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## FREEDOM AND FACTICITY: BEING-IN-SITUATION

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**Abstract:** I offer a close treatment of Sartre's analysis of freedom in *Being and Nothingness*, which is ostensibly a tricky issue in it. I propose to reanalyse its concept of freedom, under a modified framework, that is, the concept of freedom might be understood as explaining the concept of for-itself in appropriative relation to facticity (facticité).

**Key Words:** Situation, Facticity, Nihilation

I offer a close treatment of Sartre's analysis of freedom in *Being and Nothingness*, which is ostensibly a tricky issue in it. I propose to reanalyse its concept of freedom, under a modified framework, that is, the concept of freedom might be understood as explaining the concept of for-itself in appropriative relation to facticity (facticité). Facticity is connection of for-itself with the in-itself, *i.e.*, with the place, the past, environment, fellowman, birth and death. Put differently, it is a relation with *given* or *things* which the for-itself nihilates. The for-itself (*pour-soi*) is in midst-of-the-world, it is a being-in-situation, it *is there* among things which *are there* simply, it is nothing but situation. I attempt to restructure moderately the concept of freedom principally in relation to human situation, which is an outcome of the fundamental project which the for-itself freely chooses. The upsurge of freedom cannot be separated from choice *i.e.*, from the person herself that surpasses things (in-itself) in light of chosen end and confers meaning on things, and situations in relation to the end. I show the interrelation between freedom and facticity of for-itself. It is because of facticity, that the for-itself is able to engage, exercise its choice, and by its very engagement toward the chosen end, it reveals its freedom. I explain the for-itself is free in situation *protanto*, and in spite of the situation *pro tanto* meaning to a certain extent, the for-itself is always *free*, in a certain sense, from a certain point of view. In the first section, Freedom and Facticity: The Situation, I suggest facticity opens opportunities and possibilities for for-itself, besides, the for-itself in terms of facticity gives *meaning* to a situation, in light of the *chosen end*. There is no meaning outside human reality and its projects. The for-itself is possibility, hence if

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we choose to give meaning to existence it may not appear gratuitous. If we choose to provide life with an object, life would not appear without an object. Whatever may be the situation *my situation* is to choose *in situation*. I choose myself in situation, e.g., dominant or submissive. My choice is to see the situation in particular light and in the light of my choice, I influence the situation. A situation could also be a motive for conceiving another state of affairs in which things would be better. The day I conceive a different state of affairs, the situation is apprehended as unbearable. Sartre affirms that when I form the project of altering the situation, that the situation will be conceived as unendurable. I must not consider a situation as merely the most *miserable* but I must consider it in relation to an ideal nothingness from which I am separated; in relation to my chosen end which is “a state *of* the world to be obtained, and not yet existing”(Sartre 1992, 614). The for-itself has to illuminate her present situation in light of an ideal state of affairs which e.g. is a *happiness* pure and possible, a present nothingness, and nihilate it in return by saying, “I am not happy”. Sartre considers that my freedom is projected ensemble of non-existents which is myself as transcendence, “it is Me in so far as I have to be myself outside of myself” (Sartre 1992, 564). The for-itself is a situation, that is, *in any situation, my situation* is to *make* a choice, *make* a decision. Penultimately, I would conclude.

## 1.FREEDOM AND FACTICITY: THE SITUATION

My class, birth, death, place, environment, my family, etc. are facts, but the fact that I cannot escape their lot, does not imply that I am not free, because for the for-itself to exist, is to choose its way of *being* in relation to these facts, in relation to its *being there*, in relation to the utility or adversity that surround me, that is, in relation to my being-in-the-world insofar as this being-in-the-world is a choice—nihilation of the factual givens. Sartre considers that my position is to give meaning to my being in the world which is a relation between existents which surround me and my facticity. This is the situation, and it is a “position apprehended by the For-itself which is in situation” (Sartre 1992, 701). The for-itself is conscious of these facts or facticity but facts cannot constitute me as *being* a worker or *being* a bourgeois. The for-itself apprehends itself as *being there for nothing*. It depends on me the way I apprehend my position;*i.e.*, my situation; with respect to the existents which surround me. It is a matter of choice, and “the choice which I am—is an apprehension of *this situation here*” (Sartre 1992, 706). The fact or factual given can be designated as *has been* and what *has been* is the essence; human reality seizes this essence in itself as *having been*. Human reality is separated from this essence by nothingness because freedom precedes essence. The project or goal is to change this given and the given appears as given in light of the end chosen. Choice implies to change the concrete given which in fact is nothing but

myself *in situation*. As I am separated from the brute given by nothing except by my freedom, the contingency of freedom, and the contingency of in-itself are manifested *in situation* by the inconstancy and adversity of environment. Whatever may be my *modes of being*, ‘All my “modes of being” manifest freedom equally since they are all ways of being my own nothingness’ (Sartre 1992, 574). Whatever the for-itself may be in the form of *having been*, the for-itself can realize a nihilating rupture with the world and with itself. The permanent possibility of this rupture is freedom according to Sartre. This nihilation is nothing but freedom. The for-itself exists as nihilation of the in-itself, and through this permanent possibility of nihilation which is precisely freedom; the for-itself is perpetually something other than what can be said of it; that is by free choice of end which the for-itself *is not*, the for-itself is its own nothingness. For Sartre, the chosen end; a project of the for-itself; is always a transcendence, and a way the for-itself chooses itself. Choice and consciousness are identical as there is nothing in consciousness which is not conscious of being. Consciousness is always conscious of its possibilities. Possibilities of consciousness exist only as consciousness of possibilities. “The possible is a structure of the *for-itself*” (Sartre 1992, 29).

The for-itself, Sartre asserts, is a *being* which implies that the for-itself makes itself by means of a possibility manifested as a value and which is associated with the *being* of the for-itself in the form of a project of a being which is *lacking*, because the for-itself is a *lack of being*. *Lack* and freedom are identical. The for-itself chooses because it is a lack of being, it is the concrete mode of being of the lack of being. Possibility, project of being and *being*, are one and the same thing for Sartre. Concrete projects are totality of my being which reveals my choice of myself as a totality in a particular *situation*. “The choice of the for-itself is always a choice of a concrete situation” (Sartre 1992, 762). The for-itself which is nothingness is nothing but freedom: possibility which exists for me. Recognition of a possibility as *my* possibility is anguish, that is, the *consciousness* of being my *own future* anguishes me. Sartre stresses, “I am full of anguish: the slightest gesture enrages me. I can’t imagine what is required of me. Yet I must choose: I sacrifice the passage Gillet, I shall never know what it held for me” (Sartre 1965, 83). Anguish is constituted when consciousness sees itself cut from the future by its very freedom. 1. “Consciousness is being, the nature of which is to be conscious of the nothingness of its being” (Sartre 1992, 86). It is “a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is” (Sartre 1992, 100). *Which is what it is not* suggests that the for-itself *becomes* that *what it is not* (future *possibilized*). The second part *which is not what it is* implies that the for-itself cannot be in the mode of being-in-itself, the way a glass is a glass or a table is a table; the for-itself *makes* it *be* as the changing of what *it is*. Elsewhere, to express consciousness, Sartre reverses the formulation: “It is a being which is not what it is and

which is what it is not” (Sartre 1992, 17). Thus, possibilities do remain when one possibility is exhausted. I am separated by the ideal by nothing. The ideal is ideal for me because I apprehend it as real, therefore there is the constant obligation to make myself what I am. The for-itself is consciousness of possibilities because it is not an absolute plenitude, it is not an entire positivity. The for-itself is nothingness, it *is not*, it is non-being which is “empty of being” (Sartre 1992, 48). Being-in-itself (*l'être-en-soi*) *is*. There is no non-being at its heart. It has no negation, “it is full positivity. It knows no otherness; it never posits itself as *other-than-another-being*. It can support no connection with the other. It is itself indefinitely and it exhausts itself in being” (Sartre 1992, 29). It is what it is. The density of this being is infinite. The in-itself (*en-soi*) exists in an “infinite compression with an infinite density” (Sartre 1992, 120), it is full of itself and no further “plenitude can be imagined” (Sartre 1992, 120); there is no emptiness in it, “not the tiniest crack through which nothingness might slip in” (Sartre 1992, 121). On the contrary, the for-itself or consciousness never coincides with itself in a full equivalence which is that of the in-itself. The for-itself is a decompression of being. “Of this table I can say only that it is purely and simply *this* table. But I can not limit myself to saying that my belief is belief; my belief is the consciousness (of) belief” (Sartre 1992, 121). Sartre notes that I cannot say my belief *is* belief because it cannot be immediately belief, in the sense an inkwell is an inkwell. I am not the belief, I am separated from the belief by *nothing*, as the object is separated from a subject. It is nothingness which haunts the for-itself and separates it from the *being-in-itself*. The empty distance which for-itself carries in its being is its nothingness. “The being of consciousness qua consciousness is to exist *at a distance from itself* as a presence to itself (Sartre 1992, 125). The *in-itself* is neither possible nor impossible, it is always *is*. But the “for-itself is the being which determines itself to exist inasmuch as it can not coincide with itself” (Sartre 1992, 125-26). The *givens* do not invalidate my freedom because the for-itself is made-to-be, freedom is the being of the for-itself, nevertheless, the for-itself is not its own foundation. If it was its own foundation then the for-itself could choose its being-free; it could decide not only its choice of an end but also its choice of itself as freedom. This would imply that the possibility of being-free and the possibility of not-being-free exist in a uniform manner before the free choice of freedom of the for-itself. But since the for-itself is not the foundation of its own freedom, the for-itself is “responsible for everything” (Sartre 1992, 710) except for her “very responsibility” (Sartre 1992, 710). The for-itself is free to choose, but it is not free to choose to be free.

A familiar refrain of Sartre is that, the for-itself is “condemned to be free” (Sartre 1992, 186) and to decide the existence of its being. Sartre insists that the co-efficient of adversity in world cannot be utilized as reason or evidence against freedom because there can be a free for-itself only as

engaged in a world that offers profound resistance. A particular crag is neutral and awaits to be illuminated by an end which the for-itself posits. Sartre holds that, if I choose to ascend upon the crag to look over the countryside; it manifests itself as helpful, but if I choose to dislodge it, the crag would reveal itself as offering stiff resistance. It is my choice which discloses the crag in one or the other way. The crag is revealed as adverse or helpful, difficult to scale or climbable according to the end chosen. The end is a certain objective state of the world to be achieved and not yet existing. It is transcendent. “And consciousness is aware of itself in so far as it is consciousness of a transcendent object” (Sartre 1957, 40). Choice of the end—which I choose to realize—is the intention, because consciousness is consciousness of something; that is, the constitutive structure of consciousness is transcendence and “consciousness is born *supported by* a being which is not itself” (Sartre 1992, 23). The end is not *given* but chosen by for-itself. “But consequently this end can be transcended only if it is separated from us at the same time that it is accessible” (Sartre 1992, 621). Realization of this end is possible when human reality *engages* in a resisting world. Freedom is meaningful only as engaged, committed, or involved in the free choice of the end. In the absence of adversity freedom loses all meaning as the for-itself would have no choice to *engage* herself in a resisting world. Sartre maintains, “Life has a meaning if you choose to give it one” (Sartre 1965, 162). Adversity does not endanger freedom rather it reveals freedom of the for-self. “In fact we are a freedom which chooses, but we do not choose to be free.... If, therefore, freedom is defined as the escape from the given, from fact, then there is a *fact* of escape from fact. This is the facticity of freedom” (Sartre 1992, 623). The fact that human reality is not being able not to be free is the facticity of human reality or freedom, and the fact that human reality is not free not to exist is contingency of for-itself. Thus the for-itself, as Sartre is ever reiterating, is not free to exist as not-free. This contingency of freedom is the *situation* which the for-itself discovers in the midst of the world. ‘The for-itself *is*, in so far as it appears in a condition which it has not chosen, as Pierre is a French bourgeois in 1942, as Schmitt *was* a Berlin worker in 1870; it *is* in so far as it is thrown into a world and abandoned in a “situation”; .... It *is* in so far as there is in it something of which it is not the foundation—its *presence to the world*’ (Sartre 1992, 127). Sartre also affirms: “the situation is the organized totality of the being-there, interpreted and lived in and through being-beyond. Therefore there is no privileged situation.....there is no situation in which the for-itself would be *more free* than in others” (Sartre 1992, 702). Sartre persuasively argues that if my situation is to scale the rock, the rock would appear scalable or not-scalable, but for a simple traveller the crag may appear either as aesthetic or grotesque. So, it is in the light of end chosen, that is, if the rock is integrated by freedom in a situation of which the general theme is climbing, then, the rock would appear as offering resistance. Thus the *given*, the

in-itself (crag), is manifested as recalcitrant or aid, in the light of the projecting freedom which illumines the in-itself. Hence, there is freedom only *in situation*, and there is *situation* only through *freedom*. “Situation *leaves me free* to pursue this or that end. One might say even that this situation conditions my freedom in this sense, that the situation is *there in order not to constrain me*” (Sartre 1992, 624-25). Resistances and obstacles receive meaning through free choice of human reality in relation to chosen ends. The for-itself apprehends itself as *being there for nothing* to choose the meaning of its situation.

In an esteemed work *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*, Jonathan Webber contends, “When Sartre claims that a human being ‘is not what it is’,...he is indeed claiming that we are not identical with our facticity” (Webber 2009, 47). Webber, suggests ambivalence in Sartre’s conceptualization of freedom. He argues that for Sartre not all human actions are free and at the same time all our actions are rooted in projects which are freely chosen and maintained. In Webber’s view Sartre’s freedom indicates a modification in the project of for-itself as simply indeterminate, and incidental. But, Sartre illustrates in example of the gambler that there is nothingness which separates the gambler from himself and gambling, and there is no role of *chance* in the decision of the gambler. “The not-gambling is only one of my possibilities, as the fact of gambling is another of them, neither more nor less” (Sartre 1992, 70). The very possibility of changing the project is the very condition of the possibility of maintaining it and the very meaning of the freedom of *pour-soi*. The gambler is *free to choose* in his situation; his present choice of not gambling or gambling does not depend on his past choices of gambling, he can *make* his decision *ex nihilo*. Sartre discusses another example. ‘*I have been* “wanting to write”, but *nothing*, not even what I have been, can compel me to write it. Finally, I must discover the nothingness which separates me from what I shall be: I discover that the permanent possibility of abandoning the book is the very condition of the possibility of writing it and the very meaning of my freedom’ (Sartre 1992, 75). Thus I *am*, by my own choice my *being*, and meaning comes from me and not from outside of me. The for-itself is a *choice*; there is no other meaning other than, what the for-itself chooses to give. It is an apprehension of a situation in whatever way the for-itself chooses to apprehend. In *Age of Reason*, Mathieu insists, “All I want is...to retain my freedom” (Sartre 1986, 107) and Jacques declares, “that freedom consisted in frankly confronting situations into which one had deliberately entered and accepting all one’s responsibility” (Sartre 1986, 107).

## Footnotes

1. Kate Kirkpatrick in her admirable work *Sartre on Sin: Between Being and Nothingness* explains Sartre's notion of nothingness in light of the Christian doctrine of original sin and evil. She writes, "nothingness is an alias of sin and evil" (9). But for Sartre being is and nothingness is not. The for-itself freedom and "must assume the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it" (Sartre 1992, 707-08). Or as when Orestes says that "There was nothing left in heaven, no right or wrong, nor anyone to give me orders" (Sartre 1989, 118); "I am my freedom" (Sartre 1989, 117). I acknowledge many contemporary readers have tackled Sartre's freedom and related concepts, of which a few are: Elizabeth Butterfield, Manon Garcia, Sonia Kruks, Kathryn Sophia Belle, Michael Monahan, Ronald Aronson, Katherine Morris, David Reisman, Peter Poellner, Christine Daigle, Christian Onof, Betty Cannon, Christina Howells, Diane Enns, Christina Landry, etc.

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