

Understanding Individual Freedom through Jean-Paul Sartre

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English

Department of English and Humanities

BRAC University

July 27, 2025

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that,

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing my degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through complete and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Dedication

I dedicate this work to myself—the boy who kept going even when it felt impossible. I've doubted myself many times and taken longer than expected, but I never gave up. I held on to my faith in Allah and myself. I have learned to accept myself, with all my flaws, and keep trying. This will always remind me that I'm stronger than I think.

Ethics Statement

This research was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and standards appropriate to academic scholarship. All sources of data, information, and ideas used in this paper have been properly acknowledged through citation and referencing. No part of this research involved plagiarism, fabrication, or falsification of data. If human participants, interviews, or surveys were involved in the research, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was maintained throughout. The research was conducted with respect for intellectual property, privacy, and the dignity of individuals or communities involved.

This work reflects my honest academic effort, and I have upheld integrity and accountability throughout the process of writing and submitting this paper.

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, my heartfelt gratitude goes to Almighty Allah for everything. I am forever grateful for the countless blessings in my life. Despite the many ups and downs, Allah has always been there, guiding me and making everything fall into place. I am thankful for this life and for the path my journey has taken. I would like to thank my supervisor, Mahruba Mowtushi ma'am, for her guidance. I want to thank my family for their support and all the things they have provided me with. A sincere thanks to my late mother, who showed me her constant love, support, and encouragement. Thank you for always being there for me, Ammu, as I'm nothing without you. Finally, I extend my gratitude to all the wonderful people who have unknowingly touched my life and helped make it better.

Abstract

This thesis tries to examine the concept of freedom through Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy, emphasizing the belief that “existence precedes essence.” Sartre believes that individuals are not born with a fixed nature. They should define themselves through conscious choices and personal responsibilities. Based on this, this paper looks at Sartre’s notable works such as *Being and Nothingness*, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, and *No Exit*. To understand ideas such as radical freedom, bad faith, authenticity, and anguish. The study uses a qualitative research method to analyze Sartre's impact on both philosophical thought and global sociopolitical movements. This includes the Algerian War of Independence, the 1968 French protests, and the 2024 Bangladesh student resistance. This paper also looks at contemporary context marked by surveillance, inequality, and political repression to understand Sartre's idea of “freedom” offering a powerful lens through which one can understand freedom not as mere liberty but as a moral responsibility to live authentically.

Keywords:

Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism, Freedom, Bad Faith, Authenticity, Responsibility, Existential Identity, Political Resistance, Being and Nothingness

Content:

Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	11
1.1 The Father of Existentialism.....	11
1.2 Existentialism and Freedom.....	14
1.3 Freedom and Responsibility.....	15
1.4 Methodology and Theoretical Framework.....	16
Chapter 2 – Literature Review.....	18
2.1 Existential Philosophy in Sartre Work.....	18
2.2 Exploring Human Nature and Existential Identity.....	19
2.3 Freedom as the Core of Human Essence.....	21
2.4 The Ethical Implications of Sartrean Freedom.....	21
2.5 Radical Freedom, Authenticity, and Bad Faith.....	22
2.6 Sartre’s Existential Freedom in a Socio-Political Context.....	23
2.7 Existential Freedom and Its Limitations.....	24
2.8 Research Gap.....	26
Chapter 3 – Freedom and Responsibility.....	27
3.1 Historical Influences and Philosophical Contrasts.....	27
3.2 Anguish, Anxiety, and the Burden of Freedom.....	30
3.3 Bad Faith and the Gaze of Others.....	32
3.4 No Exit and the Embodiment of Existential Struggle.....	34
Chapter 4 – Philosophy of Liberation: Sartre’s Impact on International Movements.....	37
4.1 Sartre on Liberty vs. Freedom.....	37

4.2 Algerian War of Independence.....	38
4.3 Vietnam and Anti-Imperialism.....	40
4.4 May 1968 Protest in France.....	41
4.5 The Zapatistas and Anti-Globalization Movements.....	42
4.6 Sartrean Praxis in Collective Resistance.....	44
Chapter 5 – We Are Condemned to Be Free: Sartre’s Freedom in an Unfree	
World.....	46
5.1 Radical Freedom in a Contemporary Context.....	46
5.2 Surveillance Capitalism and the Digital Gaze.....	47
5.3 Economic Inequality and Facticity.....	48
5.4 Political Oppression and Bad Faith.....	49
5.5 The 2024 July Resistance in Bangladesh.....	50
Chapter 6 – Conclusion: Choosing to be Free.....	53
Works Cited.....	56

Chapter 1

Introduction

Jean-Paul Sartre's "Existentialism" is a philosophical idea that claims humans are thrown into existence by chance. They have no existing meaning; the only sense of their existence is death. This absurdity and nothingness of life is the true meaning of existence. Therefore, humans are free to choose their destiny. Moreover, as Sartre claims, we create our own identity in the world through choices. Unlike objects with a predetermined essence, we are the creators of our nature, meaning, and purpose. This paper investigates the concept of individual freedom through JeanPaul Sartre, whose philosophy gives a powerful and honest look at human nature.

According to Sartre, people are not born with a fixed purpose or essence—they must create meaning through actions. His ideas of freedom are not only about exercising personal autonomy, but also about taking full responsibility for our choices. Sartre's views regarding freedom remain essential because they help us understand personal responsibility, identity, and how to live an authentic life.

1.1 The Father of Existentialism

Jean-Paul Sartre is a famous figure in the world of philosophy. He was born on June 21, 1905, in

Alsace-Lorraine, France. Sartre's development of existentialist philosophy began in the 1930s in Berlin. In Berlin, he was introduced to the concept of phenomenology through Edmund Husserl, whose work emphasized that consciousness is always directed toward objects instead of existing independently. As a result of this idea, Sartre came up with the idea that awareness is something that exists on its own and is defined by choice. Later, Sartre was inspired even more by Martin Heidegger's book *Being and Time*.

In the book, Heidegger's idea of authenticity, which comes from his idea of being-toward-death, stresses life according to one's true self instead of following social norms. What was important wasn't that we're going to die, but how knowing that we will die affects the choices we make. This helped Sartre build the case against the idea of an essential human nature, which supports the idea that "existence comes before essence.

In this case, Søren Kierkegaard had a big impact on how Sartre thought about freedom and choice. In his books *Either/Or*, *Fear and Trembling*, and *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard stresses how important it is to take responsibility for how your character is formed. His ideas were helpful. Sartre looked into the idea that people build their core through the choices they make.

Later, Sartre added to the concept by saying that we are each in charge of our lives in a world where meaning, morality, and purpose are not inherently built into the fabric of existence. Instead, they are created by individuals. There are no universal truths about right and wrong or good and evil. Human meaning can only be understood through action and choices. For example, if one is born into a family of power and privilege, it is up to that person to decide whether to adopt those values. Will they accept or reject them in favor of something more meaningful, such

as compassion, creativity, or simplicity? No external moral truth dictates their choice; rather, it is shaped by their act of valuation.

This idea to create meaning through one's choice was a fresh, new take on freedom in 20th-century France. The addition of technological advancements and industrialization brought positive changes, but it also created a world that is mechanical and bureaucratic. The people of France at that time started to feel lost and without direction. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche quoted "God is Dead" reflected Europe's crisis in finding meaning as traditional sources of guidance.

Regarding this, existentialist thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus, psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud, structuralists like Paul-Michel Foucault, and cultural anthropologists like Claude Lévi-Strauss offered different perspectives on interpreting these societal changes. However, it was the aftermath of World War II that brought Sartre into the limelight. At that moment, France faced the immense task of reconstruction—physically, economically, and politically. The country was devastated by the war and deeply divided due to the Vichy regime's collaboration with Nazi Germany. Charles de Gaulle emerged as a key figure, leading the provisional government and restoring republican institutions.

After, the Fourth Republic was established in 1946, it struggled with political instability and colonial conflicts, particularly in Indochina and Algeria. Economically, France benefitted from the U.S.-led Marshall Plan, which helped rebuild its industry and infrastructure. Socially, there was a strong push to purge collaborators and rebuild national unity. The postwar period also marked the beginning of France's transition from a colonial empire to a modern republic.

However, it was not easy, as the people of France were confronted with the unpredictability of life, the absurd nature of existence, and the weight of individual responsibility in a world full of chaos. For France, the realization hit after World War II. During that time, Sartre's emphasis on radical freedom, personal responsibility, and the absence of a predetermined essence helped the people of France grapple with these existential crises. In his play *The Flies*, he used myth to critique collaboration and promote moral awakening among the French under German occupation. In works like “Existentialism Is a Humanism” (1946), Sartre emphasized personal responsibility and the freedom to choose one's path—messages aimed at people rebuilding their lives after war trauma. In the same essay, the famous line “existence precedes essence” suggests that individuals, not God or history, must define the meaning of life. We should define it by ourselves by rejecting societal constraints and oppressive ideologies. His ideas were not only for the people of France; although he began there, his engagement with political movements, advocating for Marxism, anti-colonial struggles, and social justice, cemented him as a worldrenowned philosopher and activist.

1.2 Existentialism and Freedom:

At the core of Sartre's existentialism is the radical notion of freedom, which asserts that humans are not born with a predefined essence but must construct their identity through actions. In Sartre's book, *Being and Nothingness*, he discusses freedom through four main concepts. First, Nothingness and Radical Freedom¹ distinguish human beings (*pour-soi*, or "for-itself") from mere objects (*en-soi*, or “in-itself”), as individuals exist in a state of nothingness, an absence of

¹ The words in bold highlight key concepts or central ideas.

predetermined essence that allows them to define themselves (Sartre 70). Second, anguish arises from this absolute freedom, as individuals bear full responsibility for their choices, leading to existential anxiety—the weight of knowing that one alone determines one's existence (Sartre 78).

Third, Bad Faith (*Mauvaise Foi*) describes individuals' self-deception to evade this burden, choosing to conform to societal expectations rather than embracing the anxiety of genuine Freedom (Sartre 89).

Lastly, Radical Responsibility means that even inaction constitutes a choice, reinforcing that individuals are entirely accountable for who they become (Sartre 102). Moreover, based on this, his existentialist ideas were shaped by arguing that even within restrictive conditions, individuals retain the power to define themselves through their choices (Sartre 115).

It offered a new perspective on personal responsibility and the freedom to define one's purpose through choices in life. It is a perspective emphasizing the need to take full responsibility for our actions, rather than attributing them to external factors or predetermined beliefs. Sartre emphasized that we have the right to choose and the duty to do so. Sartre rejected the idea that we have an essential inner character.

He argued that our actions, not fixed inner nature, define who we are. In his view, life is inherently meaningless, but we create meaning through choices and actions.

1.3 Freedom and Responsibility:

Therefore, freedom places full responsibility on the individual to create meaning and purpose. Sartre does not tie freedom to social roles, contracts, or historical progress. Instead, in *Being and Nothingness*, he argues that freedom is an intrinsic condition of human existence, inseparable from consciousness (439). Sartre insists that freedom stems not from divine will (as in Kierkegaard) or power dynamics (as in Nietzsche), but from human nature. It is self-determined and utterly independent of any external justification or authority.

In “Existentialism Is a Humanism,” Sartre asserts that “Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (22), and “existentialism makes each person fully responsible for their existence” (23). Furthermore, human beings create meaning through the act of negation, which, simply put, is the ability to say “no.” In *Being and Nothingness*, he explains that being is self-contained and capable of independent decision-making, while non-being, such as the absence of a friend you expected to meet at a café, gains meaning only when recognized by consciousness. That absence is a negation of being.

This view positions humans, as Sartre states, as “the for-itself” (*pour-soi*) as opposed to “the in-itself” (*en-soi*). The in-itself refers to objects that merely exist without awareness or free will—they are what they are. In contrast, the for-itself refers to beings with consciousness; humans are aware of their existence and possess the freedom to choose, imagine possibilities, and take responsibility for their actions.

Within this framework, the research seeks to explore: Why should the concept of freedom be examined through the philosophical lens of Jean-Paul Sartre, and how do his views on human nature and freedom remain relevant today?

1.4 Methodology and Theoretical Framework:

This study takes a qualitative approach, focusing on a close reading of Jean-Paul Sartre's key works, particularly in *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, to explore how he defines freedom and its connection to human identity.

It will also examine the short one-act play, *Huis Clos* or *No Exit*, and *La Nausea* or *Nausea* to see how Sartre presents these ideas in his work of fiction.

Alongside Sartre's original texts, the research will include secondary sources from scholars like Simone de Beauvoir, a French existentialist philosopher and feminist theorist, Thomas Flynn, a contemporary scholar specializing in Existentialism, phenomenology, and the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre, especially his political and ethical thought, and David Detmer an American philosopher known for his expertise in Sartrean Existentialism, phenomenology, and critiques of postmodernism to understand different interpretations and critiques of his philosophy.

This study will explore how Sartre's ideas on freedom in existential philosophy help us understand the contemporary world through textual and thematic analysis, as it allows for a deeper understanding of Sartre's existentialism and its relevance today.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Existential Philosophy in Sartre's work:

Jean-Paul Sartre is recognized as a foundational figure in existentialist philosophy, particularly for his philosophical idea that humans exist without any predetermined essence, becoming who they are through their choices and actions. His seminal work, *Being and Nothingness*, is the cornerstone of his existentialist thinking, explaining his key concepts such as freedom, bad faith, and the nature of human existence. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre introduces several key concepts of existentialism, including absolute and radical “freedom”, “bad faith”, “anguish”, “being in itself”, and “being for others”. The first is Absolute and Radical Freedom. Sartre's idea in *Being and Nothingness* mainly looks at the idea that external forces or any predefined essence do not determine human choices and actions; individuals are fully responsible for their existence. Collective freedom emerges when individuals challenge societal structures restricting personal freedom, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between individual agency and collective action.

By contrast, “Existentialism Is a Humanism” provides a more accessible discussion of existentialist themes, focusing on the connection between freedom and responsibility. Sartre argues that “freedom” is both a heavy burden and a great opportunity. It requires us to create our

purpose, values, and meaning through actions without relying on excuses or outside validation. Sartre insists that we are fully accountable for our decisions, as these choices shape humanity and the world around us. Values are not set in stone; individuals create them through their actions. Life becomes meaningful from how people live it, making existence a creative process like making art.

Sartre's novel *La Nausee* shows this through the protagonist, Antoine Roquentin, when he experiences a shift in his existential despair after grappling with the meaningless and absurd nature of existence. He contemplates existing through art.

As his lines “A pale reflection of myself ... I am the one who has written it. I am going to keep it. I shall write it down ... Perhaps one day I shall be able to write a novel (178),” and “I shall put the root of the Nausea in writing and I feel as if I am going to be saved (178),” was Sartre’s way to assert freedom and give form to Roquentin’s existence. Thus, writing becomes his way to confront the absurd and impose meaning.

This work serves as an essential companion to *Being and Nothingness*, offering a more concise articulation of Sartre's key ideas. Together, these texts from the theoretical foundation of this study provide critical insights into Sartre's conception of freedom, human identity, and the weight of existential responsibility.

2.2 Exploring Human Nature and Existential Identity

When we ask what human nature is, the possibilities of answering it are complex. Philosophers like Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, argue that humans are guided by a sense of duty rooted in reason and autonomy—qualities he considers intrinsic to all rational beings (Kant, 15). Similarly, in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume highlights that humans share empathy, imagination, and social connection traits. He emphasizes that moral reasoning emerges from these shared sentiments, forming the foundation of ethical behavior (Hume, 179). Jean-Jacques Rousseau offers a complementary view in *The Social Contract* and *Discourse on Inequality*, describing humans as naturally self-aware, creative, and inclined toward forming cooperative societies. For Rousseau, these traits underscore humanity's innate social nature and capacity for mutual collaboration (Rousseau, 176).

Martin Buber expands this understanding in his influential work *I and Thou*, which stresses the relational aspect of human existence. According to Buber, humans are inherently social beings who find meaning and identity through genuine connection, revealing a shared capacity for forming deep and meaningful relationships (Buber, 27). The perspectives of these thinkers collectively suggest that human beings are born with inherent essences that they gradually realize and fulfill over time.

However, Jean-Paul Sartre radically challenges this idea. In *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, he famously states, "Existence precedes essence," meaning humans are not born with predefined qualities or purpose. Instead, they define themselves through choices and actions. Sartre writes, "Man is condemned to be free; once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. It is up to you to give [life] a meaning" (Sartre). In contrast to essentialist views, Sartre's

philosophy shifts the responsibility of being human from discovering a fixed nature to actively creating oneself, placing freedom, action, and responsibility at the very core of human existence.

2.3 Freedom as the Core of Human Essence:

To understand Sartre's existentialism, examining the relationship between freedom and human existence is essential. Babbi Mishra, in her article “Freedom and Responsibility Define Human Essence in Sartre's Philosophy,” discusses how existence and freedom are deeply connected. She explains that when humans are born, their consciousness starts as a space shaped by nothingness. According to Sartre, individuals perceive the world without any predetermined essence, allowing them to define themselves through actions (Mishra 1). Similarly, Ogbad Chukwudi highlights Sartre's famous claim that Existentialism is a form of humanism in which humans are “condemned to be free.” In “Freedom and Responsibility in Jean-Paul Sartre: A Fundamental Principle in Authentic Existence,” Chukwudi emphasizes that Sartre's idea of freedom rejects external factors such as gods, fate, and societal norms. Instead, Sartre argues that individuals must take full responsibility for their existence and create meaning through conscious decisionmaking.

2.4 The Ethical Implications of Sartrean Freedom:

Jean-Paul Sartre presents freedom as a force without constraints—there are no external limits to define or restrict it. However, some scholars argue that absolute freedom should have certain ethical limitations. In “Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre: Regarding Their Conceptions of Freedom and the Relations These Conceptions May Have to Ethical Theory,” Dusan Galic

explores Sartre's belief that freedom is something we cannot escape. Sartre says that people are always free because freedom is a fundamental part of being human. Every choice, action, or refusal to act shapes who they are and who they will become. Galic also examines Simone de Beauvoir's perspective on freedom, which, while closely aligned with Sartre's, emphasizes the responsibility to support the freedom of others. Beauvoir suggests that true freedom is not just an individual pursuit but a collective effort where people work together to create shared meaning and progress (Galic 73).

On the other hand, Ebo Henry Obinze, in “Jean-Paul Sartre's Absolute Freedom and Its Ethical Implications,” contends that while Freedom is fundamental, it should be exercised with a sense of responsibility. He explains that when individuals have complete Freedom, every action, or even inaction, becomes a deliberate choice. Therefore, individuals must recognize the weight of their decisions and impose necessary limits on their freedom by considering the consequences of their actions. According to Obinze, true freedom does not mean acting without restraint but instead acting with awareness of the ethical and social implications of one's choices (Obinze 102).

2.5 Radical Freedom, Authenticity, and Bad Faith:

In understanding Sartre's existentialism and its influence, it is important to understand radical freedom, authenticity, and bad faith. In “Existentialism and Human Freedom,” John Killinger explores the concept of authenticity in Sartrean thought. Authenticity refers to full awareness of one's freedom and accepting responsibility for one's choices. Killinger contrasts this with bad

faith, where individuals deny their freedom and evade responsibility. He argues that because individuals are free to create meaning, they must strive to live authentically by being truthful and accepting the consequences of their actions. Otherwise, they risk suffocating their freedom through self-deception and avoidance. Authenticity, therefore, requires taking responsibility for shaping one's existence (Killinger 45).

Similarly, Helet Botha and R. Edward Freeman, in “Existential Perspectives on the Problem and Prevention of Moral Disengagement,” examine Sartre's idea of existential freedom by applying it to real-life instances of corporate misconduct, social injustice, and corruption. They explore how individuals often justify unethical behaviour through moral disengagement, dehumanization, and religious reasoning to avoid accountability. Botha and Freeman emphasize Sartre's claim that “humans are condemned to be free,” illustrating how many individuals misuse their freedom by refusing to take responsibility for their actions. Instead of being authentic, they engage in bad faith by running away from accountability, hiding behind external justifications rather than embracing the moral weight of their choices (Botha and Freeman 112).

2.6 Sartre's Existential Freedom in a Socio-Political Context:

In “A Critical Examination of Jean-Paul Sartre's Conception of Freedom and Responsibility and Its Implications on Man's Freedom in Nigeria,” Orji Chidi Paul extends the discussion of Sartrean Freedom into the sociopolitical realm. He argues that Sartre's philosophy is crucial for understanding the challenges of political corruption, economic inequality, and social injustice in

Nigeria. Many individuals face systemic limitations such as poverty, lack of education, and oppressive governance, which restrict their ability to exercise Freedom. However, Sartre's philosophy suggests that individuals are still responsible for their actions within these

constraints. Paul's work highlights the tension between Sartrean absolute freedom and real-world limitations, suggesting that while individuals have agency, structural inequalities can obstruct authentic self-determination.

2.7 Existential Freedom and its Limitations:

In recent debates surrounding the concept of freedom, several scholars have offered critical examinations of free will, challenging traditional views in light of contemporary scientific and philosophical developments. Dr. Shipra Dikshit, in her paper “Concept of Freedom and Its Limitations: A Critical Survey of Sartre's Philosophy,” explores Jean-Paul Sartre's radical existentialist approach to freedom, which posits that individuals are "condemned to be free" and bear the responsibility of defining themselves in an indifferent world (Shipra 42). Sartre's view emphasizes that while freedom is central to human existence, it is not absolute. Shipra highlights Sartre's notion of “bad faith,” where individuals often escape responsibility for their Freedom by conforming to societal expectations (Shipra 27). She also critiques the tension between Sartre's existential freedom and the constraints posed by external forces, such as social, political, and economic realities, suggesting that Sartre's theory, while empowering, overlooks the complexities of these limiting factors.

Eric Sanchis, on the other hand, provides a revision of the traditional notion of free will, aligning it more closely with contemporary understandings of determinism and human behaviour. In his paper, “Free Will: A New Formulation,” Sanchis argues that free will should not be conceived as an absolute, uncaused ability to choose but rather as the capacity to make choices within a

constraints framework (Sanchis 13). By connecting free will in terms of agency, Sanchis suggests that freedom remains meaningful when understood as an interplay between external and internal influences, focusing on personal responsibility and moral accountability.

In contrast, Martin Lopez-Corredoira, in his article “Against Free Will in the Contemporary Natural Sciences,” critiques free will through the lens of modern scientific understanding. He argues that fields like neuroscience and psychology suggest that human behavior is more likely governed by deterministic processes than autonomous decision-making (Lopez-Corredoira 12). Lopez-Corredoira emphasizes that while individuals perceive themselves as exercising free will, this perception is illusory, shaped by subconscious influences and genetic predispositions, challenging traditional philosophical assumptions about human agency. Petr Hajicek, in “Freedom in Nature,” provides an interesting synthesis between philosophical freedom and the natural sciences.

Hajicek suggests that freedom, while not absolute, can be reconciled with determinism through the concept of spontaneity, where individuals can generate new actions within a structured causal framework (Hajicek 21). He also connects his argument to quantum mechanics, proposing that indeterminacy at the quantum level offers a space for human freedom within a naturalistic

worldview. Hajicek's work thus expands the discourse on Freedom, demonstrating that it does not need to conflict with the laws of nature but can exist within them.

2.8 Research Gap:

Despite extensive research on Sartre's existentialism, most studies focus on the fundamental concepts of his philosophy, particularly how scholars interpret his idea of freedom in shaping human essence. A key question remains: can one develop one's essence through freedom, as Sartre suggests? Additionally, ethical dilemmas that reinforce the principle of existence precedes essence have not been thoroughly explored.

This paper addresses these gaps by examining how Sartre's ideas, despite the controversies and evolving interpretations throughout his career, have influenced global discussions on freedom and identity. Rather than limiting the analysis to Sartre's perspective, this study seeks to understand the broader impact of his existentialism on freedom in the contemporary world.

Chapter 3

Freedom and Responsibility

In *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Jean-Paul Sartre argues that individuals both shape and are shaped by the social, political, and economic forces they encounter. His quote, “Man affects the Universe, and in turn, the universe affects man” (Sartre 21) forms a dynamic understanding of this reciprocal process. According to Sartre, philosophy emerges as a response to these interactions arising from the tensions and struggles of a given historical moment (Sartre 45). Sartre's idea of “Existentialism” was a philosophical movement that not only revolutionized 20th-century France but also revolutionized modern thinking around the world. Sartre's idea of “Existentialism” is relevant today because it delves deep into human experiences and choices.

3.1 Historical Influences and Philosophical Contrasts

Philosophers such as Plato, who have influenced philosophy in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and politics, tie Freedom to fulfilling one's proper role within society, emphasizing that individuals are assigned meaning and purpose rather than choosing for themselves (*Republic* 369-370). On the other hand, his student Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics*, did not define Freedom as a role within society but instead saw it as the ability to live rationally and make choices. In contrast, the 17th-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, known for the *Leviathan*, “believed that human beings are self-interested, driven by survival instincts, and naturally exist in chaos. He advocated for a social contract to avoid this, arguing that Freedom must be limited to ensure order and stability (Hobbes 87).

On the other hand, Sartre's contemporary, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, connected Freedom with social and historical contexts, suggesting that Freedom can be achieved over time through a dialectical process in which contradictions arise and are resolved. Through this progression, the individual and society develop a profound understanding of Freedom, eventually seeing it as personal autonomy and collective rationality. On the contrary, Søren Kierkegaard, the pioneer of Existentialism, in his *The Concept of Anxiety*, associates Freedom with the individual's relationship to God, framing it as a spiritual endeavour (60).

Friedrich Nietzsche, in turn, views Freedom as the process of self-overcoming and the creation of one's values, rooted in the will to power (Thus Spoke Zarathustra 212). Unlike Sartre, Nietzsche's philosopher's idea of Freedom is tied to social roles, divine will, contracts, power dynamics, or historical progress; however, for Sartre, Freedom is an open-ended question where we judge our free will, actions, and consequences. The central idea of Sartre's Existentialism is the radical concept of human Freedom. In *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, even after acknowledging specific Marxist ideas, he diverges sharply in his philosophy of history. Traditional Marxist thought suggests that the future is predetermined by historical processes, following a necessary trajectory based on past events (Marx and Engels 75). Sartre rejects this deterministic outlook, insisting that human beings are always in a state of becoming rather than moving toward a fixed end (Sartre 88).

An argument could be made about whether there is any limitation to Freedom. In Jean-Paul Sartre's "Existentialism is Humanism," Sartre explains that Existentialism is a philosophy

centered on human beings and their subjectivity. However, many people view it negatively, associating total Freedom with chaos or evil. Sartre calls this hypocritical, as people often dismiss negative behavior's as "human nature" and avoid taking responsibility. He counters by emphasizing that Existentialism gives people a choice rather than forcing any outcome (Sartre). He also adds that this choice comes with responsibility. He argues that every action we take sets an example for others, influencing their choices.

For instance, helping someone in need not only aids that individual but also encourages others to act similarly, fostering a collective sense of responsibility. If we look at the main themes discussed by Sartre in his idea on freedom, he talks about how humans create meaning through the act of negation, which, in simpler terms, is the ability to say "no." In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explains that being is self-contained and capable of independent decision-making, while non-being exists only as a negation of being (Sartre 9). In Sartre's existential philosophy, the concept of non-being plays a vital role in understanding human consciousness and Freedom. Non-being is not a separate, independent reality but a construct introduced by human existence—it arises through perception and is given meaning by consciousness. While objects of non-being may appear to exist independently, their significance relies entirely on how humans interpret and define them. Being and non-being are abstract concepts that gain relevance only about one another, especially within specific contexts. Consciousness is the source of negation; it brings non-being into the world by recognizing absence, posing questions, and making distinctions. Through this act of nihilation—an active process of negating—humans drive meaning from lived experiences. Sartre emphasizes that nothingness is born from the capacity of consciousness to say "no" to a question, and to accept what is simply given. This power to negate is what enables freedom, as it allows individuals to reflect, and choose.

That is why human freedom is not a gift but an existential demand rooted in the ability to challenge the totality of being. It is through negation that individuals introduce differentiation, create meaning, and shape the world around them. Consciousness embodies nothingness by detaching itself from immediate realities and activating self-questioning, interpretation, and transformation.

While this freedom grants humans the power to shape their reality, it also imposes the burden of responsibility, requiring constant engagement in the task of creating values, making choices, and bearing the consequences. In essence, the human condition is marked by the interplay of being and non-being, and this dynamic makes meaning, choice, and authenticity possible. Freedom arises from the capacity to negate, to challenge what is given, and to transcend what is immediate. By using their ability to negate, humans exercise their freedom, separating themselves from the totality of being, breaking its unity, and enabling themselves to question, redefine, and reshape reality. A profound awareness of anguish drives this ability—an unavoidable aspect of human freedom that emerges from the realization that existence lacks inherent meaning and that individuals must take full responsibility for their choices (Sartre 65).

3.2 Anguish, Anxiety, and the Burden of Freedom.

This freedom comes with both liberating possibilities and heavy burdens. These possibilities and the heavy burden become more than fear; it turns to anguish, a reflective anxiety that arises when individuals recognize the weight of their decisions and the consequences. For example, when someone contemplates suicide, they may feel the fear of death, but this fear itself can generate

anguish because it reveals the responsibility behind the choice—to live or to end one's existence. In this way, freedom allows individuals to act autonomously, but anguish makes them aware of the limitations and responsibilities tied to that freedom.

It manifests most strongly in decision-making moments, such as choosing whether to resist oppression or remain passive, take a moral stand or compromise, follow one's passion, or accept security. In each case, anguish stems from the self-awareness of potential consequences and the realization that no external force determines the outcome—only the individual's choice does (Sartre 84). This internal struggle is a central part of the human experience because it forces individuals to take ownership of their existence. It arises from fear of external forces and recognizing one's ability to act against instincts, habits, or societal expectations. The uncertainty of outcomes in any situation creates a feeling of nothingness, much like the unsettling sensation of vertigo when standing at the edge of a cliff. This feeling occurs not because one is afraid of falling but because one realizes they have the freedom to jump. Similarly, when standing on a hill with the option to move forward or step back, the anguish comes from knowing that no external force dictates the decision—only the individual's will does.

This existential anxiety does not arise from ignorance of determinism but from full awareness that external constraints do not define one's path. Unlike a predetermined fate, which might offer comfort by removing personal responsibility, freedom places the burden of shaping one's future on the individual (Sartre 92).

3.3 Bad Faith and the Gaze of Others

However, there is one more aspect that persists, and that is bad faith. Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of bad faith. A form of self-deception in which an individual lies to themselves to avoid facing uncomfortable truths about their choices and actions. Unlike a regular lie that involves hiding the truth, bad faith is more complex because the person believes and doubts their deception. It allows people to escape the burden of making choices by convincing themselves that they have no other option and that circumstances define them.

An example of bad faith is when someone stays in a profession they dislike, telling themselves they have no choice due to financial or social reasons. While external pressures exist, they still have the freedom to make a different choice but deceive themselves into thinking they do not (Sartre 118).

Sartre illustrates bad faith in *Being and Nothingness*, with the example of a first date. A man may desire physical intimacy but instead chooses to behave in a way that aligns with social norms, pretending to be only interested in the intellectual conversation. Meanwhile, the woman may recognize his true intentions but ignore them, maintaining an illusion of innocence by avoiding confrontation. Both individuals deceive themselves instead of openly acknowledging their true desires and making a conscious decision about how to act. Another example can be seen in someone who remains in an unhappy relationship, convincing themselves that they are staying for love when, in reality, they are afraid of loneliness or change. Similarly, an individual who continuously blames bad luck for their failures rather than recognizing their role also engages in bad faith. Bad faith can also arise from societal expectations.

For example, a person might define themselves solely as a parent, student, or employee, believing this role completely determines their identity. In doing so, they limit their freedom and deny their ability to change. Sartre argues that sincerity can also become bad faith when someone rigidly clings to a fixed identity, refusing to acknowledge that humans are everchanging (Sartre 122).

A reason for this could be Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of Being-for-Others, where our sense of self is shaped by how others perceive us. Unlike self-reflection, which comes from within, our awareness of ourselves and others is immediate and unavoidable. An example is shame, which arises not from how we see ourselves but from how we believe others see us. If someone does something embarrassing, such as tripping in public, their sense of shame comes from the awareness that others are watching and judging them. In that moment, they exist not just as they see themselves but as objects in the eyes of others. This experience reveals that our identity is not entirely our own—the gaze of others shapes it. For instance, people may consider themselves trustworthy, but that trait only exists when others acknowledge and respond to it.

Similarly, someone may not think of themselves as rude, but if others perceive them as such, that perception becomes part of their identity. Sartre critiques traditional views of how we understand others. Realism assumes that other people's minds function like ours, but Sartre argues that we only experience them externally. On the other hand, idealism claims that everything we know, including others, exists only in our consciousness, which can lead to solipsism—the idea that only our mind truly exists. Sartre rejects both views. He argues that the self and the other are deeply connected. They shape each other's existence. The gaze of others, for Sartre, is not an

abstract concept. It is something that is felt directly. A fitting example would be if a person is doing something and realizes they are being watched, they suddenly feel exposed and judged. This shows how others' perceptions can subconsciously affect us. Sartre further adds that the body exists in different ways. For us, the body is a tool we use for interaction, but for others, it is an object they observe and continuously judge.

Instead, he argues that the self and the other are deeply connected, each shaping the other's existence. The other's gaze is an abstract concept and something we feel directly. For example, if someone secretly does something they know is wrong and suddenly realizes they are being watched, they instantly feel exposed and judged. This reaction shows how the other's perception can alter our awareness of ourselves. Sartre also explores how the body exists in different ways. For ourselves, the body is a tool we use to interact with the world, but for others, it is an object they observe and judge. This automatically limits our freedom, as we depend heavily on how others perceive us.

3.4 The Embodiment of Existential Struggle

Jean Paul-Sartre in his existential philosophy has talked about the deep personal question of one's existence, purpose and meaning in life, often accompanied by the feeling of validation. Sartre's *No Exit*, a one-act existential play is a prime example of one's existential struggle. In the play, through the eyes of the three main characters, Inez, Garcin, and Estelle, who recently died, were brought together in a single room by a mysterious valet. The punishment they had to suffer was psychological and eternal.

At the beginning, they try to understand why they were placed together and what their punishment will be. By the time they realize that they are each other's tormentors, they cannot escape each other's judgment, lies, and truths. Garcin is a coward who betrayed his comrades. Inez is manipulative and cruel, and Estelle is vain and murdered her own child. As their interactions become more intense, through the characters of Garcin and Estelle, Sartre shows how bad faith arises when people avoid taking responsibility for their choices or rely on others for validation instead of doing something themselves.

Conversely, Inez represents the "gaze," the constant awareness of how others perceive us, which can trap us and make us feel like objects instead of individuals. In the end, even when they have the chance to escape, they choose to stay, bound by guilt, ego, and the desperate need for validation. The door opens, but no one leaves.

The story is a proper example of how people create their sufferings by refusing to accept their freedom and responsibility. The characters are completely stuck in a cycle of wanting validation from each other instead of taking ownership of their actions. This dependency on others' opinions creates an internal phase of suffering, where they are aware of their flaws but cannot face them honestly. Sartre argues that our consciousness and body are not separate but unified through existence.

The body is not just a physical object; it is central to our experience of self. Being for others is a fundamental part of human existence, shaping our identity and interactions in ways we cannot fully control (Sartre 43-46).

Therefore, Sartre's idea of existential freedom revolves around defining ourselves through our choices. No matter the time or place, humans always reject what they are not and try to fill the emptiness. The weight of freedom can feel overwhelming, and people often shape themselves based on how others see them. However, despite these struggles, we always have the freedom to decide how we want to live. The question is whether we will face the fear of consequences and be true to ourselves in creating meaning.

Ultimately, Sartre's concept of freedom does not confine us to any rules. In a world without inherent moral guidelines or divine purpose, Sartre contends that humans are "condemned to be free." This phrase encapsulates the existential dilemma of having complete freedom to create meaning and values while bearing the full weight of accountability for one's decisions.

This freedom, though daunting, also presents an opportunity for individuals to actively shape their lives and contribute meaningfully to the world around them. He believes that human freedom and the unpredictability of social change cannot be confined within a singular, inevitable historical outcome (Sartre 91).

Insisting that human beings are always in a state of becoming rather than moving toward a fixed end (Sartre 88). That is why understanding Sartre's "Existentialism" is important for understanding freedom. His existential themes and ideas of freedom are a roadmap to understanding how one should live. This is one reason why Sartre's "existentialism" is relevant today.

Chapter 4

“Philosophy of Liberation: Sartre's Impact on International Movements”

4.1 Sartre on Liberty vs. Freedom

Sartre's “existentialism” heavily relies on the concept of freedom, which focuses on emphasizing the responsibility of individuals towards their surroundings. Sartre's idea of freedom has been a source of inspiration for many movements against oppressive regimes. Sartre, as a person, has been involved in various liberation struggles, both as a philosopher and activist. His core understanding was to value individual and collective action towards anything that hinders one's freedom of choice as a philosopher and activist.

Especially in a world where liberty and freedom are interchangeable, it is important to ask: what is liberty? Like freedom, liberty also gives individuals the power to act and speak. However, it is primarily associated with the rights and privileges granted within a society or governing rule. Liberty is considered a legal and societal framework that protects individual freedoms, such as freedom of speech, religion, or assembly. Still, there is often a certain restraint in how Freedom is asserted as Mathew A. Stanley explains in his book review of Slavoj Žižek's *Freedom: A Disease Without a Cure*, “liberty is peddled by capitalist ideology in which we are free to have what we desire, we are free to engage in whatever acts we choose, and we are free from any external compulsion which we have not freely chosen” (Stanley). In simple terms, even though we are free to act, societal and government regulations trap individuals in a cycle where they must abide by a long list of rules. Similarly, Vickie Hsueh and Shirin Deylami, in their expert

analysis of John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, highlight how "the increasing powers of society and government over the individual, both by the force of opinion and even by that of legislation: and as the tendency of all the changes taking place in the world is to strengthen society, and diminish the power of the individual" (Hsueh and Deylami).

The reason liberty was brought into this topic was because liberty, in many instances, kills individuals' freedom. Moreover, Sartre's "Freedom" is the epitome of practicing "Individual Freedom" to its full potential. However, the debate on whether Liberty is good or bad is another discussion. Here, it was only brought to understand how it contradicts Sartre's idea of freedom.

4.2 Algerian War of Independence

Now, if we look at Sartre's most notable instances where his philosophy was directly influenced, the resistance movement during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) would be the most notable. The influence of French colonization at that time transformed Algeria into an integral part of France. The division was between the native Algerians and the French settlers. The native population was faced with systematic oppression, economic exploitation, and a lack of political rights, which led to the rise of the revolutionary group "Front de Liberation Nationale," also known as FLN (1954). FLN aimed to liberate Algeria from French colonial rule through guerrilla warfare, leading to a brutal eighty-year struggle (Horne 45). The violence that caused by the war was extreme on both sides. Mass arrests, torture, and civilian massacres were the methods used by the French army, whereas the FLN resorted to assassination and bombing. The colonial revolution soon became a civil war and a nationwide liberation movement.

This gained a significant amount of international attention. After eight years, Algeria secured independence in 1962 by signing the Evian Accords under French President Charles de Gaulle (Evans 112). Sartre's existentialist philosophy, particularly his emphasis on human freedom and responsibility, played a critical role in framing this struggle.

For Sartre, colonialism was a denial of human freedom — a system that dehumanized both the colonizer and the colonized. His philosophical stance, articulated in works like *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (1964), condemned French imperialism, portraying it as a mechanism that stripped individuals of their existential freedom and authenticity (Sartre 32). Sartre's support for the Algerian War went beyond intellectual engagement. His preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is one of the most powerful articulations of anti-colonial thought, where Sartre frames the act of violent resistance as not merely a political necessity but an ontological reclamation of the self.

Sartre argued that for the colonized, the act of rebellion—even through violence—was a necessary means to reclaim one's humanity, stating that "the former slave realizes himself as a free man" through the act of resistance (Sartre, Preface xli). Although this view sparked ethical debates, it reinforced the idea that colonial domination was not just a political issue but a question of human dignity and self-definition. Sartre's contribution to the Algerian struggle was both philosophical and practical. His ideas gave the Algerian people a framework to confront their oppression authentically, resist "bad faith," and assert their existence through action. As Ian Birchall points out in his study of "Sartre's political engagement," Sartre's commitment was not confined to abstract ideas; he actively supported the cause of Algerian independence, even if it

meant alienating his fellow intellectuals in France (Birchall 150). Sartre's existential philosophy of freedom and responsibility became a source of empowerment for the Algerians, who, through their struggle, were reclaiming political autonomy and their very humanity.

4.3 Vietnam and Anti-Imperialism

Sartre's engagement with global resistance movements was not limited to Algeria. His philosophical stance on freedom also shaped his response to the Vietnam War. In 1967, Sartre served as the executive president of the Russell Tribunal, an international court set up to investigate the actions of the United States during the Vietnam War. In Sartre's writing for the tribunal, his most influential piece, "Vietnam: Imperialism and Genocide," questioned the U.S. military's actions in Vietnam as genocidal. According to Sartre, the American intervention in Vietnam was a continuation of colonial oppression. The U.S. military not only wanted to destroy the Vietnamese people's physical existence, but it also wanted to erase their cultural identity. Sartre stood firm against the actions of the U.S. military. He also gave refuge to those who resisted inside the Army (RITA), a group of U.S. military personnel who opposed the war, in his house in Paris. Sartre's effort to provide full support to these soldiers showcases his unwavering commitment to anti-imperialist ideas and solidarity towards those who are oppressed. His engagement thoroughly supported his philosophy of freedom, where not only the individual will fight for his freedom, but collectively, everyone shall fight for the exact cause. His opposition to U.S. imperialism through public speeches, editorial work, and support for those who resisted highlights the practical application of his existentialist ideas in Global politics.

4.4 May 1968 Protest in France

The May 1968 protest in France is one another example where we can understand the importance of Sartre's philosophy. The protests mainly began because of the President of France, Charles de Gaulle's authoritarian government, which demanded absolute obedience from the people of France. This obsession failed to address the fundamental problems that France was facing. The younger generations struggle with the old educational system and its structure, and the burden of the capitalist mindset on laborers, who are deprived of their rights. The workers were working under poor conditions, unfair wage barriers, and lacking worker rights. All of these led to the

May 1968 protest. The students and workers were frustrated. The protests during the Vietnam War and the Algerian War inspired them to resist this totalitarian mindset. Thus, the students and the workers joined forces to establish a general strike. The number of people was over ten million, shaking the French economy and pushing De Gaulle's French Government.

These social changes were deeply influenced by Sartre's idea of freedom, which focused on how individuals should work towards Freedom and responsibility through authentic choices. Sartre's philosophy challenged every individual to reject the system, whether that system was traditional, religious, or political. The May 1968 protesters perfectly defined Sartre's calls for authenticity and resistance. The protestors wanted democracy, involvement in politics, and social changes, reflecting Sartre's belief that humans are radically free and must define themselves through actions. Sartre's support for anti-colonial movements in the Algerian War of Independence shaped the ideological backdrop of the protests.

The May '68 movement, therefore, was not just a local political event but part of a broader global struggle against imperialism and capitalism. The protesters, inspired by Sartre's existentialism, sought to reclaim their freedom and dignity through resistance to the oppressive systems that controlled their lives (Poster).

4.5 The Zapatistas and Anti-Globalization Movements

After Sartre's death, his existential philosophy did not die; instead, it profoundly impacted later movements, including the Zapatista uprising in Mexico. In 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) launched an armed insurrection in response to the imposition of neoliberal policies under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The Zapatistas' critique of neoliberalism aligns with Sartre's condemnation of capitalism as a system that alienates individuals from their labour, humanity, and freedom (Sartre 58). In his *Change the World Without Taking Power*, John Holloway talked about the Zapatistas' efforts to reclaim their Indigenous identity and assert autonomy in the face of capitalist pressure, which are deeply rooted in Sartrean ideas of authenticity and self-determination. Sartre argued that authentic human existence could only be achieved through active engagement with the world, a concept reflected in the Zapatistas' emphasis on grassroots action, collective decision-making, and mutual care within their communities (Holloway 74). The Zapatistas' rejection of imposed identities and their assertion of a new identity rooted in their culture and community values is like Sartre's call to create freedom and dignity in a world that systematically controls people (Holloway 82). The Zapatistas' resistance to neoliberalism and their emphasis on creating works according to moral duties embody Sartre's belief that human freedom is inseparable from

collective responsibility. Sartre argued that freedom was not simply the liberation of the individual.

However, the Zapatistas' commitment towards solidarity and mutual care was seen as a shared responsibility toward other people, a philosophy where one's actions will be a lesson to others. Marcos's *Our Word is Our Weapon* (2001) delves into how the Zapatista movement is connected with Sartre's existentialist ideas. In both of the works, it was argued that the Zapatistas have sought to create an authentic space of existence in opposition to the dehumanizing forces, exemplifying Sartre's notion of praxis — the idea that humans must act to transform their circumstances, even in the direst situation, such as the anti-globalization protests in Seattle in 1999.

The anti-globalization protests in Seattle mainly targeted the World Trade Organization (WTO). The core goal of the WTO was to promote neoliberal ideas, which promoted capitalism. The protest movement directly reflected Sartre's belief that individuals must resist systems that alienate, take away their freedom, and dehumanize them. The protesters organized direct actions such as sit-ins and blockades, embodying Sartre's notion of praxis — the belief that freedom is only possible through active engagement and world transformation (Sartre 33). The movement's refusal to accept the dominant neoliberal narrative of the state not having control over its economy parallels Sartre's concept of bad faith, where individuals and societies deceive themselves into accepting everything and not taking responsibility. By rejecting corporate narratives and exposing the injustices behind globalization, the protesters embodied Sartre's critique of the self-deception of bad faith.

The critiques of Naomi Klein in “No Logo” (1999) provide a valuable perspective on the Seattle protests. She explains how the protestors' actions embodied Sartre's existential commitment to freedom and the ethical obligation to challenge oppression.

The protesters were large, and many groups—from labour unions and environmental activists to students and indigenous representatives—came together to fight for social justice. Sartre believes that freedom is responsible for others, and the protestors took that responsibility—their guided collective efforts. By resisting the structures of power represented by the WTO and the global capitalist system, Sartre's concept of authentic freedom inspired them to act authentically to transform and reject the systemic dehumanization imposed by neoliberal globalization.

4.6 Sartrean Praxis in Collective Resistance

Now, from Algeria to the Zapatista movement, the core reason would be the tension between freedom and liberty. As John Stuart Mill explained in his book *On Liberty*, society fails to value individuality as essential to well-being. Mill argues that most people do not care about the "free development of individuality." He believes that individuality is not just a luxury or personal preference, but a vital part of what makes civilization, education, and culture meaningful.

However, society often fails to recognize this; most people are content with conformity and do not see why others should think or live differently. Worse, many reformers—who seek to improve society—view individuality as a threat or annoyance to their plans for what they believe is best for everyone (Mill 121–22). In a way, Sartre rejects the idea of liberty as imposed by society, instead arguing for a more radical notion of freedom rooted in individual responsibility and existential choice (Sartre 489). To conclude, Jean-Paul Sartre's idea of existential freedom

has played an important role in shaping global resistance. It is a philosophical idea that showcases the power of both individual and collective action, establishing freedom not as a means of doing what one wishes but as a responsibility.

The Algerian War of Independence, the May 1968 protest in France, the Zapatista movement in Mexico, and the protest in Seattle uphold Sartre's philosophy as a guiding force to understand how to utilize Freedom properly. His vision of freedom, rooted in authenticity and collective understanding, profoundly influenced various movements throughout time.

Chapter 5

We Are Condemned to Be Free: Sartre's Freedom in an Unfree World

5.1 Radical Freedom in a Contemporary Context

There is little doubt that the foundation of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy is rooted deeply in his concept of freedom. For Sartre, humans are radically free to choose their actions, shape their paths, and, ultimately, create their identities. However, this freedom does not come without responsibility. Sartre believed that human beings are born without any predetermined essence or purpose. Instead, it is through their choices and actions that they define who they are. As he famously stated, “existence precedes essence,” meaning we exist first and only later create meaning through our actions (Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* 22).

Therefore, for Sartre, freedom is both a gift and a burden, because with this freedom comes the responsibility of accepting the consequences of one's choices. Living authentically requires individuals to act with courage in a world that provides no ready-made meaning. However, Sartre also acknowledged that people often escape from this responsibility through “bad faith” — a state of self-deception where individuals deny their freedom and conform to social norms or external expectations to avoid anxiety and fear. Instead of taking ownership of their choices, they blame circumstances, social pressures, or fate. Authentic existence, in contrast, demands that people resist this tendency and embrace the discomfort that comes with true freedom (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 70).

We can also see how Sartre's own life and work inspired not only individuals but also movements around the world to resist oppression and claim their freedom — from the anticolonial struggles in Algeria and Vietnam to the May 1968 protests in France and even later movements like the 1999 Seattle anti-globalization protests and the Zapatista uprisings in Mexico. This leads to the paper's central argument: Sartre's idea of freedom remains deeply relevant because freedom is inseparable from human existence. As Dusan Galic rightly notes, “Individuals cannot evade their freedom because it is the foundation of their existence. Every choice, action, or even refusal to act contributes to shaping who they are and who they will become” (Galic 15).

5.2 Surveillance Capitalism and the Digital Gaze

In this sense, Freedom is not something external that can be granted or taken away. It is embedded within our very being. However, in the contemporary world, the practice of freedom often feels increasingly complex. One of the main challenges comes from the rise of surveillance capitalism and digital technology.

Today, corporations and governments collect massive amounts of personal data, monitoring , online activity, and even predicting individual choices. For example, China's social credit system tracks citizens' behaviour to reward or punish them, while Edward Snowden's 2013 revelations exposed how Western governments collaborated with tech companies to access private data. Shoshana Zuboff explains in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* that companies like Google

and Facebook turn personal data into products, manipulating user behavior for profit (Zuboff 52).

In this way, digital surveillance directly challenges personal freedom, as online spaces are increasingly shaped by algorithms designed to control attention, choices, and even beliefs. This manipulation often leads individuals into bad faith in the digital world. Social media platforms, for instance, create environments where users surrender their freedom to trends, popular opinions, and algorithmic control. Instead of thinking independently, many users unconsciously conform to the expectations of digital culture, losing touch with their authentic selves. Here, Sartre's concept of "the gaze" from *Being and Nothingness* perfectly explains this situation. He argued that when we are watched or observed, we risk becoming passive objects in the eyes of others rather than active, free subjects (Sartre 259). The same phenomenon occurs in the digital world. The Cambridge Analytical scandal in 2018 is a prime example of how personal data was exploited to manipulate voters, undermining free decision-making in the democratic process. Constant observation leads individuals to act not from freedom but from fear of judgement, exclusion, or punishment.

5.3 Economic Inequality and Facticity

Moreover, freedom in today's world is deeply tied to economic inequality. As Amartya Sen argues in *Development as Freedom*, poverty is not just about low income but about deprivation of basic capabilities and choices. He notes, "Poverty must be seen as a deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty" (Sen 87). This connects directly to Sartre's idea of "facticity" — the

material conditions one is born into, such as race, gender, class, or historical context, over which individuals have no control.

While these conditions shape a person's life to a certain extent, Sartre still insists that people retain the freedom to choose how they respond. However, in a world where the wealthy enjoy limitless options while the poor struggle for survival, freedom becomes unequally distributed. Political and social structures further limit freedom by creating systems where individuals feel they cannot conform. In authoritarian regimes like North Korea or Russia, criticizing the government can result in severe punishment.

5.4 Political Oppression and Bad Faith

However, even in democratic societies, political correctness, nationalism, or cultural traditions can suppress individual voices. When facing such pressures, people often convince themselves they have “no choice,” which, according to Sartre, is another form of bad faith. He powerfully reminds us, “We do not suffer violence because of the orders of others, but because we choose to obey them” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 541). Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* analysis becomes especially relevant in this context. He argues that individuals willingly give up their freedom because of fear, insecurity, or the desire to belong. Fromm writes, “The individual ceases to be himself; he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns and loses all sense of self” (Fromm 98). This alienation from one's authentic self is perhaps the greatest threat to freedom in the modern world.

Interestingly, the answer to all these crises of freedom, both in Sartre's time and our contemporary world, lies within Sartre's idea of freedom. The reason why Sartre's existential ideas became so widely accepted in 20th-century France is quite simple. It was not only because Sartre told people what was restricting them, he also offered them a roadmap to break free from those restrictions (Flynn 45). Sartre's philosophy identified the chains and showed the possibility of liberation.

5.5 The 2024 July Resistance in Bangladesh

Now, if we shift our focus to the present world, it becomes evident that our freedom is constantly restricted in various ways. We are forced to live in systems and structures that prevent us from fully realizing or utilizing our freedom. Moreover, this very struggle is where Sartre's idea of Freedom begins, with restrictions. Sartre believed that freedom is not something given easily; instead, it emerges through awareness, resistance, and the courage to live authentically despite the limiting conditions of the world (Sartre 97). For Sartre, creating meaning in life requires taking responsibility for one's actions, resisting oppression, and practicing freedom, even when circumstances seem unbearable.

When we look at the people we consider significant, revolutionary, or inspiring, we realize that their greatness comes from this very ability — the ability to exercise their freedom within restrictions. They dared to live authentically, take responsibility for their actions, and challenge systems that tried to control them. Their actions become a source of motivation for others to follow the same path of freedom. A striking example that strongly reflects Sartre's idea of

Freedom is the “July Resistance” of 2024 in Bangladesh. This real-life event shows how Sartre's philosophy of radical freedom, although challenging to practice, often finds its expression in moments of crisis. The protest initially began as a “Quota Movement” against the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) recruitment system, which allocated only 20% of its positions based on merit. In comparison, the remaining 80% were reserved for different quotas, including a significant 30% for freedom fighter descendants.

This discriminatory policy ignited anger among the students, especially from public universities. However, within days, the protest turned violent. Instead of listening to the students' demands, the government launched a brutal crackdown. They used their student wing and police forces to attack the students, spreading false rumors to discredit the movement and presenting the protesters as conspirators against the nation. Many students were beaten, injured, and even killed. The government's actions reflected what Sartre warned about — the structures of power that try to deny human freedom (Sartre 121).

Nevertheless, what followed was an extraordinary act of radical freedom. Private university students, who were not directly affected by the BCS quota system, could not remain silent after witnessing the injustice faced by their fellow students. On July 18, they launched a countrywide counter-protest in solidarity.

This marked a turning point in the resistance. The movement was no longer just about the BCS quota — it had evolved into a larger fight for freedom, dignity, and justice. The students stood firm despite severe restrictions, such as internet shutdowns, phone tapping, arrests, and media

manipulation. The resistance grew stronger, eventually involving students and ordinary citizens, who realized the truth and joined the fight.

Finally, on August 6, 2024, Bangladesh witnessed what many called its second independence, as the students and citizens successfully brought down the authoritarian government. This entire incident is a living example of Sartre's concept of freedom. It shows how freedom, according to Sartre, is not about living without restrictions but about confronting them bravely. It is about taking action, assuming responsibility, and inspiring others to resist oppression. Sartre believed that humans are condemned to be free, meaning, even in the harshest conditions, humans always have the freedom to choose their response (Sartre 49). The students of Bangladesh, through their courageous resistance, practiced exactly that. They refused to live in bad faith, refused to be passive victims, and instead became agents of change by embracing their radical freedom. Ultimately, Sartre's existential philosophy clarifies that freedom is never ready-made or handed down to us. Instead, it is something we continuously create through our actions and choices. As Sartre famously quoted, "Freedom is what you do with what has been done to you."

The paper argues that the most powerful way to understand Freedom is through the lens of Sartre's thought. No matter how restrictive or challenging the systems around us may be, Sartre's philosophy insists that true freedom lies in our courage to confront those realities, act authentically, and take full responsibility for shaping our existence, either within or in resistance to those systems.

Synthesize rather than repeat. You tend to repeat the same ideas quite often. Please read your entire thesis over and cut out the repetitive parts.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Choosing to be Free

Ultimately, Jean-Paul Sartre's "existentialism" provides a profound understanding of human Freedom. At its core, Sartre's "existentialism" believes that "Existence precedes essence"- A statement that individuals are not born with any inherent purpose. Instead, they are thrown into a world that is devoid of meaning, and through their choices, they will find meaning in this world. This makes freedom not a luxury but an unavoidable condition of human existence. In every moment, we must choose what to do, who to be, and how to live life, and with every choice comes the burden of responsibility.

According to Sartre, we are "condemned to be free." Through each chapter, the thesis argued that Sartre's "existentialism" is a necessary point of view that helps us understand freedom in both philosophical and practical terms. It helps us look beyond the superficial idea of freedom, which is being free. But he says that real freedom is being able to decide who you are in a world with no future. People like us are in charge of making our own lives by acting in a smart and sensible way. However, this freedom is not at all simple; it comes with a lot of worry, doubt, and pain. It asks us to be responsible for every choice we make, with no one else to defend or excuse us.

His idea of "bad faith" shows how we try to avoid taking responsibility by telling ourselves we have no choice but to accept our situations and give up the freedom that makes us unique. We

stop being active and real in relation to the system, which keeps us from using our freedom.

"Existentialism" by Sartre tells us not to lie to ourselves and live a false life. It makes our lives empty and makes us strangers to ourselves.

But to live truly, we have to be strong-willed enough to face problems head-on and always act in a way that is in line with our values, no matter what. The importance of Sartre's ideas is clear when we look at the real world. As we live in a time of surveillance, capitalism, political repression, and structural inequality, work gets in the way of our freedom. People are constantly being watched, controlled, and put into groups. In a world like this, where our freedom is limited, Sartre's ideas are important and applicable. It helps us remember that we can still fight back even when things are hard. Even if the world tries to change us, we can and should still choose how to describe ourselves.

History has shown over and over that people can stand up to oppression, get their freedom back, and live their true lives. This is something that Sartre's own life as a philosopher shows. His support for Algeria's anti-colonial movements and his revolutionary nature to fight against what is wrong have shown how existentialism can guide both personal and political resistance, from the Vietnam War to the French protests of 1968. Not long ago, groups like the Zapatista uprising and the anti-globalization protests in Seattle in 1999 were similar to Sartre's ideas. Even the July 2024 Resistance in Bangladesh shows how powerful extreme freedom can be. Even though they were told lies, hurt, and repressed, students and regular people did not give up. They chose to fight back. They also got back their freedom, respect, and voice. Sartre never said that freedom would be simple or safe; he always thought the reverse. It's scary because we have to live with

the weight of our choice. But this weight is what gives it meaning. When we live as free beings, we accept that things can go wrong and take full responsibility for what we become. Freedom can't be given; it has to be made. It was gained by having the courage, going through hard times, and always choosing to live honestly.

In the end, this thesis's main study question was: Why should the idea of freedom be looked at through the philosophical lens of Jean-Paul Sartre? How do his ideas about freedom and human nature still apply today? The question was answered by showing how Sartre's theory gives us a great way to think about human agency, not as abstract thought but as facing responsibility and making sense of the world every day.

Existentialism by Sartre doesn't offer comfort in the end; it challenges us to live without making excuses, to find meaning where none is given, and to carry the weight of our life with courage and honesty. In a world where many people seek safety in conformity or denial, Sartre tells us that freedom is not just a choice; it is a condition that we can't escape, and what we do with it determines who we are.

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