



Freedom: An Unavoidable Phenomenon

Dr. Uday Singh, Associate Professor (Philosophy)

Government Girls' College, Chittorgarh, Rajasthan, India

ABSTRACT: In this study, I am viewing at the emergence of Sartre's project of fundamental ontology of freedom culminating in *Being and Nothingness*. I would analyse the "factual" life as it is concretely lived in life's different situations. My central focus would be on the tension between freedom and choice, between emotions/sentiments and guilt. I assume an independent philosophical stand that is critical of Sartre as far as Sartre's concept of exceptional autonomy/freedom is concerned.

Key words: Sentiments, Choice, Guilt

Freedom as Alternative Possibilities

The principle of alternative possibilities recognizes that the agent is praiseworthy/blameworthy for her/his action if she /he could have avoided the action that is if he/she could have done otherwise. When Sartre says that man is free he means that there are alternative possibilities and it is up to the agent to decide. For Sartre, what is morally required by the agent in a concrete situation that is in an agent-specific situation is not objectively known, because objectivity and universal are the domain of abstraction, necessity, in-itself and unfreedom but man is for-itself, concrete and totally free.¹ Sartre is not in favour of human sentiments or emotions as factors that determine the choice of the agent.² He is not in favor of emotions as criterion to evaluate the choice or action. Actually, according to the principle of alternative possibilities what is morally required is based on human sentiments or emotions but in case of Sartre what is required of the agent in a particular situation has to be *decided* by the agent. Actually, it is the agent who has to choose or decide because the agent is free. The agent is therefore completely responsible for her/his acts. Emotions and sentiments cannot justify the agent's act. In fact, man is freedom and he is unjustifiable; man is without excuse, so there is complete responsibility for his acts.

Sophie's Choice :The Existential Drama ofChoice and Guilt

In *Sophie's Choice*, the choice which the author imputes to Sophie is not an example of moral dilemma because it's not a choice at all. The offer which Sophie gets: "Choose between your two children so that one can be saved, otherwise both will be killed"; the author William Styron speculates that Sophie makes a choice and chooses her four year old son Jan over her seven year old daughter Eva and thus only one is saved. As a matter of fact, firstly, Sophie as a mother will not choose, because she does not want to lose any of her children thus she will not experience the guilt. The question is not to save one, but to save both that is to not to lose both the children. Secondly, Sophie's choice is not a choice (free). It lacks freedom. Sophie is constrained to act according to her choice. There is coercion. Both the children belong to her and if she is given a real choice or freedom then certainly she will not allow either child to be killed. The consciousness of committing a wrong action which could have been circumvented and for which one is accountable in person, will not exist in case of Sophie because Sophie is coerced. The psychological guilt is only experienced if one was actually free. Sophie as a mother will experience intense hatred and indignation against her captors and wrongdoers. The possible possibility to save both the children as *Sophie's possible possibility* does not exist in her case.

In Sartre's view every action must be intentional. Since Sophie's intention can never be to let her either child die, she can never be blamed for causing the death of her child. Intentionally, she cannot realize the conscious project of letting her one child die, hence she has not *acted*. In the state of affairs—bondage—Sophie was in, she could never be held responsible for what happened as there was no freedom in her especial case, so the question of her choice does not arise; her choice cannot be classed as choice, thus it is absurd that Sophie will freely choose her son over daughter. Additionally, both the children are her ends, therefore, the problematic claim that end justifies the means will not appear in her case. After all, it is simply failure to consider the diabolical motivations and wrathful psychological states of her adversaries; it is failure to fully think through the feminine implications of motherhood, and the mechanism as well as implication of freedom and choice, that have led to implausible and incoherent conclusions regarding Sophie's choice. Sartre wants to spotlight, "We must recognize that the indispensable and fundamental condition of all action is the freedom of the acting being" (Sartre 1992, 563).

Well, I reckon that in Sophie's case the author abstractly presupposes that Sophie makes a choice and incorrectly deduces guilt from the choice which indeed was not a choice. Guilt is only experienced when the choice is a totally free choice. Frankly, Sophie; which is just a placeholder name for a mother; will not choose any one of her children because she will never wish that either child gets killed. Her choice is a camouflage choice. Coercion is misrepresented or disguised as choice. Despite being compelled or threatened to immediately take a stance against her will, I suppose Sophie as a mother, will never actually choose in a real sense of the word choice. Though choice in Sartre is absolutely a free choice but in the practically incompatible case of Sophie, a free choice did not exist; her child was rather snatched from her by her unlawful detainers. Her inner subjective fact or attitude (*mobile*) and her *motif* are to save both her children. As regards Sophie, freedom as the foremost *sine qua non* condition of action does not exist with her.³

Sartre's Gambler and the Coefficient of Adversity

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre elucidates that there is no limit to man's freedom except freedom itself and this freedom is the being of man that is his nothingness. "Human reality is free because it *is not enough*" (Sartre 1992, 568). Man is necessarily a consciousness of freedom because nothing exists in consciousness except as non-thetic consciousness of existing. In fact, freedom according to Sartre is the very stuff of man's existence or his being, and nihilation is the being of freedom. Sartre marshals a wide range of closely associated words for freedom, such as nihilation, temporalization—means human reality is *not* but it *makes itself*—nothingness, choice, existence, *negatité*, for-itself, lack, human reality etc., and these closely associated words are compatible within his notion of freedom. As regards Sartre, man is condemned to exist perpetually beyond his essence. "I am condemned to be free," (Sartre 1992, 567). "We are condemned to freedom" (Sartre 1992, 623). Sartre further explicates:

Freedom is precisely the nothingness which *is made-to-be* at the heart of man and which forces human-reality *to make itself* instead of *to be*. (Sartre 1992, 568)

As far as existence is concerned, to exist implies to choose; existence and freedom are identical. Freedom is entire and unconditioned and it is the foundation of ends. The ends which the for-itself attains by means such as passion or volition is a matter of choice of means. Sartre affirms that whether I act by volition or by passion, it depends on no one

except on me that is on my choice to act either by volition or by passion. Even my fear, according to Sartre, is free and reveals my freedom. I choose myself as fearful in this or that particular situation by putting all my freedom into fear. If I put all my freedom into my courage that is if I choose myself as courageous, I shall exist as courageous. Likewise, I can choose myself as a hypocrite, as ugly, as infirm, as racist, or I can choose myself as just the opposite. Thus in Sartre's view:

In relation to freedom there is no privileged psychic phenomenon. All my "modes of being" manifest freedom equally since they are all ways of being my own nothingness. (Sartre 1992, 574)

Lending crucial perspective to his theory of freedom, Sartre elucidates if I am hiking with friends and after several hours of hiking my fatigue increases and becomes unbearable, I have a choice then, either I can choose to resist my weariness or I can choose to relax. Suppose if I relax, then it implies that I have constituted the meaning of the hike as a path too difficult to traverse. All the same, my companions are still walking; but I have chosen myself as inferior before them. My inferiority⁴ is the choice of myself in the world. "Thus the inferiority complex is a free and global project of myself as inferior before others; it is the way in which I choose to assume my being-for-others." (Sartre 1992,592).

As regards choice, our choice is a conscious choice, in fact, choice and consciousness are identical. Man is responsible for intended acts. An incautious and inattentive smoker who through unmindfulness caused the explosion of a powder magazine has not chosen because the explosion was not intended aspect of the smoker's action. There is no difference between to be conscious of ourselves and to choose ourselves. The for-itself or human reality cannot apprehend itself except as a choice in the making. The freedom of human reality is always engaged. Man does not exist first in order to act later; but for man, to be is to act, and to cease to act is to cease to be.

Whatever our being may be, it is a choice; and it depends on us to choose ourselves as "great or "noble" or "base" and "humiliated." If we have chosen humiliation as the very stuff of our being, we shall realize ourselves as humiliated, embittered, inferior, *etc.* We are not dealing here with *givens* with no further meaning; writes Sartre (Sartre 1992, 607).

In Sartre's view, it is I who recognize myself as humiliated and this recognition is a choice. The for-itself or human reality cannot apprehend itself except as a choice in the making. Sartre draws attention to the fact that the term freedom⁵ is not a demotic term but it is a technical and philosophical term which means only the *autonomy of choice*. He tells us that freedom does not mean to secure what one has wished, but rather "by oneself to determine oneself to wish". (Sartre 1992,621).Sartre clarifies that, choice and action are exactly alike, choosing and doing are uniform. For Sartre, it would be wildly unreasonable to say that a prisoner is always free to go out of prison and it would be an impertinent platitude to state that a prisoner is always free to long for release, but one can at least say that the prisoner is always free to try to escape from confinement. Thus, if one says that the prisoner is always free to try to escape from confinement, that is, that whatever his situation may be, he can project his release and learn the value of his project by undertaking some sort of action; it would not be inconsistent with reason or common sense. In order to distinguish between choice and dream/mere wish, Sartre recapitulates that choice involves commencement of actualization or realization of what one chooses, in other words, choosing and doing, intention and act are identical. For human reality, Sartre attests that there is never any possibility of not choosing oneself.

Freedom is the freedom of choosing but not the freedom of not choosing. Not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose. The result is that the choice is the foundation of being-chosen but not the foundation of choosing. (Sartre 1992, 618-19)

As regards choice, it is absurd, not in the sense that it is without reason, but in the sense that there has never been any possibility of not choosing oneself, besides, it is choice by which all foundations and all reasons come into being, and by which the very notion of absurd receives a meaning. The for-itself always apprehend itself as a choice in the making. "In fact, we are a freedom which chooses, but we do not choose to be free. We are condemned to freedom," writes Sartre. (Sartre 1992, 623)

Man is not free to exist as not being free. He is not free not to be free because his ontological structure is such that he is not to be what he is and to be what he is not. It is freedom itself

which posits its intention or goal and it is freedom which chooses this end or goal and places it as either unobtainable or obtainable with hardship, implying that choice involves elimination and selection hence there is nothing that comes to human reality or for-itself which is not chosen. Human reality can modify its projects because every free project is an open project and the very project of freedom is choice which implies expectation and acceptance of some sort of opposition somewhere. Additionally, Sartre explains that the magnitude of opposition or the enormity of co-efficient of adversity of things may be such that several years of patience may be needed to get the feeblest result. Though the co-efficient of adversity or obstacles exist, that is to say, they have a real being, nevertheless, it is freedom which illuminates them as obstacles and it is free choice which would interpret the meaning of these obstacles as something that can be easily accomplished or as something that cannot be got over without great effort. Thus, there is no point in complaining or grieving because nothing from outside has decided what one feels, what one lives or what one is. The entire responsibility shall be borne by men and women. “Furthermore this *absolute responsibility* is not resignation; it is simply the logical requirement of the consequences of our freedom.” (Sartre 1992, 708; *italics mine, translationaltered*). Sartre accentuates that human reality is without excuse. Convenient excuses are just manifestation of bad faith.⁶

Drawing special attention to the fact that freedom is absolute, Sartre says, “I am condemned to be *wholly responsible* for myself” (Sartre 1992, 711; *italics mine, translation altered*). Sartre contends that freedom is being of for-itself or consciousness and consciousness exists as consciousness of freedom that is as possible possibilities. Possibilities exist as *my* possibilities. These possibilities are not something about-to-happen certainly, because if it exists as (surely) about-to-happen it would be strictly determined and unfree. But the possibility exists with the possibility of opposite possibility. In other words, any possibility of positive human action or conduct exists with its counterpart that is with the possibility of opposite or negative conduct. He argues that it is the for-itself or human reality that causes the possibility to appear, to sustain, to engage with it or to reject it. There is no external cause that can remove or obliterate the possibility. The for-itself is the permanent source of the being of possibility as well as the source of its non-being, therefore according to Sartre *nothing* determines a man walking on the precipice to throw himself into the abyss, all the same, *nothing* prevents him from *not-throwing* himself into the abyss; the for-itself is absolutely free to adopt either possibility. Sartre highlights:

If someone asks what this *nothing* is which provides a foundation for freedom, we shall reply that we can not describe it since it *is not*, but we can at least hint at its meaning by saying that this nothing is made-to-be by the human being in his relation with himself. (Sartre 1992, 71)

As a matter of fact, any human conduct or action carries with it the possibility of opposite or its negative conduct and either possibility can become possible for the for-itself. Sartre illustrates through the example of the celebrated gambler. The gambler, for instance, has freely and sincerely taken a resolution to not to gamble anymore, but when he approaches the gaming table the gambler observes that his resolution is fizzling out and it is nothingness which separates the gambler from his resolution. The possibility to gamble exists along with the opposite possibility to not to gamble. Aside from the fact, that gambling is a *possibility* possible, there also exists *not-gambling* as a *possibility* possible. Though the resolution is still there however it has become an object *for* the gambler's consciousness, and the resolution is no longer him, that is the gambler *is* it in the mode of not-being. Thus *gambling* and *not-gambling*, both exist as possible possibilities. The gambler wants so much not to gamble anymore, but he apprehends with anguish that *nothing* prevents him from gambling. The condition for the existence of the complete inefficacy of the past resolution, the condition for the total inefficiency and futility of the motive to not to gamble, is the freedom of the gambler. The gambler realizes that fear of financial ruin; family disappointments, etc. are mere representations in his memory which can *no longer* prevent him from gambling. Sartre illuminatingly writes:

In order for it to come to my aid once more, I must remake it *ex nihilo* and freely. The not-gambling is only one of my possibilities, as the fact of gambling is another of them, neither more nor less. I *must rediscover* the fear of financial ruin or of disappointing my family, *etc.*, I must re-create it as experienced fear. (Sartre 1992, 70)

The very fact that the for-itself that is human reality can recreate, rediscover and remake itself out of *nothing* shows that the for-itself is *absolutely free*. Neither past nor future can determine the for-itself, because both are *no longer*, this specific consciousness of freedom

which exists is anguish thus there is anguish in the face of the past and anguish in the face of the future. For anguish to exist, the condition is the total freedom of the for-itself. In other words, freedom is the condition for anguish to exist. The for-itself is *absolutely* free and *absolutely* responsible for its acts.⁷

Footnotes

1. For an interesting comparative treatment of freedom, see Grene, Marjorie. 1959. "Sartre and Heidegger: The Free Resolve." In *Introduction to Existentialism*, edited by Marjorie Grene, and Rathdrum Clash, 41-66. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Robert C. Solomon presents a careful analysis and a fascinating account of Sartre's theory of emotions. See. Solomon, Robert C. 1987. "Sartre on Emotions." In *From Hegel to Existentialism*, edited by Robert C. Solomon, 261-74. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3. In my view, Sophie's choice is similar to a following example: Suppose Audrey is asked to choose a chocolate from a box which contains two chocolates, one in a turquoise color wrapper and the other in an ivory white color wrapper, and simultaneously, she is told: "Choose any one but do not choose the ivory white". In Sophie as well as Audrey's case, choice does not exist. For choice to exist, Sartre explains that it has to be free, in fact, choice implies freedom but Sophie's case is devoid of choice.
4. According to Sartre, a person who suffers from *Minderwertigkeitskomplex* has chosen to be her/his own tormentor.
5. There is an interesting and noteworthy debate on freedom and determinism. See. Taylor, Richard. 1992. "Freedom and Determinism." In *Metaphysics*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp, Monroe Beardsley, and Elizabeth Beardsley, 35-53. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
6. Zheng tends to treat the theme of bad faith from various aspects. He considers to illuminate what is bad faith but Zheng chooses to mute the idea of absolute freedom (*pace* Zheng 1997). Zheng, Yiwei. 1997. "Ontology and Ethics in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*: On the Conditions of the Possibility of Bad Faith," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 35 (Summer): 265-87.

7. See. Waller, Bruce N. 2015. *Restorative Free Will: Back to the Biological Base*. Lanham: Lexington Books. Bruce N. Waller in his enlightened work *Restorative Free Will: Back to the Biological Base* liberates free will or freedom from the burden of moral responsibility and reduces human freedom to the phylogenetic level. Waller explains that both man and animal explore alternative paths when faced with environmental contingencies and both adapt themselves; besides, there is no difference between human free will and the free will of chimpanzees, mice, beetles, and other foraging animal species. From Sartre's point of view, I think Waller has not chosen to consider the fact, that, in the human world, human beings strive to be responsible, committed, peaceful and happy which certainly does not prevail in the animal world. Without the element of absolute responsibility, human free will or freedom becomes implausible and impractical and makes little sense (*pace* Bruce N. Waller, 2015). Sartre would not share the restorative free will ambition of Waller. In my estimate, the ability to explore alternatives in animals is *given* that is based on instincts. Action of man is *free and intentional*. According to Sartre, human choice is not determined by situation or circumstances or by environmental contingencies but by freedom. In human, there is consciousness of freedom along with the "consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or of an object" which animal lacks. Waller chooses to ignore this wrinkle from Sartre (*pace* Bruce N. Waller, 2015).

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- 5 LaCapra, Dominick. 1979. *A Preface to Sartre : A Critical Introduction to Sartre's Literary and Philosophical Writings*. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd.

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