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## Death as a Limitation to Human Freedom: A Critical Look at Jean-Paul Sartre's Existential Position on Freedom and Death

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### **Abstract:**

*This work consists of a critical appraisal of Jean-Paul Sartre's claim of absolute freedom despite of the reality of death. If death terminates man's transcendence and forecloses his possibilities, then it also does limit his freedom. It is the argument of this work that freedom has its limitation and the greatest of such is death. Though death may limit man's freedom it is not the end of man. The work employing the expository and critical methods discussed the reality of death within the context of Sartre's existential position on freedom. It is Sartre's claim that death is outside man's possibilities and thus cannot limit man's freedom in the real sense since it comes from outside man. For him, when death comes the pour soi (man, consciousness or freedom) is no more. The work argues that death which terminates ones existence does limit his potentialities and possibilities. The work further argues against Sartre's position that one's death makes him a prey to other humans and also makes his existence absurd and meaningless. Against Sartre's position, the work concludes that freedom has its limitations among which is death. Though death limits man's possibilities, it is not the end of everything about man.*

**Keywords:** Death, freedom, human existence, facticity, Absurdity

### **1. Introduction**

The question of human freedom occupies a very prominent part in the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre. For Sartre, either man is free and God does not exist or God exists and man is not free. This means that human freedom cannot co-exist with God's existence. Sartre's existentialism chose human freedom and denied the existence of God. It is the position of Sartre that man is nothing but freedom. If at all man has essence, then freedom is his essence. Sartre so glorified human freedom to the extent that he declared it absolute or unlimited and holds that nothing can stop man from being free except man himself. Sartre indeed did agree that death which lies outside the human situation and possibilities can limit man's freedom. For him death terminates freedom, consciousness or human transcendence. It is the completion of human essence, the end of one's possibilities.

This work, employing the critical and expository methods, takes a critical look at Sartre's notion of human freedom and the reality of death. It presents an elaborate discussion on Sartre's position on freedom which he sees as the essence of man. It articulates Sartre's view on the origin, foundation and nature of human freedom. It also reviews Sartre's firm assertion that freedom is a yoke and burden to human existence of which death appears a liberation from. Going further the work discussed some basic dispositions which, according to Sartre, man betrays in the presence of his inescapable freedom, these include: anguish, abandonment, despair and nausea. These basic dispositions, according to Sartre, arouse in man the feeling of the absurdity and meaninglessness of human existence. Since Jean-Paul Sartre resolutely argues for unlimited freedom in spite of the facticities of life, the work reviews the various facticities of life including death which can pose as obstacles to human freedom. Finally the work discussed the reality of death within the context of Sartre's existential position on freedom where death which, according to Sartre, comes from outside man's situation limits man's freedom and possibilities. Here the work frowns at Sartre's assertion that one's death makes him a prey to the Other and also makes his existence absurd and meaningless. In conclusion the work holds that though death may be a limitation of the pour-soi, freedom or consciousness, though death may be a termination of one's projections and possibilities, though it may bring to an abrupt end the combat between one and his environment and the other human beings, death is not the end of everything. After death, the fact of one haven been in existence remains, his legacies, the fruits of his choices, his history, his successes and failures as well as the memory of him in the minds of those whose lives he positively impacted upon remains. Hence death may be a limitation of human freedom and transcendence but death is not the end everything about man.

### **2. The Place of Human Freedom in Sartre's Existential Philosophy**

It is worthy of note that Sartre presented his doctrine of radical freedom precisely at the moment of Europe's time of troubles. The crises of the two World Wars, the depression and fascism were still lingering on. Faith in the harmony of

science and morality, technology and freedom was gradually fading. Social theorists were much ready to dismiss the notion that men could shape their destiny because of their freedom.

It was in such a skeptical social environment that Sartre emerged to proclaim absolute freedom for man saying: "Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of human being is suspended in his freedom. What we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the being of "human reality". Man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the beings of man and his being-free" (Being 25).

For Jean-Paul Sartre, freedom is at the center of human existence. It is not a special privilege which one earns or develops; it is not an 'essence' of man in the sense that it could be distinguished from his appearance, from his normal everyday existence. "For Sartre, freedom was radically democratic since it enveloped every being at every moment of existence" (Poster 80).

Sartre's position on human freedom is another very controversial area of his Humanistic Existentialism. After denying the existence of human essence or nature as a consequence of his postulatory atheism, he said that man is fundamentally existence and nothing else. In the absence of God and any supra-human consciousness to pre-conceive man's essence, man is completely free. During his earthly life man is constantly creating himself by means of the existential choices he makes. Man creates his essence which will be complete only at the moment of his death.

### 3. The Origin, Foundation and Nature of Human Freedom

Sartre's doctrine of freedom was a child of his phenomenological description of being. In his *Being and Nothingness* which he subtitled a "Phenomenological Ontology", Sartre carefully traces his ideas in relation to Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. From a phenomenological examination of being, Sartre discovered two qualities of reality: being and nothingness, the being-in-itself (en-soi) and the being-for-itself (pour-soi), which can be described as the non-conscious and consciousness. Being (en-soi) is full, solid, passive, complete, self-identical, inert and massive while Nothingness (pour-soi) is empty, fluid, dynamic, nonself-identical and a lack. The in-itself is what it is, it simply "is" (Being xxxix) while the for-itself is not what it is. Being-for-itself is consciousness. Making use of Husserl's insight Sartre defines consciousness like Heidegger thus: "Consciousness is a being such that in its being, its being is in question in so far as this being implies a being other than itself" (Being xxxviii).

For Sartre, the structure of consciousness itself is a lack, a flight towards what it is not. Freedom, in Sartre's view results from the fact that man is not self-sufficient, not fully real and therefore actually inferior to the fullness of being of the in-itself. Man's freedom is a consequence of his ontological inferiority, of a diminution of his being. Understanding himself as incomplete, man strives to fill this gap, he engages himself in a fruitless task of trying to be the in-itself which possesses completeness of being.

It can, therefore, be said that for Sartre, freedom is a summon to action. Action primarily implies a lack; there is a need to be fulfilled or a possibility to be realized. For Sartre, freedom goes hand in hand with consciousness and consciousness is as such a projection towards possibilities.

From the above, we can assert that Sartre sees Nothingness, as the foundation of man's freedom. Nothingness makes man the kind of being he is, a being without support and difficult to identify with anything in a fixed, permanent way, a being always negating itself by negating and nihilating. Sartre insists that man does not have freedom, he is freedom. Freedom is not a faculty of the soul or a property of the will. He says: "I am indeed an existent who learns his freedom through his acts, but I am also an existent whose individual and unique existence temporalizes itself as freedom. As such I am necessarily consciousness of freedom since nothing exists in consciousness except as the non-thetic consciousness of existing. Thus my freedom is perpetually in question in my being; it is not a quality added on or a property of my nature. It is very exactly the stuff of my being; and as in my being, my being is in question. I must necessarily possess a certain comprehension of freedom" (Being 439).

Freedom means lack of being; it means that man has to choose and make himself whatever he becomes. For Sartre, freedom is a transcending and nihilating being rather than an aspect of being. There is no resting place for man because he cannot become a thing in the world no matter how he transforms himself. The lack which is freedom is interminable except by death; then man finally becomes a thing. As Desan rightly observed: "For-itself, Nothingness, Human consciousness, Freedom, Free choice are, in Sartre's system, one and the same thing" (101).

In his lecture, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (1946), Sartre proclaimed further the absolute nature of human freedom asserting that "man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself" (291). Affirming with Heidegger that man is a project, Sartre pushes man's freedom and responsibility further, saying: "Thus, the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. And when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men" (Existentialism 291).

It is Sartre's view in almost all his works that man is absolutely free, nothing can stand on his way to freedom except himself. In *Being and Nothingness* he insisted: "I am condemned to be free. This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free" (439). Since man is his freedom, Sartre asserts that his freedom is absolute. He is free in all situations and circumstances even when he pretends not to be free.

### 4. Freedom Is a Yoke and Burden to Man's Existence of Which Death Is a Liberation

Sartre's firm belief in the absolute nature of human freedom made him to proclaim man as a law unto himself and a creator of values and moral laws. Man not only creates values for himself but also for others. He has no reference point

for his actions since there are no laws to refer to except those he has created himself. Thus we can agree with Breisach that Sartre's freedom is not a "pleasant experience. It is an awesome freedom in which man is immersed and it is inescapable" (99). In this freedom man must always be free, he cannot be without choice and he must make a choice. Sartre confirmed this when he said: "Man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does... Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse... If God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behavior"(Existentialism 295).

It is Sartre's argument that since there is no higher authority than man and consequently no essences or natures, there are likewise no norms or values. In such a situation man's freedom becomes a crushing and overwhelming condemnation. It is no more a blessing but a curse and a horrible yoke. Man finds himself faced with the appalling necessity of making choices without the help of any norms made by nature, God or his fellow man. He must create values in the absence of laid down rules of conduct to guide his actions. For Sartre, there is absolutely no one and no thing that can either justify man or condemn him. He is the supreme maker and inventor of values and laws and he assumes complete responsibility for all his actions without reference to any person or thing. Proclaiming the absolute nature of human freedom Sartre said: "It follows that my freedom is the unique foundation of values and that nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable" (Being 38).

Sartre's contention is that man's freedom is boundless, he is free in every respect. In his Humanistic Existentialism, Sartre rejected all conventional rules and guidelines which men normally follow in the performance of actions. For him, value is not a given. It is rather an ideal which man's freedom can create and destroy at will (Lafarge 62). Leo Sweeney beautifully summed up this view of Sartre in his book *A Metaphysics of Authentic Existentialism* saying: "...without God and without stable natures which would ground norms of conduct, there can be no invariable, universal laws -- rather, each man is a law to himself as he finds himself now in this, now in that actual situation. Without God, too, there is no divine providence and hence, the countless chance events constituting reality are totally meaningless and unintelligible. The career of each existent begins and ends in random absurdity" (25).

Man as unqualified, absolute and ungrounded freedom is condemned to carry the entire responsibility of the world by himself alone. He is abandoned. This means he cannot run away from this responsibility, he must make his choices without any assistance and create values. He must give meaning to his own life which before has been an empty shell. In so doing, he fills the whole world with meaning. Sartre develops this point saying: "...man being condemned to be free, carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders. He is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being... I am responsible for everything, in fact, except for my very responsibility, for I am not the foundation of my being (Being 553,555). With the weight of the world on his shoulders and freedom apparently a yoke death appears a big relief. In the face of such an awesome and inescapable absolute freedom, man develops some basic dispositions or emotions namely: anguish, nausea, abandonment, despair and the feeling of absurdity.

## 5. Man's Basic Dispositions in The Face of His Inescapable Freedom

These dispositions are also manifestation of man's subjectivity. They are consequences of man's apprehension of his unlimited freedom. In seeing himself as nothingness, consciousness, emptiness or a gap man (the for-itself) strives to escape from this state by projecting himself. In his attempt to avoid wholehearted acceptance of being a being-for-itself (nothingness, consciousness and freedom) there are basic dispositions which grip him and remind him of the futility of his endeavour to escape the freedom he is. These dispositions bring him face to face with what he is, they confront him with his subjectivity and inescapable freedom.

## 6. Anguish

As a manifestation of man's subjectivity this basic disposition, anguish or anxiety comes to play when man realizes the real nature of his freedom and its accompanying responsibility. Constantly checkmated in his projects, constantly confronted by the reality of his unlimited freedom of choice in creating meaning not only for himself but also for others, man experiences dread and anguish. Knowing that he is completely alone, absolutely on his own without any excuse, under the fearful pressure of his own responsibility, the freedom to which he is condemned frightens and worries him. Commenting on anguish Oyeshile says: "It is the coming to face decision making situation which can only be done by oneself-. A man experiences anguish when he contemplates his own freedom. When a man really sees for the first time that nothingness exists within him, that is, when he realizes that he is free to do and think whatever he chooses, he suffers anguish" (193).

For Sartre, anguish, just like freedom, is an inescapable disposition. Trying to flee from anguish "is only another mode of becoming conscious of anguish" (Being 43). Those who do not betray this disposition of anxiety, according to Sartre, are merely disguising their anguish or are in flight from it. Such effort is fruitless since man cannot escape from making a choice or taking a decision and in so doing man cannot but feel certain anguish (Existentialism 292, 294). The category of anguish is one of the most ridiculed categories of contemporary existentialism. Herbert Spiegelberg displays certain impatience with Sartre's assertion that all values depend upon our freedom and that we are subjected to this great anguish as a result. He accuses Sartre of a number of gratuitously assumed propositions which are absolutely lacking in proof. He writes: "Sartre's anguish has nothing to do with cowardly timidity in the face of real or imaginary

dangers. It expresses man's response to his assumed responsibilities which in Sartre's case are particularly overwhelming since they embrace no less than the meaning of his world as a whole" (486).

## 7. Abandonment

As a basic disposition that manifests man's subjectivity, abandonment or forlornness emerges as a consequence of Sartre's denial of God's existence. In the absence of a creator God who watches over the world, man finds himself in the world without any support for his choices and actions. His freedom becomes an inescapable heavy burden on his shoulders. Being freedom, man cannot help but continue to create himself at every moment. Without any guide posts along the road of his life, he builds the road to the destiny he has chosen by himself. Traditional values and moral codes are not binding on him and as such offer very little assistance in his creating his future. They cannot relieve him of his freedom to create, invent and project himself forward and to be lonesome in the process.

Abandonment, therefore, for Sartre is an inescapable disposition so long as God does not exist. Man is left alone to manage the affairs of the world he had not created, to create values for himself and others without support or reference to anyone or thing, he bears responsibility for his failures or success in all circumstances. Thus Sartre concludes: "That is what "abandonment" implies, that we ourselves decide our being. And with this abandonment goes anguish" (Existentialism 299). In his *Essays in Existentialism*, Sartre also insists on this basic disposition which flows from man's unlimited freedom, he says: "I am responsible for everything, in fact except for my responsibility ... I am abandoned in the world... in the sense that I find myself suddenly alone and without help" (66-67).

## 8. Despair

This basic disposition which Sartre regards also as a manifestation of man's subjectivity seems to be the strangest consequence of freedom and it very much exposes the darkness and the questionable character of Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism. According to Sartre: "As for "despair" the meaning of this expression is extremely simple. It merely means that we limit ourselves to a reliance upon that which is within our wills, or within the sum or the probabilities which render our action feasible" (Existentialism 298).

For Sartre, despair calls on man to act without hope for any meaning and regularity in the world except that which he himself introduces. He insists that there is no order in the universe other than that established by man. In the absence of any Supernatural being, man becomes the creator of order and meaning in the universe. He becomes the centre of meaning and its creator. Consequently no hope exists for man outside himself.

Sartre's notion of despair is at its core an attack directed against hope in God and also the mass movements of Marxism. He rejects the tendency to take despair as an excuse for doing nothing because this will entail an outright denial of man's basic condition and obligation. Thus he reminds us that: "Man is nothing else but what he proposes, he exists only in so far as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is" (Existentialism 300).

Man is what he has done and is doing, not what he dreams, hopes and expects. Only an understanding of this activist interpretation of man opens the door to Sartre's concept of transcendence. Sartre's transcendence is not that of God but that of man. Man surpasses himself continuously beyond himself. Man surpasses himself constantly, and in this constant self transcendence lays the new meaning given to transcendence.

This is the climax and last stage of Sartre's aim to put man at the centre as the creator. With this human existence no longer carries any meaning beyond itself. To live one's existence is the highest fulfillment. Man exists solely for himself and his own task.

There is no hope outside man. Man is the hope of man - man is the future of man (Existentialism 295).

## 10. Nausea

Nausea or disgust is another basic attitude which Sartre believes all conscious beings must experience in response to the world. Every free and conscious being experiences nausea in its contact with the world whether in perception, emotion or action because this contact is through the medium of our own awareness of our bodies. Mary Warnock describes it as "a kind of physiological counterpart of pre-reflective consciousness" which one carries around with himself as long as he is alive (Existentialism 109).

According to Sartre, it is not only in the apprehension of our bodies that we experience nausea. This experience also emerges when we become aware of certain key-aspects of the world. The very nature of existence itself disgusts us. Of this disposition Sartre says: "Consciousness does not cease "to have" a body.... This perpetual apprehension on the part of my for-itself of an insipid taste which I cannot place, which accompanies me even in my efforts to get away from it, and which is my taste- this is what we have described elsewhere under the name of nausea" (Being 338). Only a conscious free being can experience nausea. An-en-soi (in-itself) which lacks freedom and consciousness, cannot experience this disposition.

If according to Sartre, man perpetually carries this feeling of nausea, then human existence will be a miserable experience. Life itself will be repulsive and it will be very unfair to reduce man's experience of the world he lives in to this pitiable state.

## 11. Freedom and the Absurdity of Human Existence

Sartre's humanistic existentialism reduces human existence to absurdity. According to him, the for-itself which is consciousness, freedom or nothingness is always what he is not and never what he is, His struggles are always fruitless and

his unlimited freedom and its attendant responsibility frightens him and throw him into anguish, the feeling of abandonment and despair, and makes his life meaningless and a burden. These basic dispositions bring about the feeling of absurdity, or of the dispensableness of everything. Life is nothing but a futile struggle. Thus, the feeling of absurdity arises as a consequence of the burden imposed on man by his unlimited freedom. Iroegbu comments on this deepest negative point of Sartre's Existentialism thus: "Yes, alone I am, without help, abandoned in my absolute liberty, and alienated from all. I am consequently meaninglessly groping in the darkness of existential inevitability. I did choose, except to exist. As there is no help from above, atheism blinds any possible transcendental longing. As there is no help from below, beside or betwixt, solitariness walls me off from every other being. The ultimate result of Sartrean and other akin existentialistic philosophy is deviant alienation from every being: God, nature, society, other human beings, and most mortally, from myself. The end is self-evident: suicide" (255).

In as much as man can never realize his projects nothing can be more absurd than his existence in the midst of a world that knows him not. When man contemplates the facticity of his existence, the feeling of absurdity becomes inevitable. Freedom itself is absurd because it rests upon an absolutely gratuitous contingency - the fact that one's existence cannot be explained in relation to anything or person. It has no ontological foundation. As a being that chooses, man is simply 'there' - placed in a situation which is not of his own asking or choosing and yet he is responsible for everything that happens to him and others. His choices are absurd because there is no possibility of not choosing and this fact lies beyond all reason.

In the presence of such feeling of absurdity, Sartre encourages man not to develop the attitude of passivity but to transform his world by projecting his subjectivity through his choices in order to overcome the absurdity of human life. It is certain that Sartre himself is aware of the futility of this effort because at the end of it all absurdity is obviously inevitable. This lands Sartre himself in complete nihilism when he seemed compelled to say: "All existing beings are born for no reason, continue through weakness and die by accident... man is a useless passion. It is meaningless that we are born; it is meaningless that we die" (Nausea 180).

Joseph Mihalich sees this assertion as containing Sartre's basic themes, namely, that existing is absurd (de trop) in that it cannot be explained or justified, "that existing itself is fraught with confusion and bad faith" and that death, too, is de trop and wholly beyond anticipation and preparation (14).

## 12. Freedom and Facticity (Obstacles to Freedom)

Sartre did not deny the truth that physical, biological, social and psychological factors constitute one's situation, but he argues that in spite of them man is still very free to project what he wants.

The facticity of a human being is the particular set of contingent facts that are true of him alone. These facts that make man include: heredity, childhood experiences, habits, family, date of birth, place of birth and residence, physical appearances, class, nation, colour, culture, height, environment and so on. Most of these facts of life are outside our freedom of choice. We do not choose our parents or our date or place of birth. There are also great possibilities of these facts restricting our freedom of choosing what to make of ourselves and our future.

Sartre disagrees with this truth and argues that in spite of these facticities of life man is still absolutely free to determine his future. He denies that facticity even limits the possibilities open to man. Commenting on Sartre's rejection of any obstacles to freedom Desan says: "Sartre's freedom is something absolute; He rejects all determinism whatsoever, Even under its mitigated form as imperialism of the passions. Consequently, he presents us with a freedom more acute than, possibly, has been seen in two thousand years of philosophy" (107).

Sartre precisely looked at five of such facticities of life in relation to freedom. These include: one's place, past, surroundings, fellow human beings and death. He insisted in his denial of these facts being obstacles to freedom.

With regard to one's place, Sartre says that place in itself is neutral. It is neither an obstacle nor a help to one's freedom. It is one's "projection towards a certain end" that makes one's place either a help or a hindrance (Being 494). In his line of argument, therefore, a place becomes comfortable or not according to the end which one's freedom has chosen. Thus, if one's place is an obstacle to his freedom, it is because one has freely chosen an end for which one's place is an obstacle. Sartre's point is illustrated in the case of a poor worker in Paris who chooses a trip to New York, an impossible task considering his place. This obstacle will be removed if he chooses a trip to a neighboring city Versailles (Being 495). Thus it is not place itself but our choices that make place a hindrance to our freedom, Sartre concluded.

One can not rightly say that Sartre was completely blind to real life situation in which one's place of birth, nationality or place of residence can restrain his freedom to explore the possibilities open to him, for instance, if we consider elections where tribal affiliation comes first, a person from a minority tribe will always lose unless zoning comes into play.

In relation to one's past, Sartre asserts that freedom means to be free from all deterministic influence of the past. According to Sartre, a man is responsible for his past not only in the sense that his projecting made it what it was at the time, but also in the sense that he can choose what meaning it shall have in relation to his projects now (Being 498). Though a man does not "make" his situation, he does make whatever meaning it has for him, and for this he is responsible. The above view of Sartre with regard to the influence of one's past to his freedom leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Considering the type of past one has, is there not a certain motivation which pushes him to one direction rather than another? Has one's family history no influence over his future choices - either to be for it or against it? Having been a delinquent during one's youth, now transformed, shall one not at certain times still feel the influence of his past? There is in the life of some persons a past which they have come to reject, what about this past? Do these persons enjoy the same freedom as if this past had never been there? Sartre made many suggestive remarks but he did not solve these problems.

In considering one's surroundings, Sartre explained it not in terms of one's place or the space one occupies but in terms of the things (tools) which surround one with their "coefficient of adversity and utility" (Being 504). It is in the face of these things-in-themselves that man makes a choice and acts. Without them choice and action will be impossible. For Sartre, freedom means to be free to act, free to manipulate things. In as much as one's surrounding is indispensable to his actions and his freedom, they do also pose a resistance to his freedom. Sartre denies this latter truth arguing that we see our surroundings as obstacles to our freedom when we make bad choices. For example when we choose to use a bicycle (an indifferent tool) in a bad weather, it may be a very "resistant" thing. Thus Sartre concludes that it is one's free choice which makes them obstacles or helps.

We can say that Sartre's argument here is also faulty because most of the time it is not my free choice which makes my surroundings resistant but rather my surrounding which hinders my freedom. For example my choice of traveling with my bicycle for a very important errand in an unmotorable road may be prior to the bad weather (heavy rain with storm and big flood) this shatters my plans and leaves me only with the option of endangering my life or canceling my trips with drastic consequences.

Sartre's position with regard to one's fellow man is that the Other person threatens my freedom, he tries to rob me of my subjectivity by seeking to objectify me. Thus, it is Sartre's view that the Other limits me through his presence because freedom is only restricted by freedom. In this case, it is understood that not only a person restricts his own freedom but one's freedom restricts the freedom of another. According to Iwuagwu, "Sartre basically defined man's relations with the other in terms of conflict and not co-operation .... Since every human being is determined at all cost to make an object of the Other, he is a natural and a priori enemy of the other" (17). The view of the Other on me, according to Sartre, does restrict my freedom - though not in its internal and essential dimension but as some external limitation through the strength of the Other. In spite of these assertions Sartre still believed that his theory of absolute freedom is adequate notwithstanding the existence of the Other.

Finally, Sartre considered the fact of death which he fails to see as an obstacle to man's freedom. Sartre disagrees with Heidegger who considered death as one of man's possibilities. For Sartre, death is the destruction of my possible and is itself outside of my possible (Being 534). Death is absurd because one cannot choose the instant of death. It can come suddenly and shatter one's life-long dreams and projections. The for-itself is a perpetual desire, and death is the end of all desire. The for-itself is permanent expectation and death is the end of all expectations. The for-itself disappears forever when death appears (Being 540). Sartre, therefore, concludes that mortality lies outside the for-itself.

Death is the external limit of life; life itself is freedom and choice. Death is the limit of one's freedom, but a limit which one shall never grasp and which will never restrict one as a conscious being. For when death is there, one is no longer there.

In conclusion, we can say that Sartre's insistence on man's absolute freedom in the face of human facticity cannot be defended. Since these facts are independent of man's existence and are mostly irreversible they very much restrict man's choices. He has to make his choices within the limits provided by these facticities. If man's freedom to determine himself is limited and influenced by these facts then it cannot be absolute. The options or possibilities open to him are limited by these facts of life most of which he cannot transcend however he tries.

### 13. Death as a Limitation of Man's Freedom

In Sartre's existentialism just as existing is absurd (de trop) death too is absurd. According to Sartre: "All existing beings are born for no reason, continue through weakness and die by accident...man is a useless passion. It is meaningless that we are born; it is meaningless that we die (Nausea 180). The being-for-itself (pour-soi) which is consciousness, freedom, transcendence and perpetual desire is never what it is and is thus constantly in a state of becoming. It is always projecting itself into new situations while always much more than its past, present and future projects. It is fluid and dynamic. That the pour-soi is always more than its situation is what Sartre regards as the ontological foundation of freedom or consciousness. This continual transcendence of freedom or consciousness into new possibilities to be what it is not is terminated by death. When one dies, he finally assumes the status of a thing (en-soi). With death human projections and possibilities come to an end. With death one becomes complete and static.

Unlike Sartre, Heidegger sees man as a "being-to-death." In his *Being and Time* Heidegger portrays death as a phenomenon which assists Dasein to attain authentic existence. In his inauthentic existence Dasein scatters himself in his concerned dealing with things, hence as long as man is alive, he is incomplete, dispersed and difficult to gather back in his wholeness (276). According to Iwuagwu, "Heidegger sees death as the phenomenon which helps us to gather man back from his dispersion into wholeness. With death Dasein stands before itself in its own most potentiality for being.... For Heidegger, dying is not just an event that occurs to man at the close of his life, but man's mode of being, for man is a being-towards-death, a being who starts dying the very day of his birth and lives all his life towards death" (37).

This is not so for Sartre. Death, according to Sartre is outside one's situation, it is outside our possibilities because it is that which "comes to us from the outside and transforms us into the outside" (Being 545). While alive and in a situation our freedom is powerless over our death which comes from outside us. Whereas Heidegger speaks of Dasein as a "being-towards-death" and sees death as "Dasein's own most possibility" and one of man's possibilities (303), Sartre denied that we can encounter death in a situation because death cannot be our possibility. This is because to have possibilities is to have choices, whereas to be dead is to have no choice at all. This means that death "is the outside of freedom." For Sartre, death is the destruction of my possible and is itself outside of my possible (Being 534). What makes death absurd is that one may not be able to choose when to die, where to die or the manner of death. Most times death comes suddenly when least expected and shatters one's dreams or projections. The pour soi, for-itself or freedom is a perpetual desire or longing, and death is the termination of all desires. The for-itself or freedom is a permanent expectation and death is the end of all

expectations. The for-itself or freedom, according to Sartre, disappears forever when death appears (Being 540). Like other facticities of life death is the limit of one's freedom. This limit is one which the being-for-itself as consciousness or freedom shall never contemplate nor grasp because when death is there, the for-itself is no longer there. With death the for-itself becomes an unconscious being, "a thing" and no longer nothingness.

It is Sartre's view that while alive the pour-soi, for-itself, freedom or consciousness is perpetually engaged in an antagonistic and confrontational relationship with his environment and the Others. This battle continues even after death. The sad thing about death is that without consulting the for-itself it abruptly ends the combat by suppressing one of the combatants and unjustly handing over victory to the Other. For Sartre, the fact of one's own death removes all meaning from life and makes existence completely absurd (*de trop*). It is this unjustifiable suppression of consciousness (freedom or the for-itself) and the handing over of the prize of victory to the Other that led Sartre to say that "to be dead is to be a prey for the living" (Being 543). When we are dead and gone our lives and all we cherished while alive together with all our choices, legacies and history become potential objects for another pour-soi to interpret and reshape according to his or her whims or according to what Sartre describes as "instrumental complex" or peculiar interest (Being 482-483). "Sartre's analysis of death," according to Lightbody, "lends itself to this sort of resignation. Not only will I die, but my life, the choices I make, the things I have accomplished, are truly meaningless since the Other can re-interpret these things in a completely different manner than the manner in which I interpreted them" (95). For Sartre with my death the Other assumes absolute power over me, I become powerless and helpless and my projections and possibilities come to an end. At the point of death, I am forced to surrender to the Other. He laments thus: "But the fact of death without being precisely allied to either of the adversaries (I and the Other) in this same combat gives the final victory to the point of view of the Other by transferring the combat and prize to another level—that is, by suddenly suppressing one of the combatants." (Being 544).

It may be argued that Sartre's faulty notion of death is a consequence of his fundamentally erroneous phenomenological depiction of our "situation." To behold the Other person and the environment with suspicion and in a confrontational and antagonistic manner will surely lead to such negative apprehension of death. Such an approach will be, according to Lightbody, "to supplant ontology with ideology" (96) or as Marcus will say "to betray the promise of Utopia" (236).

While not denying the negative connotation of death which basically is a negation of life, it will be unacceptable to hold that death takes away everything of one's existence, i.e. leaving no trace of the pour-soi, the for-itself or freedom and making it appear as if he never existed. It is true that after my death the Other may re-interpret my choices, history and legacies. The Other may disobey my will, treat my body as he pleases, re-write my history or diary to please his "instrumental complex" and judge me without my defense, yet the facts of my having been, the facticities of my birth, my parentage, my place of birth and residence, my accomplishments, my past as well as my successes and failures he cannot change however he tries to re-write them. However, he tries the Other cannot change my identity, my legacy nor can he erase the memory of my having been, my actions and inactions. Hence after my death I cannot be termed a prey to the Other as Sartre supposes. After my death I cannot be viewed as a loser nor should my life be viewed as absurd or meaningless since my legacies live after me and the memory of me lingers in the minds of those whose lives I have impacted positively. Death may be sad since it terminates my projections and possibilities, yet the fact of my death is not the end of everything about me. According to Lightbody, "Sartre's position on freedom leads to some rather perplexing questions. First, if my body and indeed my legacy are such that they are free to be re-interpreted by the Other, then in what sense are they still considered mine? That is to say, does my personal identity, in any form, continue after I am dead? Do I not have at least some degree of freedom while alive to decide how I will be remembered? Indeed, is there anything left of 'me' when I die? These are important questions, but from Sartre's analysis it does not seem as though he makes room for them" (91). Death may terminate my physical existence; it cannot destroy the idea of me. Death may limit my possibilities but it cannot erase what my choices have accomplished. It may terminate my projections but has no power over my having been.

#### 14. Conclusion

It is undeniable that the problem of death offers a cog in Sartre's unrelenting assertion of unlimited freedom. Sartre's argument that death is outside my situation and thus not within my possibilities in no way resolves the issue that death limits my possibilities and terminates my transcendence. If by death I become a thing an *en-soi* and cease to be *pour-soi*, nothingness, freedom or consciousness then it means that death has transformed me from being nothing to being something, from being fluid to being static, from being conscious to being unconscious. It can rightly be said then that death is the last of my possibilities. After death I am open to no other possibility. If death transforms me from consciousness to unconsciousness, from nothingness to a thing it also means that death makes me a "ready-to-hand" (using a Heideggerian term), a tool like every other thing in my environment which is employable according to the whims and caprices of the Other conscious beings. It is only from this point of view that Sartre's assertion that "to be dead is to be a prey to the living" can be understood.

The above assertions could have been true if the human being is only nothingness, freedom, consciousness or transcendence, but the human being is a mixture of being and nothingness (*en-soi* and *pour-soi*). To be truly human the human being also must be in an environment and must have the other person (*l'être pour-autrui*). Though Sartre firmly believed that the Other is a big threat to my existence and freedom, he also holds that the Other is an absolutely essential condition for my very existence. In his essay *Existentialism Is a Humanism* he said: "The Other is indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself" (303). It can therefore be said that what constitutes the human being is being, nothingness, the Other and the environment, facticity or situation. With these constituent elements

of the human being it will be wrong for Sartre to consider man as "a useless passion" just because he is constantly transcending his possibilities and always superfluous. Through his numerous choices man accomplishes various feats that are permanent, indelible and praiseworthy. These legacies, historical facts and successful accomplishments cannot all be destroyed by death or be re-written by the Other. The Other may have power over me after my death, but there are facts about me that he cannot re-shape nor destroy. The fact of my having been, the fact of my accomplishments, the facts of my origin, my choices, my history and my death. These are facts and facts do not die. While we agree with Sartre that death limits or terminates my freedom we must say that death cannot destroy what my freedom has accomplished through its choices. Death cannot erase my legacies. These continue to live after death has terminated my transcendence and possibilities.

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