovering the concepts necessary for undertaking the most profound communication possible. This is so because beyond all the structures of art and science, there remain men with whom we can communicate. Thus Jaspers takes Marcel's position to its logical end by showing that intersubjectivity is not only

essential to human existence but central to it. This is in direct contrast to the views of Heidegger and Sartre who are able to draw only an amorphous picture of intersubjectivity.

It appears that each successive existential thinker has sought to sharpen the issue of intersubjectivity. It is in Buber that we find the issue in the sharpest focus. This is particularly so when he points to the 'between' as the real ontological ground of existence. The issue is further accentuated with his typological distinction between 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' and his keen understanding of the knowledge of dialogue as including not only direct contact and mutuality but also an experiencing of the other side.

Marcel and Jaspers, though coming quite close to Buber's stand point, however, fail to appreciate how essential experiencing the other side is for every type of relationship including love and friendship, education, psychotherapy and ethical action. In all these human activities the intersubjective knowledge of the others' uniqueness alone enables to meet and know him as a 'Thou'.

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