

**Jean-Paul Sartre on  
Other Minds**

*(Being and Nothingness, Part III)*

# 4 requirements for a theory of other minds

1. Do not try to offer a new “**proof**” of the existence of other minds; show that their existence is “as **sure** as **my own**”;
2. Show the **presence** of the other **in myself**;
3. The other that I discover in myself must **not** be **an object**, but he/she must **concern** me;
4. Discover the existence of the other as “not being me”

# Some quotations about Sartre's 2 first requirements

1. “The Other’s existence will always be subject to doubt, at least if one doubts the other only in words and abstractly”.  
“The structure of the Other is on principle such that no new experiment will ever be able to be conceived, that no new theory will come to validate or invalidate the hypothesis of its existence, that no instrument will come to reveal new facts inspiring me to affirm or reject this hypothesis. Therefore, if the Other is not immediately present to me, and if his existence is not as sure as my own, all conjecture concerning him is entirely lacking of meaning”.
2. “We must ask the For-itself to deliver to us the For-Others; we must ask absolute immanence to throw us into absolute transcendence. In my own innermost depths I must find not reasons for believing that the Other exists but the Other himself as not being me”

## Some quotations about Sartre's 2 last requirements

3. “What the cogito must reveal to us is not the Other-as-object. For a long time now it must have been obvious that an object is only *probable*. (...) Therefore, if he is for us, this can be neither as a constitutive factor of our knowledge of the world, nor as a constitutive factor of our knowledge of the self, but **as one who ‘interests’ our being**”
4. “The Other must appear to the *cogito* as *not being me*. This negation can be conceived in two ways: either it is a pure, external negation, and it will separate the Other from myself as one substance from another substance - and in this case, all apprehension of the Other is by definition impossible; or else **it will be an internal negation, which means a synthetic, active connection of the two terms, each one of which constitutes itself by denying that it is the other**”

# The Look

- “If I were to think of him as being only a puppet, I should apply to him the categories which I ordinarily use to group temporal-spatial ‘things’. That is, I should apprehend him as being ‘besides’ the benches, two yards and twenty inches from the lawn, as exercising a certain pressure on the ground, etc. (...) **Perceiving him as a man, on the other hand,** is not to apprehend an additive relation between the chair and him; **it is to register an organization without distance of the things of my universe around that privileged object.** (...) Instead of the two terms of the distance being indifferent, interchangeable, and in a reciprocal relation, **the distance is unfolded starting from the man whom I see** (...) Instead of a grouping toward me of the objects, there is now an orientation which flees from me”
- “The Other is first the permanent flight of things towards a goal which I apprehend as an object at a certain distance from me, but which escapes me inasmuch as it unfolds about itself its own distances (...) **Thus suddenly an object has appeared which has stolen the world from me**”

# Being seen

- “If the Other-as-object is defined in connection with the world as the object which sees what I see, then my fundamental connection with the Other-as-subject must be able to be referred back to my permanent possibility of being seen by the Other”.
- “My apprehension of the Other in the world as probably being a man refers to the permanent possibility that a subject who sees me may be substituted for the object seen by me. **‘Being-seen-by-the-other’ is the truth of ‘seeing-the-Other’**”
- “The original relation of myself to the Other is not only an absent truth aimed at across the concrete presence of an object in my universe, **it is also a concrete, daily relation which at each instant I experience. At each instant, the Other is looking at me.**”

# Seeing the Look

- “If I apprehend the look, I cease to perceive the eyes; they are there, they remain in the field of my perception as pure presentations, but I do not make any use of them (...) The Other’s look hides his eyes; he seems to go in front of them”
- “I see myself because somebody sees me (...) I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the other”
- “It is shame or pride which reveals to me the Other’s look and myself at the end of that look. It is the shame or pride which makes me **live**, not just **know** the situation of being looked at. Now, shame is shame of self; it is the recognition that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging”