

**AM I SIMPLY THERE! OR DO I MAKE MYSELF BEING SIMPLY THERE!**

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**Abstract:** In this article I shall make an attempt to explain the large picture of place, time, environment, fellowman, and death in relation to the autonomy of the human reality. Through detailed discussion I would develop that it is through human reality that place exists and it is human reality which is responsible for the place it takes.

**Key words:** Place, Environment, Death, Human Reality

**My Place:** Sartre notes that it is human-reality by which place comes to thing; without human reality there is no place. I *exist* my place and this placing takes place only in relation to an end. “It is in the light of an end that my place takes on its meaning. For I could never be *simply there*” (Sartre 1992, 633; italics in the original). In Sartre’s view place is provided with a meaning in relation to a certain not-yet-existing end which one wants to attain. It is in the light of this not-being or non-being and of the future that my place or position can be actually elucidated. It is freedom which arises place. Brute relation of distance to objects gets it meaning not from outside but through the free choice which I make of my end. Thus, according to Sartre: “a particular city situated twenty miles from my village and connected with it by a streetcar is much nearer to me than a rocky peak situated four miles away but at an altitude of two thousand eight hundred meters” (634). He further adds: “To be sure, in being born *I take a place*, but I am responsible for the place which I take” (636; italics in the original). A place appears as an exile, natural, nostalgic, or favourable in relation to human reality, depending on the choice of my end. It is human reality which gives existential meanings to places. Place acquires a meaning which I give to it in relation to a certain not-yet-existing being which I want to nihilate. It is in the light of not-being and of the future that my position can be actually understood, asserts Sartre. ““To be there” is to have to take just one step in order to reach the teapot, to be able to dip the pen in the ink by stretching my arm, to have to turn my back to the window if I want to read without tiring my eyes, to have to ride my bicycle and to put up with the fatigue of a hot afternoon for two hours if

I wish to see my friend Pierre, to take the train and pass a sleepless night if I want to see Annie' (633). Hence, the facticity of my place cannot limit my freedom, because I am not my place and my existence is not to be what I am and to be what I am not. But, can my past limit my freedom? I shall analyse from Sartre's viewpoint.

My past

Sartre explicates that we do not have a general past but a particular past. "The past is not *nothing*; neither is it the present; but at its very source it is bound to a certain present and to a certain future, to both of which it belongs" (Sartre 1992, 163). Past cannot exist as such rather it is always past of a particular present. "The past indeed can haunt the present but it can not *be* the present; it is the present which *is* its past (166). According to Sartre I do not have a past but I am *my* past. I am it. In fact, facticity and past are the same thing but the for-itself has its being outside it. It always surpasses itself. The for-itself is not what it is (past) and it is what it is not (future). The for-itself cannot reach the past because the past is in-itself and human reality is for-itself. The for-itself exists as having its being outside itself in future. This implies the freedom of for-itself. Meanwhile, freedom is the choice of an end in relation to a past and it is I who decides the meaning of the past. Whether the past is ambiguous, living, dead or half dead, it hardly matters. What matters is that my past gets its meaning from the ends chosen by me in the future. "Who shall decide whether the period which I spent in prison after a theft was fruitful or deplorable? I—according to whether I give up stealing or become hardened. Who can decide the educational value of a trip, the sincerity of a profession of love, the purity of a past intention, etc.? It is I, always I, according to the ends by which I illuminate these past events" (640). One can dissociate oneself with the past by positing one's past so as not to be associated with it by acting differently thus asserting one's freedom. By assuming the past and by conferring meaning on the past, the for-itself has chosen itself, that is the for-itself has chosen the end to change the past so that I may *no longer be* what I *was* which is to say that the for-itself can *become* because it is free. My *past* habits offer resistance when I choose to change them, if it were not so, then *doing* and freedom would make no sense whenever an environment to be changed was required; which means that the for-itself *becomes* as it is free.

### My Environment

Sartre promulgates that environment does not restrict my freedom. He explicates that if due to a punctured tyre a projected deal is not concluded with a person, it does not imply that I am not free. My environment is revealed to me through the choice of the ends which I am. It is through the end chosen that “the wind can appear as a headwind or as a “good” wind, through the project that the sun is revealed as a propitious or an inconvenient warmth”(Sartre 1992, 648). Sartre expounds that one must not mix freedom to choose with freedom to obtain. The freedom of Sartre is freedom to choose that is it is I who determine myself in the presence of an adverse environment, because I am that freedom. The very existence of freedom demands obstacles to be surpassed.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, “even the red-hot pincers of the torturer do not exempt us from being free” (649). Furthermore, “even torture does not dispossess us of our freedom; when we give in, we do so *freely*”( 672; italics in the original).

The meaning of the *givens*, of brute existents, or of environment are propounded and interpreted by the free choice of the for-itself. It is through the ends which I choose that I choose to give meaning or relate with the environment in a particular way. For Sartre, “there is nothing which astonishes in the world, nothing which surprises us without our determining ourselves to be surprised”(Sartre 1992, 651).

I can not choose freedom itself, whenever I have to choose, I have to choose something else, except my freedom. So, I can not escape the fact of making choices or choosing. Therefore, “freedom is condemned to be free”(Sartre 1992, 653). Besides, “I am absolutely free and absolutely responsible for my situation. But I am never free except *in situation*”(653; italics in the original). One of the concerns regarding facticity is the issue of the other, whether the other, that is my fellowman, can restrict my freedom or not.<sup>3</sup>

### My Fellowman

Sartre professes that the for-itself apprehends the other as The-other-as-subject or as The-other-as –object only on the foundation of a free choice. Sartre holds that there are certain determinations which are caused by the other. The other confers meaning on brute objects. The

other confers meaning upon me also. Thus there is something of myself which is *given* purely by the other and which does not exist. There are certain determinations which are not chosen by me like I am handsome or ugly, I am beautiful or intelligent, because they arise because of the upsurge of the freedom of others. This seems to restrict my freedom. I am something in the eyes of others which I have not chosen. But I can freely **re-act** against what is indicated of me by the other. I can illuminate the world which I have not chosen by my *own* chosen ends. Now the other become a figment of imagination, and I realize that it is only I who exists (in existential sense); the others (group, collectivity) does not exist. I exists as freedom. The other's action can not restrict my freedom. Even torture of other can not rob me of my freedom. It may seem paradoxical or chimera but conversely, even in this situation-limit, the situation-limit has no meaning other than that which my freedom confers on it. There is total alienation of my being, because I **alone** have to choose for myself. I "can not not-be freedom—that is, it is condemned to be free"(Sartre 1992, 673).

Though there is an outside of what the others feel about me, however, I can transcend the given, that is what others feel about me by recognizing the other as a transcendence. And this recognition "would have no meaning if it were not a *free* recognition of the Other's freedom"(674).

### My Death

Death according to Sartre is an individualized and personalized event, the "only thing which nobody can do for me" Sartre 1992, 683). Sartre compares death with love in the sense that it is irreplaceable and unique because "nobody can love for me" (684). Besides, death is not a determined event, one cannot *wait* for death. "There is no place for death in the being which is for-itself" (691). In Sartre's view death cannot be even one of *my* possibilities, because death never gives meaning to life but it removes all meaning from life. "If we must die, then our life has no meaning because its problems receive no solution and because the very meaning of the problems remains undetermined"(690). Thus suicide is an absurdity for Sartre because it is the last act of a person's life and which is denied the meaning which only the future can give. Hence, death is not an ontological structure of for-itself. It is life which decides or chooses its own

meaning because in Sartre's view life is perpetually in suspense, that is, it is *not yet*—free. Human reality reveals to itself what it is by means of that *which it is not* therefore it can decide or *choose* its meaning. Human reality gets its meaning from its perpetual engagement in its future. But death alienates human reality wholly to the advantage of the Other says Sartre. “To be dead is to be a prey for the living. This means therefore that the one who tries to grasp the meaning of his future death must discover himself as the future prey of others” (695). But, “So long as I live I can escape what I *am* for the Other by revealing to myself by my freely posited ends that I *am* nothing and that I make myself be what I *am*”(695). So according to Sartre, it's only after death that others can impute meaning to my life without my having any freedom to accept or not to accept their perspective; for now I no longer exist to accept or not to accept their perspective. The Other confers meaning on me after my death and my meaning after my death comes from outside. Furthermore, death cannot be my chosen end or my possibility because; as I no longer exist; death cannot make known to me my being; nor death's presence can be realized by the for-itself in order to reveal to me my being—*freedom*.

The shibboleth of Sartre, that “the slave in chain is as free as his master” readers take with a pinch of salt. Now for that matter, when Sartre speaks of the *situation* of the slave that the slave in chains is as free as his master, he means a “position apprehended by the For-itself which is in situation ”(1992, 701). The for-itself is a being-in-situation; it is amidst other brute existents but it need not apprehend itself as a surrounded existence which is given. Human reality is not only *being there* but it is also *a being beyond being there*. “Human reality is indeed the *being which is always beyond its being-there*. And the situation is the organized totality of the being-there, interpreted and lived in and through being-beyond. Therefore *there is no privileged situation* [my italics]. We mean by this that there is no situation in which the *given* would crush beneath its weight the freedom which constitutes it as such—and that conversely there is no situation in which the for-itself would be *more free* than in others”(Sartre 1992, 702; italics in the original). The slave is nothing other than his situation and the slave's being-in-situation is what the slave is. In other words, Sartre affirms that the slave exists as not only a *being-there* but also as *being-beyond*. The situation of the slave is a *relation of being* between himself (slave) and his world, which the slave nihilates. The situation is the whole slave because the slave is nothing but his situation.

When Sartre affirms “the slave in chains is as free as his master” he implies that the situation of both the slave and the master takes on its meaning in the light of the free choice of its end. The slave’s situation is his own, personal, and concrete with a unique co-efficient of adversity. The slave must assume the situation, must take a point of view. There is a gate for the slave which was made only for him, furthermore, “each man makes for himself his own gate”(Sartre 1992, 704).

The co-efficient of adversity (a term culled from Gaston Bachelard *according to Hazel E. Barnes*) which endangers the slave has meaning only in and through the freely chosen ends, and it is on the ground of the engagement of the choice which the slave *is* that the meaning of the situation of the slave is revealed. The slave is in chain not because he is unfree but because he *chooses* to remain enchained; his chosen end is to continue with his slavery. The slave’s choice *makes* the situation, and thus the slave *makes* himself. The contented slave chooses to not to break the chains. It is the slave’s freely chosen end. He is as free as his deferential master. The slave’s choice to remain enchained has a meaning—that is exactly Sartre’s point and that is how Sartre treats freedom.

### Conclusion

I have lucubrated that I make myself irrespective of my place, environment and other facticities. In fact, freedom in Sartre is *pure* and *simple* and have argued against an apparently majority view in the secondary literature that there are two strands of freedom in Sartre—restricted and unrestricted. I have elaborated that there is no sustained and clear support in Sartre in favour of critics who consider freedom in Sartre as limited. In an interpretative-explanatory sense, I have expatiated on a nuanced theory of freedom as propounded by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*. For Sartre, consciousness is purely and simply consciousness of being consciousness of an object, hence freedom is simple and pure that is, I am not simply there but I make myself being simply there. “Anguish, abandonment, responsibility, whether muted or full strength, constitute the *quality* of our consciousness in so far as this is pure and simple freedom” says the master in *Being and Nothingness*.

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