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'Them and I': the exclusion from a group

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to complete Dan Zahavi's proposal by shedding light on a dimension of the relationship between 'I', 'You', and 'We' that is neglected by his article: the relationship between 'Them and I'. After showing why this analysis is necessary, the article proposes to study how this relationship is established through the gaze, judgment, and exclusion from a group of persons. The article then shows that this process of exclusion does not lead to the creation of a collective but isolates the excluded person. Finally, it presents the necessary conditions to overcome this isolation by creating a group, which requires an understanding of the role of emotions and common intentions in action. To belong to a group requires to act together.

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Dan Zahavi's article offers a clarification of the phenomenological contributions regarding the relationship between the 'I', the 'You' and the 'We'. It shows how fruitful this philosophical method can be in illuminating contemporary debates on these relationships. In this commentary, I will put forward an aspect of the relationship that is not studied by Zahavi's article, to complete the very stimulating list of ontological questions he proposes (Zahavi 2024: 112). Indeed, it seems to me that an interesting paragraph is missing that could be added to the three he proposes: 'We and I', 'We and you', and 'Varieties of we'. It would be possible to add the paragraph, 'Them and I'.

This paragraph could be seen as a sub-category of the questions that deal with the relationship between 'We and you'. Zahavi considers personal identity in connection with collective identity, asking which is primary and which conditions the other. Certainly, these are fundamental questions for studying the collective dimension in first-person self-understanding. In his article, the author recalls Mead's idea (1934: 50) that '[s]elves are consequently not antecedent to the social process, but on the contrary a product of social interaction' (2024: 114). However, are the social relations that affect the self only those that concern group membership? Zahavi considers the 'we and you' perspective: the integration into a group is to exist due to the difference to another group whose members have different characteristics and act differently from the group to which one belongs.

Indeed, interpersonal relations can distinguish or even oppose two groups of people. However, this opposition seems to presuppose two conditions that I would

like to question. The first condition would be that for an individual to oppose themselves to a group is already to belong to another group. But this would neglect the fact that the individual can experience, in the first person, their difference from a group without perceiving that they also belong to another group.

The second condition is that the analysis seems to put the individual subject as the basis of the relation that unites them to other collectives, as if they were the author of the relation of difference. But is it not the group that exists first and thus is the identifier of the people who are not integrated into it?

I would like to propose an analysis which shows that the relation to oneself is constructed not only in a connection with a group to which one belongs, but also by one's exclusion from a group.

To develop this philosophical examination, I will rely mainly on one author: Jean-Paul Sartre. This author thinks about the relationship between an individual and groups to which the individual does not belong—or does not believe they belong.

Therefore, I must first ask how this exclusion from the group is experienced; whether it is real or only believed. What are the actions or words that lead to the exclusion of a person from a group? What happens to the individuation of a person when exclusion from a group occurs? If the individual is defined by others, and in a negative mode, to what extent can this negation be a source of alienation? Can the individual then construct a positive individuation that does not depend on their opposition to others? Can this individuation be achieved by the individual themselves or do they need to inscribe themselves in a group in order to oppose not the I to the You but the We to the You? To what extent is such an inclusion in the We possible? These questions will lead to an analysis that was not developed in Dan Zahavi's article.

It is these questions that this article intends to develop. This research, therefore, has implications for understanding experiences of racism, homophobia, or sexism, and the exclusionary processes that judge and isolate people.

1. The judgement of others and exclusion from the group: the 'I-object'

In this article, Zahavi (2024: 124) reminds us that Sartre (1943: 451) made the difference between the 'we-subject' and the 'we-object', but he does not broach what lies at the root of the difference. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre examines the relationship of one person to another based on the gaze that one directs at the other. This gaze objectifies the person being looked at, who then discovers a part of his or her being; what Sartre calls the 'for-others'. When Sartre develops these analyses, he must not only conduct a philosophical anthropology, but also understand the discrimination experienced by the people being looked at. Indeed, in *Anti-Semite and Jew* (Sartre 1946) and the texts he devoted to racialization, he showed that the gaze of others gives an objective meaning to the presence of a person in a situation (Malinge 2020; 2021). In the rest of his work, particularly in his biography of Jean Genet, Sartre further proposed to show how the young Genet is excluded from his community by the words, 'You are a thief' (Sartre 1952: 29). The gaze and the judgement of others are thus not only a means of objectifying an individual, but also a means of excluding them from a group. Sartre shows how Genet always felt that because he was not a legitimate child, he did not belong to his host family, his village, or any valued social group. Similarly, Fanon considers the case of a man who is excluded from the community of white

people, finds himself alone, and can only defend himself by first using the very words that discriminate him (Fanon 1952: 109).

As we can understand, differentiation does not come from the self but from others. It is they who exclude an individual. Fanon argues that it is from the judgment of white people that black people have to react, that they felt excluded by being infantilized and essentialized (Fanon 1952: 33). This approach could be compared to that of the scapegoat studied by René Girard (1982) in his mimetic anthropology: the group excludes a person who is innocent and who could be a member of the group. This exclusion is a moment of unification of the group against the victim who is driven out. The group does not have to question the elements that are common to the members; it finds its unity by negating a certain otherness. This phenomenon can be found in racial, sexist, or homophobic discrimination: a single characteristic of a person is used by a group to exclude them, even though the group is made up of people with many differences between them. Even if these discriminations are different, they have this common point, formally. For example, a group of white people might exclude a black person by referring to them by their skin colour, even though white people may have a variety of differences: their nationality, gender, or social class may be different, yet they will be united by their rejection of a third person rather than by what the members have in common. Obviously, this is deeply unfair: for instance, we can argue that there is no reason to exclude someone on these grounds or that there are surely common characteristics that could unite the rejected person and members of the group; for example, they may be of the same gender or have the same occupation. Zahavi (2024: 119) uses Stein's analysis to recall that empathy consists in a person being 'confronted with the presence of an experience that is not my own' (Stein 1917: 10–11). Yet, no empathy exists when the focus is on the characteristic that underlies the exclusion. It would be interesting to understand how this empathy might not be active in the rejection by the group. Would it be different if the excluded individual were in a personal relationship with only one member of the group and not with the entire group? We might think so, but then we would have to ask if that is possible and what the difference is in the individual's self-relationship between when they see themselves as belonging to a dominant group and when they see themselves for themselves, without any particular attention to their social belonging.

Consequently, this exclusion, based on a single characteristic, is particularly alienating for the person concerned in number of ways. (1) Whereas the person could be understood in the complexity of their existential characteristics, they are identified and reduced to a single characteristic. The rest of who they are or what they do is not important; they are designated by a single term: 'woman', 'black', 'homosexual', etc. This common name is not their first and proper name—no one thinks of their identity in these terms. It is a label that neutralises the uniqueness of each person and disrupts the relationship to oneself. (2) The temporality of their existence is disrupted. If we consider the human being as a 'for-itself' who is not what she or he is but who is always in a perspective of having to be, their existence is dynamic and each of their actions and each of their behaviours can certainly be part of an original project; however, the project is not the cause. The person is therefore free, and their existence precedes their essence (Sartre 1946: 26). The exclusion leads to think the link between one's personality and their actions as a causal and determining link. What they do is considered as the consequence of what they were and they are, and not as their own projection in the future. (3) If the individual is now designated by a fixed property, has that individual's freedom

disappeared? It seems that a destiny weighs on the individual and we must then ask ourselves how the person will react to this.

2. Feeling unconnected with other excluded people

Unfortunately, the exclusion movement does not only concern one person. It is not just a scapegoat as Girard analyses. However, does the very fact of being excluded from group A contribute to the feeling of belonging to group B? This question is not quite the same as the 'we-object' question in Zahavi's article in that it asks whether, even before any idea of a 'we-object', the excluded person can feel any sense of belonging to another group. Indeed, if the person is excluded because of a certain characteristic, it means that in the given context this characteristic is devalued. It is therefore not obvious that the excluded person has the desire to claim this characteristic. Although the history of the feminist, black, and gay movements shows that discriminated people have returned the stigma, this claim is only possible if it is first collective. It is in the union of a new group that people can claim pride in having this or that characteristic. However, as an individual, and before any inclusion in another group, the person may not be proud of the element that has been rejected by others. In the case of women, Beauvoir (1949: 21) argues that this exclusion of women is not only a relationship that plays out between men on one side and women on the other, it also has effects on women's relationships with each other: they are not united and do not form a solidarity group which could therefore recognize itself and fight against the oppression suffered by its members.

Zahavi is right to recall, after Husserl (1923–24: 376), that 'Empathy is precisely not about me having the same experiential state, feeling, sensation, or embodied response as another', but to experience the emotion in a quite different way; not in a way 'you would experience the sadness if it were your own' (Zahavi 2024: 120). Therefore, it is not due to this intentionality that excluded people are able to form a group. They feel isolated, even though they experience the same situations. However, they cannot be united from the outside. They do not have intersubjective relationships with each other and cannot be said to understand their actions as a part of rituals or conventions shared by others, as analysed by Zahavi (2024: 124) after Walther (1923: 49–50). This situation was envisaged by Sartre (1960: 373) when he analysed a type of collective that he called 'series', whose members do not have intersubjective relations even though they experience similar situations. Therefore, they do not perceive their existence as integrated into a group. This type of 'we' is not, strictly speaking, a group; since its unity is not experienced by the members, it is abstract and external. Beauvoir shows how the situation of a young woman is experienced in the first person as an exclusion from the group of men, without feeling that she belongs to the group of women (Beauvoir 1949: 95). The fact that women are confined to indoor activity (housework, childcare) isolates them and prevents them from becoming aware of their unity of interests. They remain in a face-to-face relationship with the men who exclude them.

3. The excluded persons as a collective in the making

It seems difficult to understand how it is possible to get out of a situation in which people are excluded from a group. They find themselves isolated and stigmatised by others and without any allies, even though they are not the only people discriminated

against. The difficulty lies in the fact that to move from exclusion to the creation of a group, it is not enough to suffer the same discrimination. In my opinion, Sartre clearly shows, in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, that two conditions must exist: the first is to understand the needs of others, which is not obvious since there is no consultation. Although people can imagine that others share the same situation, they do not share their existence (Malinge 2022: 159). Therefore, people need to be united by a second condition in addition to the first: the development of common objectives. For this to happen, an external event is needed which, by putting people in danger (Sartre 1952: 502), unites them in order to overcome this danger by projecting a common future. It is, therefore, not enough to live the same event of exclusion as an objective element. One must also live a subjective element: the common actions that they do. Examples could be found in social movements for LGBTQIA + rights, and in feminist movements or anti-racist movements. These examples would show that the suffering of discrimination cannot be overcome by the individual alone—unless she is a true hero—and that for a whole period, she lives alone against the others: them and I. This is reflected in various autobiographical accounts or essays such as those by Annie Ernaux (1997; 2016) or Didier Eribon (2009), who recount the social or sexual shame experienced in the isolation of their difference; of their exclusion. Their integration into a ‘We’ is only possible on condition that they change or find other people with whom they share common intentions. Finally, it would be interesting to carry out an analysis of the emotions that can be shared—such as shame or anger—in order to understand the transition from ‘them and I’ to ‘them and we’. It is not empathy that creates the unity of a new group, but shared emotions and shared actions.

In his article, Zahavi (2024) explores the relationship between ‘We and you’ and shows how the personal identity is connected with the collective identity. Belonging to a group is a fundamental element in a person’s identity. However, before considering oneself as a member of a group, one person can identify themselves as excluded from another group. Before a relation between ‘We and you’, there is a relation of exclusion between ‘Them and I’ that is difficult to overcome. Indeed, the exclusion from a group has negative effects on the way a person thinks about themselves, their existence, and their freedom. Moreover, even if they know they are not the only person excluded, they do not feel connected with other excluded people. It is only through collective actions, that the excluded people can form a new group. The solidarity between excluded people is not given, it is a construction thanks to collective actions. Thanks to these actions, they become aware that they are not alone, that they are not only in a relation between ‘Them and I’ but that they can live a ‘We and you’ relation.

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