Yixuan Huang

Explanation of three examples

The woman on a date which is an example provided by Sartre reflects bad faith through her behaviors. She ignores the obvious sexual implications of her date's compliments to her physical appearance but accepts them instead as words directed at her as a human consciousness. As the man takes her hand, she lets it rest indifferently in his, neither consenting nor resisting. Thus she delays the moment when she must choose either to acknowledge and reject his advances, or consent to them. She conveniently considers her hand only a thing in the world, and his compliments as unrelated to her body. Sartre mentions that only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth (p. 330). In that example, the woman knows very well the intentions which the man who is speaking to her cherishes regarding her, but she does not want to realize the urgency, and chooses to lie to herself (p. 332). Besides, Sartre supposes that bad faith is the attempt to flee from anguish, and we can do this in a way of seeing ourselves as a thing, and in the example, the woman does treat her as a thing. She does not think when the man takes her hand, it has some special meanings. She thinks that her hand is just a part of her physical body. The woman treats herself only an object with many parts.

The second example is a waiter in a café. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid (p. 336). His voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer. Finally, there he returns, trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his try with the recklessness of a tight rope walker(p. 336). All his behavior seems that he is playing a game. What is he playing? He is playing at being a waiter in a café! He can form reflective judgments or concepts concerning his condition. He knows well what a waiter in a café “means”, and he knows the rights which a waiter follows (p. 337). On the one hand, he really is a waiter; on the other hand, he is trying too hard to be a waiter. Conclusively, he is both a waiter and goes beyond being a waiter. He is trying to create for himself an essence, a definition, in order to avoid his freedom, and yet leading himself turns into being in itself, so he tries to be both being in itself and being for itself, and this is what Sartre describes that one way to attach to bad faith.

The example of the homosexual man is another example of bad faith. Sartre says that a homosexual frequently has an intolerable feeling of guilt, and his whole existence is determined in relation to this feeling (p.340). The man will readily foresee that he is in bad faith, because he recognizes his sexual inclination and refuses with all his strength to consider himself “a paederast” (p. 340). Sartre points out that here is assuredly a man in bad faith who borders on the comic since, acknowledging all the facts which are imputed to him, he refuses to draw from them the conclusion which they impose (p. 341). The homosexual recognizes his faults, but he struggles with all his strength against the crushing view that his mistakes constitute for him a destiny. It seems to him that he has escaped from each mistake as soon as he has posited it and recognized it, but that is in self-deception, which leads to inauthenticity (p. 341), so he is in bad faith.

I may disagree with Sartre’s assessment of their behavior, and I want to give my reason. Sartre emphasizes that we can do the bad faith in one of the two ways: by seeing ourselves as others, or by seeing ourselves as a thing. It seems that these conditions are too subjective, which means only a person himself or herself can know whether he or she is on bad faith or not. However, the person will always lie to himself or herself and deny the truth, so that that person will not admits that he or she is on bad faith. For example, what if the woman does not know the man’s obvious sexual implications? How can Sartre know that the woman “ignores” the implications instead of “unknows” it? I am not sure whether I provide a good question for Sartre’s bad faith, but this is what I feel confused when I read Sartre’s paper.