



The Challenge of Freedom Between the Determinists and the Existentialists

Eze Mabel Nkechinyere

Lagos State University of Education

Corresponding Author: Eze Mabel Nkechinyere Oteh_c@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT

Freedom ordinarily suggests a condition of total release from bondage or any form of restriction. Freedom, which was influential among the existentialist philosophers especially Jean-Paul Sartre, denotes the capacity to act without interference or limitation, liberty of action, or the attribute of not being subject to the dictates of fate or necessity, as well as the strength of self-determination, preparedness, or willingness. The freedom crisis is what is facing our age today. This work is an attempt to expose Sartre's notion of human freedom as well as a critical demonstration of the fact that man is free but not absolutely free, as virtually all his actions are being determined by some factors beyond his control as affirmed by Jean Jacques Rousseau, that " man is born free, but everywhere in chains". However, this appears to deviate from Sartre's assertion that complete human freedom is a fundamental aspect of human life and the structure of man's being. Sartre contends that human freedom is unbounded and unaffected by anything else because of this. Nevertheless, after rigorously analyzing the concepts of freedom, the self as the object of freedom, the real self, and the genuine existence of man. I would argue that although man is truly free, his freedom is in some circumstances, circumscribed. His actions can be influenced by other factors beyond his immediate control, such as civil authority, economic and environmental factors. Man is generally believed to be ontologically a free being, though not absolutely free beyond certain basic and obvious influences in the world. In order to have a clearer understanding of the subject matter of this research work, the approach to it shall be largely analytical, critical and evaluative

INTRODUCTION

Human freedom has been questioned by the majority of philosophers and scientists. As a result, a number of discussions regarding human freedom have surfaced recently. The existentialist thinkers, whose theory is commonly referred to as existentialism, are among those who have given the freedom question the most thought. Although many philosophers are frequently credited with existentialism, Jean Paul Sartre was the first to use the term. The depth of the debate over human freedom can be seen by closely examining the opinions of some philosophers; some maintain that man is born without his consent, while others believe that he is the author and finisher of his existence. The basic question remains; Amidst all the ups and downs of human life, is it possible for man to truly achieve freedom?

Because of this, the question of freedom has continued to be a central concern in modern philosophy, particularly in existentialist philosophy. In a sense, the motivation for this research was an attempt to balance the degree of man's freedom with his responsibilities. Jean Paul Sartre's ideas serve as inspiration for the piece due to the distinctive manner in which he presented freedom and responsibility.

According to him, Sartre encapsulates this fundamental idea of man when he correctly states that freedom is a fundamental characteristic of man that establishes his identity as such. Since nothing restricts his freedom, this gives him an endless array of options to achieve his goals and transcend his limitations. Given Sartre's aforementioned assertions, it is clear that he made an invalid claim regarding total freedom. Therefore, the remainder of this paper will be devoted to a critical study of this assertion.

There has been this sharp contrast between the determinists and the existentialists on whether existence precedes essence or vice versa. We notice the reoccurrence of the question as to whether man is free or determined in his choices and in his actions. This question would not arise had man not possessed consciousness, nay reason. We also have will by which we can decide whether or not to perform an act. On the other hand, we also discover that there are certain factors that influence the will or affect the intellect and therefore determine the being of man. Hence, we find some instances where we did not choose our actions, wherein certain factors over which we have little or no control constituted hindrances to our freedom. So man is in a dilemma trying to understand himself in relation to the action that proceed from him. Man is praised or blamed for his actions depending on whether it is morally acceptable or not. he is proud or regretful of his actions. But then certain questions arise: Is man really free or determined? Can man be free and determined at the same time? Is man's action free in certain instances and determined in others: is man, therefore, responsible for his actions that proceed from him? It is only when satisfactory answers to these questions are provided that we can be clear on the extent of man's freedom and responsibility for his actions.

LITERATURE RIVIEW

Jean Paul Sartre's Concept of Human Freedom Biological Note on Jean Paul Sartre

Jean Paul Sartre was born in the year Paris, 1905. Young Jean Paul Sartre and his mother moved live with her parents when his father passed away when he was fifteen months old. Sartre taught philosophy at many lyces (advanced high schools) after completing his studies at the esteemed Ecole Normale Superiure. He was a research student in Germany during the 1933–1934 school year, when he studied Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology.

His debut work, *Nausea*, was released in 1938. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay of Phenomenological Ontology*, Sartre's seminal work in philosophy, was published in 1943. Later in life, Sartre's focus shifted to social and political theory, and he made an effort to reconcile Marxism and Existentialism. Throughout his life, he had extremely poor health, which gradually deteriorated in his later years. Jean Paul Sartre passed away from severe heart failure on April 15, 1980.

Sartre's Notion of Freedom

According to Sartre, being free means having the ability to choose, but not having the ability to choose not to choose. A free creature cannot escape making a decision because, although man has the freedom to choose not to pick what he wants, refusing to choose is already a decision. Refusing to make a choice is really one method to refuse to make a decision that has already been made.

Sartre continues, "Man is not free not to be free," after realizing the existence of human freedom. He cannot escape his freedom as he is "condemned to be free," and his actions are an exercise of that freedom. However, a number of physical, psychological, social, and environmental conditions frequently make it difficult for man to exercise his freedom. Some of these conditions (such as mental illness, physical aggression, or violence) make it absolutely impossible to exercise one's freedom, which eliminates moral responsibility. Other things, like habit, anger, fear, or any other strong emotion, mental illness, intoxication, etc., also make it difficult, but not impossible, to exercise one's freedom. As a result, moral responsibility is diminished, but not entirely eliminated.

METHODOLOGY

As a philosophical research work, my primary source of information is through library research. However, relevant materials are also sourced from the internet. The work is basically expository and critical.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A Critique of Sartre's Concept of Freedom

So far, we have exposed Sartre's idea of freedom. In this chapter we shall critically evaluate Sartre's concept of human freedom and show some relevant phenomenological implications as it concerns human freedom. These criticisms will expose Sartre's libertarianism which gave no room for any element of determinism and consideration for the influence of societal and environmental factors on human beings in their actions. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge his

existential revolution and contribution that geared towards promoting authentic human existence which has been ignored because of the exaggerated threat of determinism and other existential facticities.

Sartre maintains that every human action is consciously chosen and man is fully responsible for it giving rise to different criticism from different thinkers. However, it should be mentioned that Sartre has been misunderstood and misinterpreted by popular accounts that over simplified his conception of freedom. Hence, it is necessary to defend Sartre from those baseless critiques that aim to disparage his ideas and are based only on misunderstanding and intelligence. This however does not mean that Sartre's theory of freedom is free from flaws and that there are no sustainable criticisms against his thought.

My evaluation will take two dimensions; the objective evaluation which consists of criticisms of some scholars in view of Sartre's notion of human freedom; and my personal evaluation. Sartre was criticized based on the fact that his theory of freedom treats freedom as limitless. When freedom is clearly limited, it is mistakenly believed to be limitless. It is obvious that man responded to the required limited range of possibilities by exercising his freedom. Sartre rejects this criticism by stating that unrestricted freedom does not imply that man has an infinite number of choices. Instead, man has unrestricted freedom in that they are always able to make their own decisions in any given circumstance. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sartre's contemporary, is most known for his critiques of Sartre in his book *Phenomenology of Perception*, which was primarily written as a reaction to *Being and Nothingness*. According to Sartre, "each individual agent is endowed with unlimited freedom" (Gary Cox, 2006, 67). That man is unboundedly free, is that man is free limitlessly. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty opines that freedom is limited. According to him, human freedom is a situated freedom. Freedom is absolute and unaffected by situation as held by Sartre makes freedom impossible. For Ponty freedom is defined as "A state of mind where one may choose one's own course of action and commitments within a given circumstance or range of options. There is always freedom within a certain range of possibilities. There is always freedom in a circumstance...." (www.angeifire.com/.../merleauponty.html).

For him, freedom is not absolute. There exist limiting situations for the existence of freedom. Freedom implies that one has to choose from a limiting situation or from the field of possibilities open for him. Man does not have unlimited options to choose from, but chooses from the limited options available to him by the situation in which he is living. Human beings are inextricably linked to the world, society, and past. As a result, Sartre's idea of unrestricted freedom is attacked since it holds that freedom is limited and that each individual uses it in response to a required, finite set of possibilities.

Merleau-Ponty also criticized Sartre for his failure to recognize the significance of history for the evolution of consciousness. A number of fundamental existentialist ideas are partially misrepresented as a result of this grave mistake. Because "in particular, freedom is reduced to an individual project," he criticized Sartre (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, 67). The result of a deliberate choice made as if it were something known or anticipated is what is referred to

as the future. Stressing his assertion that not all circumstances, particularly happiness on a collective level, are the result of free, conscious decision, he thus gave an example with social revolution – he argues that this phenomenon must be interpreted philosophically as a shift in awareness of class. According to Ponty, only intellectuals decide to become revolutionaries, but their revolutionary intellectual endeavors do not automatically result in a shift in class consciousness. The vast majority of common people involved in a revolution battle do not choose to become revolutionaries, in contrast to the revolutionary thinker. According to Ponty, to claim that common people choose to know revolutionaries is to assume that they have a certain type of class consciousness – for instance, a working class consciousness – before a revolution, whereas in reality, this is only possible via their shared existential purpose. (Ponty-Merleau, 2002, 447).

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In a nutshell, Ordinary people were unable to represent the situation objectively or make decisions about it prior to the revolutionary event. Instead, they evolved naturally to the point where their actions are only considered free when they are examined after they have been completed. Merleau-Ponty represents Sartre's idea of unbounded freedom in his account of the Marxist evolution of class consciousness.

if future is a representation, what it implies is that choice cannot be determined by clearly chosen ends. Thus, it becomes impossible to logically This manner, decision and action are kept apart. A person might, for instance, consider investing his money in a business, making all the required plans and research on the enterprise, and then going one step further by setting aside some funds for it. Normally, one may say that this individual has made the decision to enter this industry as though this decision had already been made in some way before he took this action. In actuality, though, he has not made the investment even though he has done the necessary research and budget. Therefore, in reality, even a decision must be based on action since the individual who first considered launching a business ultimately decided against it; Build a house with his money. This man actually decided to build a house rather than make an investment because the building was the choice which drew its life from his action.

Ponty may have implied that Sartre thought there were times when action and choice could be kept apart when he said that Sartre reduced freedom to an intellectual endeavor. Naturally, Sartre does not think that action and choice are

interchangeable since, according to his philosophy, only action can give a decision actuality and significance. Sartre contends that the main reason people behave is to make up for a perceived deficiency. It is possible to perceive the lack without having a clear idea of how it will be overcome. It is adequate for the project if the action that, in the most nebulous terms, aims to achieve the desired outcome. A person's freedom is restricted when he is condemned to perceive every circumstance as depriving him of what is now valuable to him, which he must decide whether to pursue or to deny himself. Sartre rejects the idea that a person is free only when he is able to reason about what he is doing, plans to do, and has done.

Merleau-Ponty also criticized Sartre based on the fact that Sartre posited One that is free without necessarily being free. Sartre maintains that there is no distinction between acting and not acting in a state of freedom. "Not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose," as he stated in *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 1966, 481). However, Ponty contends that a creature that chooses not to make a decision would not be free as it would not recognize its own freedom. He puts it more succinctly in his writing: "A being must choose something in which (it sees) at least for a moment, a symbol of itself, in order to be free." According to Merleau-Ponty (2002), 437, the fundamental concept of freedom requires that our choices be made with an eye toward the future.

Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty argues that Sartre made an assertion based on some assumptions. He disagrees with Sartre's suggestion that choice and accountability are more important. Therefore, Merleau-Ponty argues with Sartre that individuals are always accountable for their actions and judgments. He disagrees with Sartre because, contrary to what Sartre implies, not all appraisal is only a question of abstract personal preference. Ponty asserts that there is a natural self that is founded on the body's inherent limitations and its fundamental physical connection to the outside world. This inherent self restricts freedom by making some assessments impossible.

Ponty is justified Sartre argues that the idea of a natural self is absent from his theory of freedom. Freedom was reduced by Sartre to an intellectual endeavor. The existence of fundamental, non-intellectual, unavoidable interpretations that pre-structure human interaction is not mentioned by Sartre. One of the main problems with his concept is that, in the absence of a self, nothing stops all of a person's judgments from being wholly arbitrary since they are disconnected from reality.

Another Sartre's remarks about the nature of freedom serve as the foundation for critique of his theory of freedom. "Freedom is not just the faculty of the human soul" (Sartre, 1966, 25) or any attribute that humans possess, according to Sartre. According to him, freedom is a feature of human nature. Man is freedom; he does not have freedom as a quality. However, Battista Mondin disagreed with this notion. It is his belief that freedom is only a property of man and not his identity. On this he opines:

Freedom is a fundamental feature of man, along with other essential traits like living, thinking, and working, but it does not connect with his existence. Consequently, the same restrictions that apply to life, thought, speech, and labor

also apply to freedom since freedom is conditioned by these others (Mondin, 1985, 120).

Thus, Mondin criticized Sartre's definition of freedom as a faculty. Man, according to Mondin, possesses freedom as a property that exists alongside with other properties which human beings are endowed with. Since the others are subject to limitations, human freedom cannot be an exception.

Sartre's absolute freedom has no meaningful significance in the socio-political aspect of human reality. This is because man by his very nature is an political being in relation, since no human being can exist without the other. In other words, every human being must exist within a group of a political setup, having their political norms for the benefits of organization and accountability. This very fact is so because man as a rational being equally desires orderliness. Hence, It is evident that a politically civil society can never be achieved under Sartre's theory of ultimate freedom since, in his view, man is completely free to establish his own ideals without any basis in reason. This suggests that a person is always free to choose in any situation as long as he believes it would benefit him. Naturally, if this is accepted, the only possible outcome is the state of nature as Thomas Hobbes characterized it.

Furthermore, on a personal evaluation, Sartre's notion of freedom can be described as vanguard of the state of nature which is against political freedom. One of the aims of this political freedom is reconciling the value of freedom with the necessary restrictions or limitations. Omoregbe in quoting Jean-Jacques Rousseau said; "man is born free and he is everywhere in chains. One man thinks himself the master of others and still remains a greater slave than they" (Omoregbe, 1991, vol. 2, 5). This is because where one's freedom ends, another person's freedom begins. And if freedom were to have no limitations, human existence will end up in survival of the fittest since freedom allows man to exist and act even to the detriment of the other.

Political freedom therefore, provides a more realistic approach and picture to the true nature of human freedom. It also empowers one not only to enjoy his freedom within the circle permitted by law and order for a peaceful organized relational existence and also be conscious of infringing on other people's freedom and rights.

More still, if Sartre's theory of freedom were to be situated in human relationship, it will virtually lead to a chaotic and disordered society. If human beings were to live in isolation and each person within his own "world of freedom", everybody then becomes "super-human". This is because relating, mingling and socializing making consideration of the other in order to ensure a stable co-existence. Again, there are so many aspects of human existential nature which absolute freedom cannot claim. For instance, no one is free to choose his mother, place of birth, or culture to be born into. Hence, since no one can choose any of these factors not minding our absolute natures, it therefore implies that human freedom in this sense cannot be absolute.

Again some individuals for instance, have the cause to regret as they found themselves in a family or a particular cultural background. Yet they do not know anything about it since they did not choose it themselves. Regrets

however, in human existence regardless of human freedom. Sartre therefore failed to take recognition of the fact that some existential realities and situations can only be endured and managed.

More so, Sartre's notion of man is anthropocentric, that is the center of everything as he is the center of himself. This suggests a naturalistic view of freedom and of man. Since this idea is untrue, it deserves to be called "inhuman humanism" and, at its worst, the tragedy of humanity.

Also, Sartre proposed a world of founded situations in which instruction is insurmountable, and declares that existence precedes essence. This proposition expressed two different meanings, such that there is not essence of man, no common nature. If this were to be true, then man cannot be said to be free and there would be no distinction between human relation and that of dogs.

Human beings have two vocations, namely natural and spiritual. Sartre, being so agnostic in his philosophy, considered only the temporal and natural vocation and discusses reality only from its material point of view.

Sartre in his philosophical enterprise is frequently interpreted as holding an inflated conception of human freedom, presumably due to the assertions made in the Existentialism and Humanism lecture that "we are free, we are freedom, we are condemned to be free" (Sartre, 2002, 177). It appears that the only sense in which we are not free is that we are not free. Thus, this confirms Sartre's view that freedom is fundamental to human existence in the sense that it is not just a human attribute but rather the essence of who we are. Man's freedom is doomed and he cannot be free. Hence, any attempt to deny or escape from freedom is a leap into bad and inauthentic existence.

Furthermore Sartre's idea of universal responsibility seems contradictory to me; he holds each person accountable for his acts not only to himself but also to the whole human race as he represents all of mankind. If this is true, then man is undoubtedly set on acting in a particular way.

Given this, is man not constrained to behaving in accordance with what mankind expects or wants of him? We can interpret accountability as a component of responsibility. Being accountable to me assumes that I have some control over you and that you have broken my rules, in which case I must react appropriately. For man to be accountable to humanity since his actions reflect humanity, and he must then be given commands by humanity. In the same manner, when I behave in accordance with human values, I am accountable to myself. Therefore, either man is not accountable or his freedom is constrained by the needs of all of mankind to humanity.

Furthermore, it is very clear that Sartre's absolute freedom is only theoretical in nature, thus it has no pragmatic significance and reality in human society since he maintained that every individual has absolute freedom to the point of creating his own values and norms. The existential concept of freedom is always understood as meaning that anything is possible, and where values are inconsequential to choice and actions. This interpretation is often related to the insistence on the meaninglessness of the world and the assumption that there exist no relevant or absolute values, especially with regard to good or evil. However, that there are no values in Sartre's world of freedom" does not mean

that there are no values. For we are usually brought up with certain values though sometimes we cannot justify them, but critically looking at them, one will see that they are there to maintain peace and harmony in our society. These values in some ways influence our life.

Nevertheless, Sartre's denial of God's existence becomes another aspect of the superfluity of freedom. One obvious fact just as St. Augustine earlier pointed out is that God created man and endowed him with freedom and God does not interfere with the freedom of man. This is what makes us responsible for the action we take in life.

Finally, Sartre could have still been able to prove man's "unlimited free will" without first of all denouncing the existence of God. As has been shown, Sartre was led into denying the existence of God because he felt affirming that God existed would imply that man has essence which he received from God. In this way, Sartre sees no distinction between the creation of, say, a knife and the improbable creation of man. We hear Sartre say that man has no essence because there is no God to have a conception of it. Thus, he would not want to land himself into a compromise, so he thought. But on the other hand, one can still affirm the existence of both God and human free will. One can still see God as having created and foreknown man on the one hand, and as having given man free will to be able to make free choice on the other hand, I do not see any contradiction in this. The fact that man was created by God does not necessarily strip man of responsibility for his actions because he still possesses free will. This sort of position was held by Augustine as well. Thus, Sartre's denial of the existence of God simply because he felt the existence of God was a threat to man's freedom is uncalled for. Both views - existence of God and man's free will - are compatible.

However despite the criticism of Sartre's concept of freedom, it cannot be totally rejected and thrown away. There are still some aspects of his thesis that are worth holding and appreciated.

Everything human is discussed by Sartre from the point of view of opposites. God and the world, freedom and slavery, employer and labourer, love and hate. In his philosophy he tried to elevate man, the contemporary man, the self, the ego, the cogito above every other thing. Man is depicted as a being endowed with high intelligence. Molder and maker of himself, with right to sculpt himself into whatever shape he chooses. Therefore, Sartre projected man's dignity and his subjectivity at the same time. This serves as a counter to the philosophies which treat man as an object.

More so Sartre's philosophy alters how historical events and beliefs are interpreted and aids in the finding of new information. It also demonstrates that man is able to invent new meanings while also revealing the key to self-actualization, which starts with self-acceptance and self-awareness. Thus, man is delivered from the dogmatic rigidity that restricted his freedom. According to Sartre, sincerity would prevent one from repenting since, as a sinner, he is a sinner, just as a table is a table, and ill faith renders one a lifelong liar to himself. He is therefore unchangeable and untransformable.

What began in *Surprisingly*, Sartre's understanding of moral subjectivism evolved into an ethics of rigorous accountability predicated on personal accountability. We are what we make of ourselves, according to Sartre's thesis, and we can only hold ourselves accountable for who we are. Sartre aims to implement the strict implications of atheism, even though his moral language occasionally sounds a lot like conventional moral discourse. He agrees with Nietzsche's assertion that "God is dead." Sartre's assertion that there is nothing more than the existing individual implies the absence of God, an objective set of moral principles, an innate essence, and – above all – determinism. According to Sartre, a person is freedom; an individual is free.

Having seen the meaning of freedom and what it entails to be free, in *We* understand that, for Sartre and a few other philosophers, the self is a consciousness that creates nothingness; rather, it is a structured entity that manifests itself in temporality. Furthermore, because Sartre asserts in the "Existentialism and Humanism" lecture that there is no determinism and that "we are free, we are freedom, we are condemned to be free," he is sometimes misinterpreted as having an overblown perspective of human freedom (Sartre: 2001, 177). It appears that the only sense in which we are free is that we are not free. Thus, this establishes Sartre's belief that freedom is a basic aspect of human life in the feeling that it is a part of who we are as humans, not just one of our properties any attempt to deny or escape from freedom is a leap into bad faith inauthentic existence.

Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that Sartre's philosophy is one of action, hope, courage, and optimism despite the previously stated flaws in his thesis. It could teach us that we are more than just numbers in the grand scheme of things and that every man has a lot of potential to share his thoughts and ideals with others. Man will undoubtedly feel more important as a result of this revelation, which will make him more aware of the depth of both himself and the community he is a part of. He also emphasizes in his philosophy that man must design his life as he sees fit. He therefore maintains that every guy has a future that he must fulfill by his deeds.

Therefore, it is crucial to conclude by agreeing with the existentialists' assertion that man is an open possibility, that he is always developing, and that he may become anything he desires, but not permanently since it can never become itself. In fact, its whole method of being is defined by this becoming process. It seems sense that Sartre gives this aware entity a nullifying ability that fills its void by consuming other creatures. Man is therefore a constant being. In other words, man is a being-for-itself.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The various criticisms leveled against Sartre's existentialism attest to the fact that every human being is more or less one-sided. We do not see it as an error but problem arises when a fashion selects a certain form of one-sidedness and dishes it out as a universal norm. man lives in meaning, in that which is valid, logical, aesthetical and religious. His subjectivity is impregnated with objectivity.

So, no matter the pain taken in forming a philosophy, we must not regard it as definite or final.

As a mediating approach between the two extremes of the determined world and unrestricted freedom. Thus, I am conclusively arguing that the world is relatively free and relatively influenced by certain determined factors which do not, however, deny the fact that man is free. If we deny that the world is not determined, then scientific knowledge will be practically impossible. Conversely, denying freedom in the world will lead to the sacrifice of our existential reality on the altar of determinism, religious fanaticism, and superstition. This will deprive man of his place in the universe as an authentic being whose life revolves around his ability to transcend his facticity and his perpetual becoming through his choice.

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