ANGUISH AND AUTHENTICITY

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Abstract

In this study I am revisiting the problem of anguish and authenticity as portrayed by Jean-Paul Sartre. My chief concern is to take a closer look at the ontological status of anguish and authenticity and present the issue in my own authentic philosophical tenor.

Key Words: Anguish, Authenticity, Choice

The notion of anguish and authenticity being connected with human existence is a very familiar territory with several prominent readers in the field. In this study I am revisiting the problem of anguish and authenticity as portrayed by Sartre. My chief concern is to take a closer look at the ontological status of anguish and authenticity and present the issue in my own authentic philosophical tenor with a bit more thorough examination.

In my view, Sartre holds anguish as a specific type of behavior. Sartre affirms that when I *behave* in this particular type of behavior I *am* that type of behavior that is I exist in that specific type of behavior or I exist as that specific type of behavior which implies that I am anguish. My anguish and me are not two different things. According to Sartre, anguish permeates my existence, because I am my own future. Various conducts or courses of action are available as *my* possibilities and nothing forces me to adopt a particular conduct over the other. Apprehension of this awareness anguishes me. Sartre points out that external object which exist separately from our existence can be hidden or we can hide ourselves from those objects which exist independently of us. But if *I am anguish* then my anguish does not exist independently of me. I become anguish or anguish becomes me, that is anguish is me and at that moment anguish and me are one and the same thing. So I cannot separate anguish from myself in order to hide anguish. Likewise I cannot separate myself from anguish in order to hide myself. Sartre further mentions that anguish cannot be hidden because in order to conceal anguish I have to think of it constantly so that I can conceal it. Thus, when I make myself sure to think of my anguish in order to not to think of it, ironically, I am only thinking of my anguish all the time. I intend to flee my anguish, but in order to flee it; I have

to carry within myself the thing which I wish to flee. I wish to hide my anguish but I cannot hide my anguish without knowing what I wish to hide. The more I wish to not to think of my anguish, in order to conceal it, the more I have to think of anguish in the mode of not to think of it. To not to be conscious of my anguish at all implies being conscious of it always in order to be never conscious of it. Thus, according to Sartre, anguish cannot be concealed. The attitude of fleeing anguish which *I am* is bad faith. When I hide that which *I am* it is bad faith. It is a sort of contradiction of the self by the self.

Sartre illustrates that just as anguish is lived similarly bad faith is lived. To feel anguish is not bad faith but to try to avoid, escape from or hide the reality of the feeling of anguish is bad faith. Therefore, bad faith is that specific type of behavior where I am running from its reality in order to escape from its reality.

Sartre relates the consciousness of anguish with the consciousness of freedom or simply let's say freedom. The disclosure of freedom causes anguish. The disclosure or awareness that I *exist* anguishes the person. Since man alone is free, since man alone *exists,* he alone is anguished, and he experiences anguish because he is free. Anything that is necessary, predetermined, and fixed, cannot be anguished. Anguish emerges in a person as he or she is constantly confronted with the perpetual obligation to make himself or herself, and this obligation to make oneself looms large before the person, precisely because the person is free. In *Existentialism and Humanism,* which in my view has received scant and superficial attention from reader, Sartre develops the notion of anguish by an illustration. He says that prior to the existence (production) of a paper knife or a book, the artisan has a conception of the book or paper knife in his mind. But once the paper knife is produced, the produced paper knife is the realization of that conception, definition, formulae, and qualities of the paper knife which dwelt in the artisan's mind. Sartre says that since most of the time we think of God as creator, as a supernal artisan, the conception of man in the mind of God can be compared to that of the conception of the paper knife in the mind of the artisan. Just as a produced paper knife is the realization of the idea of paper knife residing in the mind of the artisan, similarly, the existing individual is the realization of the conception and definition of man in the divine mind. Here, that is, in the example of paper knife, according to Sartre, production (essence) precedes existence. But if God does not exist, then there is, Sartre says, "at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man."[1] As there is no heavenly God to have an idea of man, there is no human nature, or essence of man. So man is, simply *is*. As man is *nothing,* that is, he has no pre-determined essence, thus he is nothing else except that which he makes of himself. In a classic phrase Sartre asserts, "everyman, without any support or help whatever, is condemned at every instant to invent man." [2] He adds further, "You are free, therefore choose—that is to say, invent. No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do: no signs are vouchsafed in this world." [3] Thus the profound responsibility of human   existence lies not on God but on man's shoulders by virtue of his ability to choose, which anguishes him. This anguish is not the anguish that leads to

quietism, inactivity, or unfreedom but rather "Far from being a screen which could separate us from action, it is a condition of action itself." [4]

Action implies that there are several possibilities which are open before man and these possibilities do not have any intrinsic value. It becomes difficult and perplexing for a person to choose. He is anguished because the possibilities are empty of any value-content. It is only in choosing one of the possibilities that the possibility chosen gets its value. The possibility has value only because it is chosen by man. Besides, once the choice is made, man has to also bear the responsibility and accountability for the choice and action. He cannot undo the effects of his decision and action. He cannot shrug off the consequences of the actions perpetrated by him as well as the responsibility of his decision. He or she is *totally* and *completely* responsible. This *anguishes* him or her and makes him or her shudder. He or she is free without interruption and intermission.

Human existence and authenticity

The undisguised fact that makes man shudder is that it is his own existence which carries the burden of freedom and action, "we must recognize that the indispensable and fundamental condition of all action is the freedom of the acting being."[5] Man faces anguish or he is anguished because he apprehends that since he is totally free, the responsibility of leading a meaningful, sincere, authentic life (good faith) or the blame of leading an insincere or meaningless life (bad faith) would fall on him and the decision to lead either life comes solely from himself. Thus the responsibility and accountability to lead a sincere life rests purely on man. There is no extraneous purport, rules, regulations, ethical formulae, codes, pattern, or model to accord meaning or significance to human existence or human life. There is no exterior or outer direction. What is, is that there is *being a*nd outside being is that there is *nothing*. This is the predicament, the human condition, and in this existential match of human predicament or human condition, man is without the referee and linesman. This entails that in the philosophy of the French doyen, meaning and significance of life cannot come from outer source or agency. The decision to lead a meaningful life or not, rest on the person or the individual alone because it is his or her own personal, individual, concrete life and it is his or her own personal, concrete, freedom which can determine his or her own life. The only meaningful and purposive source is the *for-itself* (*pour-soi).* External agency, institutions, system, etc. only acts as empty signboards.

Sartre maintains that it is only when I project myself that is when I am referred to myself as awaiting myself in the future, then, I discover myself as the one who gives meaning to the signboard which without being referred to myself is devoid of any sense. Signboards are vapid and vacuous and stand in need of being referred to human reality and by human reality in order to make some sense. As far as the signboards are concerned, that is their meaning is concerned, the meaning is derived only from an original projection of myself, besides, this original projection of myself by myself stands as a choice of myself in the world. Until and unless, I project myself that is my existence in relation to the signboard, the signboard remains without any meaning. The frivolous and inconsequent signboard would

be perpetually waiting to acquire meaning. So, meaning is derived only from an original projection of myself which stands as my choice of myself in the world. The for-itself has to first project itself or discover itself in the world of external agency, model, institutions, etc. This projection of for-itself in the world of in-itself is a matter of choice; an example would illustrate the point. Let's take the example of tobacco warning signboard, which declares that smoking is injurious to health. The tobacco warning displayed on the signboard has no meaning until and unless I project myself that is until and unless I project my existence in relation to the warning, that is, when I *engage* myself with the warning, *"Smoking is injurious to health,"* that the signboard acquires meaning. It is only when I discover, that *I am going to smoke*, that the tobacco warning signboard with the warning displayed becomes purposive or meaningful. It is my free acts which cause meaning to surface and it is through my *acts* that I can make sense of my existence because "there is no reality except in action."[6] No one can spur me to action or to act except my own personal, individual choice and freedom.

In the philosophy of Sartre, making sense of human existence is related with the idea of negation. Sartre is using the term negation in a positive sense. According to Sartre, negation also implies discrete absence of authentic existence in man's life. If my life is not authentic then my individual authentic existence is absent (negation) from the whole human existence. When an individual's authentic existence is absent from the whole human existence, it is negation. In fact, an individual's lack of authentic existence raises itself as *nothingness* on the background of the nothingness of human reality or existence. Lack of authenticity presupposes a relation between me and human reality or existence. Sometimes, some people may not relate with human reality because there is no real or great expectation to *live* an authentic life. This loss of expectation causes dissociation with human reality. Indeed, it is my aim or expectation to lead an authentic life which gives me the sight of absence of authenticity in my life or the sight of negation (lack) of authenticity. Thus, I have to perceive the presence of the absence of authenticity in my life in order to lead a purposive life. Further, when I expect, it implies that I am *not* what I am expecting at the moment when I expect, therefore I expect to accomplish my expectation that is my *not* . In other words, I expect to fulfil what I am not, and what I am not is my non-being. So, I expect to fulfil my non-being or that part of my being which I am *not.* Here, there is the consciousness of negation. The *not* according to Sartre is a self-discovery of the consciousness of the *not.* It means I comprehend my nothingness, when I feel, 'I am *not* authentic.' This is an existential fact and not a content of thought or speculation. Amidst the nothingness, rises the possibility of a conduct of authentic existence. "Consciousness is a being, the nature of which is to be conscious of the nothingness of its being."[7]

For Sartre it is the *lived* life which matters, and it is for the individual to make sense of his life by *living* it, and the value of life is nothing except the sense the individual chooses to give to life.   In freedom, there is commitment which implies that I should also acknowledge the liberty and freedom of others. My complete freedom comprises my free acceptance of the freedom of others and respect for the freedom of others. Those who deny this total

freedom Sartre calls them *cowards* and those who hide themselves from this total freedom Sartre labels them as *scums*, that is, a pack of riffraff. Authenticity is commitment to the freedom of others inasmuch as one is committed to one's own freedom. Above all, man makes himself only in relation to his commitments.

Choice, Action, and Bad-Faith

In *Existentialism and Humanism* when Sartre says, "When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men". [8] I think the interpretation of these lines has not been well construed by the readers. What Sartre means is that a person's choice occurs in an interpersonal world. He chooses only in relation to others, that is, in relation to other individuals. His choice is in relation to other choices made by others, as he is not the only person who is making choices; there are others as well; but this does not imply that his choice is determined by the choices of others. As the choice of an individual man affects not only himself (his life) but it also affects others (life of others), therefore one must choose responsibly. Man's choice affects other person also who are also free to make their choices, hence one exercise care and caution while exercising one's freedom so that one's choice may not affect adversely the life of others. One must choose and act responsibly so that one's choice may not become a cause of unhappiness for others. Since the effect of my choice at times may influence adversely the life of the other person, I must exercise careful forethought in handling my freedom. At times, to exercise caution while making choices so that others life is not affected adversely, leads to a trying situation or human condition which anguishes a person. Man while making a choice must keep in mind that there are other individuals too, in the world who are also as free as he is and who are also making choices. One's freedom should not hinder others' freedom. One's choice should not harm the life or choice of others. My choice is not purely my choice, in the sense, that I am not the only person in the world who is making choices. I am not choosing purely for myself in the sense that my choice is possible in an interpersonal world, therefore, I should be discreet and considerate while exercising my choice so that my choice should not hurt or harm the other person. This is the human predicament. My choice or freedom should not thwart another's freedom to choose. This way of making choices is *authenticity*. In 'choosing for himself, he also chooses for all men', implies that whenever man chooses between this or that he is also creating an image of man. When he chooses one thing over the other, he is affirming the value of that thing which is chosen. Whatever man chooses, he is setting a precedent, an example for other men to choose likewise in a similar situation. If an individual chooses a particular course of action in a particular situation, he must allow others too, to choose the same course of action in the similar situation. Man cannot affirm one action for himself and deny the same action for others in a similar situation. One cannot say, '*I have disobeyed but you should obey.*' This would be bad faith, a contradiction of self by self. So there is a tremendous responsibility on the shoulders of man. Thus when I choose, I must make a responsible choice because I am also choosing for the whole mankind. Now, no matter who or what I have been, there is nothingness which separates me

from what I have been with what I am. Similarly, there is nothingness which separates me from what I shall be with what I am. So in case, if I *have been* inauthentic I am still separated in *present* by nothingness from this inauthentic mode. It is nothingness which separates my freedom from what I *have been.* On the other hand, if I *have been* sincere, I feel that it is nothingness which separates my freedom from what I *shall be*. The permanent possibility of being insincere is the very condition of the possibility of being sincere and the very meaning of my freedom or existence. Likewise, the permanent possibility of being sincere is the very condition of the possibility of being insincere and the very unmeaning of my freedom or existence. Since, at each instant we are thrown or thrust into the world , hence in the very constitution of being sincere or candid as my possibility, I catch my freedom as also being the possible destroyer of sincerity or candor in the present as well as in the future. The decision to be candid or insincere lies with me and not *outside.* And the accountability wedded with the decision also lies with me and not *outside.* I cannot shrug off my responsibility. I cannot thrust aside the effects of my choice and decision. I am responsible for my choice and acts. I cannot separate the responsibility aspect inoculated with decision. Thus, "my freedom is the unique foundation of values and that *nothing,* absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable." [9] Therefore, freedom becomes a condemnation or as Sartre says, "I am condemned to be free." [10]

Sartre in his rhetorical flourish reiterates that human reality is free because it is not sufficient. What Sartre means is that freedom and existence are correlative and existence is identical with act, and acts are possible because human reality is insufficient. If human reality was sufficient and complete then there would be nothing to act for, then man would be a thing and not *nothing.* Obviously, then freedom, existence and act are correlates of a free and living consciousness which is the *for-itself* and which projects outwards towards its possibilities and makes itself by accomplishing or realizing the possibilities which exist as insufficiencies or *lack.* Thus, man does not exist first in order to act afterwards, but to exist means to act, *to be* is to act and to cease to act is to cease to exist. Hence, to act in a way of not-being-what-one-is would be bad faith. Indeed, bad faith is possible because man is what he is not. Can man be what he is, when the *for-itself* is consciousness of *in-itself*? According to Sartre, the answer is negative because the *for-itself* cannot be for itself. It always exists as consciousness of being. Man cannot exist as *is.* In case man *is,* what he *is* then candor would become his being and bad faith would not be possible. Bad faith exists because man is in the mode of *not being what he is* and in the mode of *being what he is not.* In bad faith there is an inner disintegration in the heart of being. In bad faith, consciousness instead of directing its nihilation towards ouside, directs it towards itself. The nihilation is directed inward instead of outward. In bad faith, the *for-itself* wishes to be the inner disintegration and at the same time it accepts its inner integration which it is not, that is, bad faith denies its inner disintegration and affirms its inner integration which it is not, at the

same time. There is a unity of what I am not and what I am. This attitude is bad faith according to Jean-Paul Sartre.

Overcoming bad faith implies a radical transformation by *not-being-what-one-is-not*. The self-recovery of being from an earlier corrupt mode leads to authenticity which is good-faith and a mode of right living. Well, the choice and responsibility to lead an authentic life rests with man continuously, he cannot devolve. Thus the source of meaning and purpose in the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre is the for-itself (*pour-soi*).

Notes

1. Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1966. *Existentialism and Humanism*. Translation and Introduction by Philip Mairet. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. 28.
2. Ibid. 28.
3. Ibid. 38.
4. Ibid. 32.
5. Sartre, Jean-Paul, 1992. *Being and Nothingness : A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Translated and with an Introduction by Hazel E. Barnes, University of Colorado. New York: Washington Square Press. 563.
6. Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1966. *Existentialism and Humanism*. Translation and Introduction by Philip Mairet. London:Methuen & Co. Ltd. 41
7. Sartre, Jean-Paul, 1992. *Being and Nothingness : A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Translated and with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes, University of Colorado. New York: Washington Square Press. 86.
8. Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1966. *Existentialism and Humanism*. Translation and Introduction by Philip Mairet. London:Methuen & Co. Ltd. 29.
9. Sartre, Jean-Paul, 1992. *Being and Nothingness : A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*. Translated and with an Introduction by Hazel E. Barnes, University of Colorado. New York: Washington Square Press. 76.
10. Ibid. 567