Chapter - 3

The Humanistic View of Jean Paul Sartre
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3.1 Introduction

Jean Paul Sartre is one of the well-known philosopher of existentialism in modern times. He proclaimed that freedom of man to be absolute and wanted to establish that in man’s life “existence precedes essence”. He adopted the Husserl’s phenomenological method to analyze the different layers of human existence. His philosophy deals with the all aspects of life, with an enquiry into the ontology of man’s being, ethical reality, social and political life to determine the authentic nature of human existence.

Man is understood to be a unique object of cognition and subject of activities, therefore none of the objective laws of the world should be applied to man. These alternative conceptions are characterized by heuristic moments. Thus, it is the conceptions of these philosophical trends that are most worth to be studies.

It is important to get clear what Sartre meant by humanism. Humanism is a very general term usually used to refer to any theory which puts human beings at the centre of things: so for instance, the humanism of the Renaissance was characterized by a movement away from metaphysical speculation about the nature of God to a concern with the works of humanity, especially in art and literature. Humanism has the positive connotation of being humane and is generally associated with an optimistic outlook. One version of humanism that
Sartre rejects as absurd is the self-congratulatory revealing in the achievements of the human race. The humanism that he endorses emphasizes the dignity of human beings; it also stresses the centrality of human choice to the creation of all values. Sartre’s existentialism also captures the optimism usually associated with humanism: despite the absence of pre-established objective values we are entirely responsible for what we become, and this puts the future of humanity in our own hands: Sartre quotes Francis Ponge approvingly “Man is the future of man.”

Human freedom is the central theme of all Sartre’s writings, philosophical as well as literary. He treats man as a being, who is inalienably and absolutely free. He equates man with freedom and pictures him as an autonomous and incontestable author of himself and the world around him. Sartre’s work “Existentialism and Humanism”, an essay on his brand of atheistic existentialism, provides a clear and detailed account of humanistic thought coupled with responsibility.

3.2 Life and Works

Jean-Paul Sartre was born in Paris on June 21, 1905, the only child of Anne-Marie and Jean-Baptiste Sartre. Both of his parents came from reputed families. Sartre’s paternal grandfather was a famous physician, and his maternal grandfather, Karl “Charles” Schweitzer, was a respected writer on topics of religion, philosophy, and languages. In 1906, Sartre’s father died of entercolitis, a disease he had contracted on a voyage to China while in the navy. After the death, Sartre and his mother moved into the highly disciplined home of Sartre’s grandfather, Karl Schweitzer. Sartre maintained a complicated relationship with his grandfather throughout his childhood. Like his mother, the young Sartre resented Schweitzer’s domineering presence and fallacious religiosity. However, Sartre was at least
mildly receptive to the tutoring of his grandfather, who had recognized early on Sartre’s lively, unique mind.

In 1924, Sartre enrolled at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* (ENS), an elite French university. In 1928, he made the acquaintance of a classmate named Simone de Beauvoir, who would become his lifelong companion and go on to become a tremendously important thinker herself. Her most famous work, *The Second Sex*, is regarded as one of the seminal texts of feminist thought. Although Sartre and De Beauvoir never married and never maintained an exclusive romantic relationship, they remained close both intellectually and emotionally until Sartre’s death in 1980.

After finishing his studies at ENS, Sartre served briefly in the army, than accepted a teaching position at a high school in northwest France. In 1933, Sartre left for Berlin to study under the great German philosopher Edmund Husserl, a thinker who contributed greatly to the synthesis of Sartre’s own philosophy. While in Berlin, Sartre also became acquainted with the work and briefly, the personality of Martin Heidegger, another representative philosopher of twentieth-century philosophy who also greatly influenced Sartre. In 1938, Sartre published *Nausea*, a philosophical novel heavily influenced with the ideas and themes of Husserl’s philosophy.

At the start of World War II, Sartre was once again conscripted into the military. He was captured by the Nazis in June 1940 and held as a prisoner of war until March 1941. He joined the French Resistance to Nazi occupation. During the months he spent in captivity, Sartre began work on what would become his magnum opus, the sprawling classic of existentialism entitled *Being and
"Nothingness". Published in 1943, the work which brought his existentialist philosophy to the forefront of the intellectual conversation that followed the war.

As an editor of the journal “Les Temps Modernes”, which was first published in 1945, Sartre had a constant and immediate method for his ideas, which evolved considerably over time as they adapted to the social and political context of the world in the decades that followed the war. While many of his peers, notably Albert Camus, supported America and its Western European allies in the Cold War, Sartre was a devoted Socialist and stood with the Soviet Union.

In seeking to unite his philosophical and political beliefs, Sartre maintained a firm belief in the idea that both literature and philosophy are inherently political, in function if not in content. He believed that the author or the artist must always create with the hope of changing the social order. Sartre himself enthusiastically lent his name and his writing to many causes, including, most famously, the struggle to end French colonialism in Africa.

In the last decades of his life, Sartre was perhaps better known for his political beliefs than for the existentialist philosophy that had elevated him to iconic status in France and throughout Europe. In the 1960s, student radicals in both Europe and America embraced Sartre as a hero and appropriated him as a symbol in their resistance to war, imperialism, and other reactionary cultural-political forces. However, Sartre was never much more than an icon of the counterculture. Until his death in 1980, he remained as a tremendously prolific and outspoken writer and embodied the conviction that philosophy, if it is to be serious, must be lived.

In his last years, Sartre, who had lost the use of one eye in childhood, became almost totally blind. Yet he continued to work with the help of a tape recorder,
producing with Benny Lévy portions of a “co-authored” ethics, in the eyes of many, the published parts of which indicate that its value may be more biographical than philosophical.

After his death, thousands spontaneously joined his funeral cortège in a memorable tribute to his respect and esteem among the public at large. As the headline of one Parisian newspaper lamented, “France has lost its conscience.”

Jean-Paul Sartre, an eminent French existentialist and man of letters, ranks as the most versatile writer and as the dominant influence on the intellectual life of the twentieth century. Apart from his philosophical magnum opus “Being and Nothingness”, Sartre has written a number of literary works like ‘Nausea’, ‘The Wall’, ‘No Exist’, ‘The Flies’, ‘The Roads to Freedom’, ‘The Words’ and many more. He also edited ‘Les Temps Modernes’, a review devoted to the discussion of political and literary questions from an existential point of view. He rejected the Noble Prize for literature awarded to him in 1964.

Sartre was born in Paris, where he spent most of his life. After a traditional philosophical education in reputed Parisian school that introduced him to the history of Western philosophy with a bias toward Cartesianism and neoKantianism. Sartre succeeded his former school friend, Raymond Aron, at the French Institute in Berlin (1933–1934) where he read the leading phenomenologists of the day, Husserl, Heidegger and Scheler. He prized Husserl's restatement of the principle of intentionality (all consciousness aims at or “intends” another-than-consciousness) that seemed to free the thinker from the inside/outside epistemology inherited from Descartes while retaining the immediacy and certainty that Cartesians prized so highly. What he read of Heidegger at that time
is unclear, but he deals with the influential German ontologist explicitly after his return and especially in his masterwork, “Being and Nothingness” (1943).

He exploits the latter's version of Husserlian intentionality by insisting that human reality (Heidegger's Dasein or human way of being) is “in the world” primarily via its practical concerns and not its epistemic relationships. This lends both Heidegger's and Sartre's early philosophies a kind of “pragmatist” character that Sartre, at least, will never abandon. It has been remarked that many of the Heideggerian concepts in Sartre's existentialist writings also occur in those of Bergson, whose “Les Données immediates de la conscience” (Time and Free Will) Sartre once credited with drawing him toward philosophy. But it is clear that Sartre devoted much of his early philosophical attention to combating the influential Bergsonism and that mention of Bergson's name decreases as that of Heidegger grows in Sartre's writings during the “vintage” existentialist years. Sartre seems to have read the phenomenological ethicist Max Scheler, whose concept of the intuitive grasp of paradigm cases is echoed in Sartre's reference to the “image” of the kind of person one should be that both guides and is fashioned by our moral choices. But where Scheler in the best Husserlian fashion argues for the “discovery” of such value images, Sartre insists on their creation. The properly “existentialist” version of phenomenology is already in play.

Sartre’s basic philosophy, existentialism, is neither a narrowly definable school of thought nor limited to Sartre and his French contemporaries like Camus. Although in a certain sense Sartre was the first to name and define existentialism, it is best understood as a long-running current in Europe’s philosophical history, a current that emerged in the late nineteenth century. Existentialist philosophers believe that
philosophy should emphasize the individual human experience of the world, and they consider ideas of individual freedom; individual responsibility; and how it is possible, if it is possible at all, for individual human beings to act meaningfully in the world.

These ideas themselves belong to a larger philosophic trend that sought to expose the ostensible bankruptcy of traditional philosophy, in particular the philosophy of the Enlightenment. During the Enlightenment, philosophy had put its faith in the idea that reason and rationality hold the answer to all of humanity’s problems. To nineteenth-century thinkers, like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and twentieth-century existentialists like Sartre, a radically different approach was needed if philosophy was to rediscover its urgency. Instead of attempting to contain reality within an absolute theoretical framework, iconoclastic philosophers like Nietzsche and Kierkegaard felt that philosophy should emphasize the individual’s subjective experience rather than the individual as the bearer of abstract, universal rights. As adopted by Sartre, this emphasis on individual experience emanated from the belief that, ultimately, people cannot appeal to universal notions of morality or ethics to guide their behavior. Any attempt to generalize human nature, and hence any attempt to construct a system based on these universals, is doomed to fail.

Sartre was unique within this current of thought largely because of the way he wedded phenomenology to his rejection of traditional philosophy. Phenomenology can be described as the study of consciousness, or how the external world appears to our minds. Phenomenology poses the question of whether it is possible to find the objective reality behind how something appears to us, a question that weighed heavily on Sartre’s own meditation on the individual’s experience of and interaction with the world.
Sartre’s thought also comprises elements of Marxism. Sartre strongly self-identified as a Marxist and was a firm believer in certain key tenets of Marxist thought, including the inherently exploitative nature of the capitalist system, the fact of class conflict as the animating engine of history, and the dialectical nature of all being. That said, Sartre’s Marxism did not act so much as an influence on his existentialist philosophy as something that existed alongside it. In seeking to fuse the two, Sartre composed such works as the “Critique of Dialectical Reason”, which expanded on the themes of “Being and Nothingness” while incorporating Marxian sociological inquiry into the discussion.

3.3 Existentialism of J. P. Sartre

Existentialism has been described as a philosophical movement especially of the 20th century that stresses the individual position as self determining agent responsible for his or her own choices. Basically a true Existentialist will create their own beliefs, take responsibility for his or her own actions, and is very honest. If they were to do something wrong, they would take responsibility for their actions and not make excuses or put the blame on someone else. Furthermore, a true existentialist believes there is no God and thus man becomes alone with only our selves as a guide of making the decisions that define our existence. They also believe that life has no meaning and that everything happens by chance.

Jean Paul Sartre's philosophy is one of the most popular systems of thought in the school called existentialism. Sartre valued human freedom and choice, and held it in the highest regard. To be able to live an authentic existence, one must take responsibility for all the actions that he freely chooses. This total freedom that man faces often throws him into a state of existential anguish, wherein he is burdened
by the hardship of having to choose all the time. Thus, there ensues the temptation for man to live a life of in-authenticity, by leaning on preset rules or guidelines, and objective norms. This would consist the idea of bad faith.

Sartre introduces bad-faith while he discusses his concept of freedom. Freedom involves the risks of responsibility for which man is anguished. But in inauthentic state of freedom one wants to avoid this risks and thereby he tries to deny his own self. Basically bad-faith is an attempt to escape from anguish. Human being always carries a negative attitude in respect of himself. Instead of outward negation when this attitude turns towards itself is called by Sartre ‘bad-faith’ (*mauvaise foi*). It is a self- deception. It is the negation of one’s own self. Bad-faith proves that I am not what I am. In bad-faith one lies to himself. But this kind of lying is different from lying in general. In a lie one lies to another person, but in bad-faith one lies to oneself. This kind of lying cannot be a normal aspect of life like ordinary lie. Further bad faith is a second order behavior.

Bad faith refers to a certain fact of human experience. Sartre introduces bad faith by comparing it with lying. Bad faith may have some elements common with a lie. But Sartre thinks it to be fundamentally different. It is simply a more subtle phenomenon of falsehood. Here the unconsciousness is lying to the consciousness. In this way we can understand how we believe our own lies.

Sartre gives the example of a young woman who often goes out with a man. She is aware of the mutual attraction. She also knows that at some time she will have to take a decision about the relationship. But she does not know exactly what she wants. But one day the man takes her hands and this upsets the delicate equilibrium. What will she do now? She leaves the hand. As if it was a thing. She
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attempts neither to consent nor to reject it as an advance. Rather, she begins to talk of lofty and abstract matters. Sartre says that “the girl is in bad faith. She knows her companion’s action for what it truly is. She knows also her desire for that action. But she continues to perform in such a way as to avoid that which she knows.”

Bad faith is pretending that we are not free and responsible for what we are and do, when in fact we know that we are. It is also pretending that we are causally determined as inanimate things are, and that therefore we have no freedom and are not responsible for our lives, as victims of circumstances. To have a truly authentic existence, Sartre dictates that we live according to our own beliefs, that we insert meaning into the acts that we do, not finding meaning from what other people say. We should not live in regard to what other people think or say, because this would also push us into bad faith. We choose, act, and take responsibility for everything, and thus we live, and exist. Life cannot be anything until it is lived, but each individual must make sense of it. The value of life is nothing else but the sense each person fashions into it. To argue that we are the victims of fate, of mysterious forces within us, of some grand passion, or heredity, is to be guilty of bad faith. Sartre says that we can overcome the adversity presented by our facticity, a term he designs to represent the external factors that we have no control over, such as the details of our birth, our race, and so on, by placing nothingness into it.

By placing nothingness, he means that we can turn the facticity into "nothing," and then give it a meaning all of our own making in order to make the most out of our situation and optimize our goals. By placing nothingness into things we have no
control over, we affirm our freedom and power over the things we have no control over, and shape ourselves a life that we desire. Thus, through this action of placing nothingness, we can further achieve a life of true authenticity that Sartre recommends for humanity.

Most western Philosophies and monotheistic traditions base the creation of man as a design of god. God is the primary artisan that is the creator for all, and God’s conception of man is conceived before the creation of man. For Sartre this means that “God created humanity through a conception, it must mean that we are all created to that conception and are created with a purpose, or as Sartre defines human nature.”

As an atheistic existentialist Sartre explains a problem with a notion of a divine creator, as this would mean that our essence precedes our existence. Jean Paul Sartre’s notion of existence preceding essence is his ideology that debates freedom and human choice. Sartre’s basic claim is that the existence of humanity exists before there is conception of values and morals of human nature. For Sartre humanity is born with a blank slate, no predetermined value and no basic essence that humanity shares. Subsequently, this means that we have no particular ideal abstract of human nature we are all responsible to create our own construction of essence through the choices we make. We define ourselves by the sum of choices and actions we make. Sartre’s argument denies the traditional philosophy of an existing human nature, or an ideal abstract of being that we are all born with. Sartre’s theory articulates the absence of an omniscient creator. Sartre believes that man creates his nature and finds value though his free choices. Sartre elaborates this through his concept of freedom by establishing that our conscience
is separate from the physical world; it is without restriction and must be free. The radical freedom Sartre expresses however does have restrictions of facticity. The limitations that are instilled in us, the situations we are all thrown in does restrict some possibilities of our freedom, this is called facticity. Facticity is the situation we find ourselves in, but this does not change that we are still more than our situation; we always have choice and are destined to it.

From reading Jean-Paul Sartre's work, the Existentialism is philosophy that places emphasis on individual existence, subjectivism, and freedom of making choice. According to Sartre, existentialism is philosophy that states that "If God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence." It seems that Sartre's theory rests on this thesis that 'existence precedes essence' and therefore it should be basis for any further discussion or understanding of this philosophy. To prove this Sartre uses example of man or human being, he says that man first exist, where he is nothing, and then he defines himself, where he himself will have made what he will be. So if I understand this correctly this means that you need to have existence in order to have essence, so there is no predetermined 'true' thing, it has to already exist in order to become what it is. Therefore, man is fully in charge of creating himself as a person, and creating his own future. Subjectivity is also important to Existentialism and by subjectivity Sartre means that "while choosing his own self, man also chooses all man." He states this idea in this citation "to choose to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose, because we can never choose evil. We always choose the good, and nothing can be good for us without being good for all." I'm not sure if I can agree with this, because knowing myself, sometimes I consciously make decisions that I know are not good for everyone. But Sartre is trying to say is
that those passionate choices and actions that every individual makes, are influencing choices and actions of others.

Third and last thing that makes up my definition of the Existentialism is freedom of choice. “The boy was faced with the choice of leaving for England joining the Free French forces—that is, leaving his mother behind—or remaining with his mother and helping her to carry on. He was fully aware that the woman lived only for him and that his going off—and perhaps his death—would plunge her into despair, whereas every effort he made toward going off and fighting was an uncertain move which might run aground and prove completely useless.” And then he asks, “Who could help him to choose?” here Sartre uses case of one of his students, as example to show us that every man is free to make choices of his own. However choices he makes make him responsible for things that will happen as result of those choices. So choosing one is choice not to choose other. Therefore choice is inescapable, not making choices is choosing to not choose.

3.4 Sartre's Existentialism as Humanistic Philosophy

According to Sartre, existentialism is humanism for the reason that it draws attention to ‘real’ man, uplifts the value of personality and defends its interests against the hostile influence of collective and society. Sartre called his method “the concrete analysis of social phenomena.” He found similar examples in K. Marx's works. Sartre notes that K. Marx neglected apriorism, but always relied upon experience, abundant factual material. However, contemporary Marxism, in his opinion, ‘forgot man’, “lost completely any understanding of man”. This forgetfullness is a consequence of the very dialectical scientific conception of nature, society and thinking, - of dialectical monism. Marxism understands the
historical process as natural process, this process, “believes that it is possible to turn the historical process into a process of natural history.”¹¹

Sartre does not agree that dialectics can be beyond man in an alien sphere. According to him the dialectics of nature can be neither asserted nor neglected. “Everyone is free to believe or not, that in the love of physics or chemistry some dialectical mind is manifested, in any case it is a non-scientific statement with respect to the facts of inanimate nature.”¹² Since this external materialism lays down the dialectic as exteriority, “the nature of man lies outside him, in an a priori love, in an extra-human-nature beyond man, in a history that begins with the nebulae,”¹³ therefore according the Sartre, the specific nature of dialectics is forgotten and human history is ‘dehumanized’. In the conception based on dialectical monism, as one of the objects of nature in his development one obeys the laws of nature. In other words, he exists as a pure materiality governed by the universal laws of dialectics. Dialectical materialism smothers the problem of consciousness, rejects as a ‘foreign admixture’ a concrete live man with his human relations, his true or wrong thoughts, his real goals, was replaced by the absolute thing. Hence follows the conclusion that the materialistic world outlook is based on cognition of the object without a cognizing subject. “By taking off all subjectivity and identifying it with pure objective truth, it enters the world of things inhabited by men-things.”¹³

Men become men-objects, and the human nature is depreciated, derogated because, in his opinion, “the basis and results of every philosophy that subjugates humanness to anything else but man are hatred of man.”¹⁴ Marxism in Sartre's opinion, has forgotten the specific character of historical dialectics. Therefore it
sees the driving force of the historical process only in economical circumstances which “act behind the man’s back”\textsuperscript{15} and thus it ignores human freedom. By doing so, Marxism, according to Sartre, rejects a concrete man as an embodiment of dialectical creation. In theory therefore Marxism turn into schematics, and in practice into totalitarianism. This is the way to destroy humanism. In Marxism, man is dehumanized, turned into a scheme in which there is no place for man as creator and the subject of historical initiative. Marxism ‘forgot’ man both as a subject of cognition and the creator of history. It rejects as casual all concrete definitions of human life and from historical continuity preserves only its abstract skeleton of universality. On account of this Marxism having lost ‘the sense of man’, uses abstract ‘global’ notions like ‘class’, ‘worker’, ‘bourgeois’ which turn a ‘concrete’ man into a scheme, a negligible magnitude. Sartre sees here anti-humanism, not because these abstract concepts are used however in Marxism they are the limit and measure of everything.\textsuperscript{16}

Existentialism on the contrary, tries to ‘grop’ human practice by concrete concepts and thus to supplement Marxism. Inside the very heart of Marxism there is “an empty space for concrete anthropology.”\textsuperscript{17} Existentialism remained the ‘only definite approach to reality’. Therefore the task of existentialism is to “take man back into Marxism.”\textsuperscript{18} More than once Sartre comes back to the problem of the significance of Marxism. He believes that “we have the method, the only one to correspond to the entirely of historical movement in its logical order.”\textsuperscript{19} Existentialism then is bound to become the ‘anthropology’ of Marxism, because Marxism lacks humanistic problems, neglects the individual, does not accept the value of the person; explains everything in term of the collective, and sacrifices personal interests by the mosses or for the collective.
3.5 Existence Precedes Essence

Man, according to Sartre, is not created by God, since God does not exist. Man is not produced like an object, the existence of which is predetermined by its producer. For instance, the production of a knife is the totality of the design and qualities, which its producer wants to give it. That is, the existence of an object is preceded by essence as conceived by its producer. The idea in the mind of the ‘architect’ is the foundation of the existence of an object. However, it is wrong to think that man is created in conformity to a plan. Man is not an object to be first designed and then produced in accordance with it. There is no universal formula which can determine the birth and life of man. Sartre says that it is bad-faith to entertain the idea: “God makes man according to a procedure and a conception, exactly as the artisan manufactures a paper-knife, following a definition and a formula.”

Sartre is of the view that man is free in the sense that he possesses altogether different qualities from those of a thing. Unlike a thing, man is a being of choice. Man is a being of consciousness, which is in constant negation of the present. By nature, man is without essence. For man, to be is to ‘have been’, he exists as a perpetual nihilation of his own being; he never ‘is’, he ever ‘is not’, his being is ‘not yet’; he is always beyond all denominations given to him. That is, man is already something other than what can be said about him unlike (the being of) a thing which is ‘being’, man is (a being of) ‘nonbeing’. The (being of a) thing ‘is’; whereas (the being of) man is not what (it) he is and is what (it) he is not. That is, (the being of) man is outside himself; (it) he is in projecting himself into the future; (it) he is an elsewhereness to himself. That is, man is a being of “subjectivity”
which is beyond all determinations, materialistic or divine. Sartre says, “Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life, instead of being a kind of moss, or a fungus or a cauliflower.”

Man is a being who does not have a permanent nature; he is not born with a certain nature. On the contrary, man is what he chooses himself to be; man is not born readymade; it is only later on that he becomes ‘this’ or ‘that’. Man is what he makes himself to be; he becomes what he ‘wants’, (not, however, what he may wish to be); man defines himself by his own deeds; he shapes his future which is not preordained but virgin and pure; man’s future is not laid down by God in advance; but it is man who fashions his future. That is, man is free to have a future he chooses. Sartre says, “If man, as the existentialist sees him, is not definable, it is because, to begin with, he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it.”

Man is not a set of conditioned reactions as all kinds of materialism or idealism treats him to be. Man is not endowed with set patterns of behavior. Instead, man is a being of absolute freedom. Indeed, Sartre equates man with freedom.

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\text{Man} = \text{freedom}
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Man and freedom are one and the same. He says that it is impossible to distinguish man from freedom. Man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently. That is, freedom is not a quality added on to man; it is not his accidental character; there is no difference between man and “being-free”. Freedom constitutes the very being of man. Sartre says, “There is no determinism – man is free, man is freedom.”
Sartre holds that, in man, existence precedes essence. That is, man is not determined by his essence. On the Contrary, it is he who creates and conditions it. He is free to choose his essence. For instance, no man is born a coward; a coward is a coward not because of his stunted physical organism or abnormal psychological temperament or unfavorable environment but because he chooses himself to be so consciously or ‘unconsciously’ (For Sartre, the so-called unconscious does not exist.) It is his choice that determines him to be a coward. In reality, a coward makes himself a coward and a hero; it is one’s own choice that determines who he is or will be. Man simply finds excuses for his irresponsible and inauthentic behavior in believing in the power and determination of some non-human factors like environment, heredity and so on. Man merely avoids exercising his power of choice by saying, “You see, that is what we are like no one can do anything about it.”

Thus Sartre condemns man to freedom which is coupled with responsibility. He holds that man is what he does; man defines himself by his own actions for which he is responsible completely. Man is the sum of his actions which are freely chosen by himself. That is, there is no cowardice apart from cowardly actions of a coward; there is no love apart from the deeds of love; there is no genius which is not expressed in the works of art. Man, whatever he may be, is nothing other than what he has made himself to be. Sartre says, “That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment he is thrown into the world he is responsible for everything he does.”

Sartre maintains that human responsibility in a world without God is overwhelming. Since everything comes into “being” through man, since there is
no non-human situation in the world and since things will be such as men have
decided they shall be, man has to choose with tremendous responsibility. But the
plight of man is such that he is alone in choosing with responsibility. That is, man
is free and responsible without help and excuse. He is without help, for there is
neither God nor any non-human guiding principles to help him in choosing with
all responsibility; he is without excuse, for there is nobody or nothing upon which
he can throw his responsibility and thereby lessen the burden of his absolute
freedom. Sartre substantiates man’s burden of freedom and responsibility with an
example of a pupil who was confronted with a dilemma of deciding between two
equally “valid” and different modes of action: one of staying with his old mother
for whom he was the only consolation and the other of joining the French Forces
in order to fight for his nation and avenge his brother who was killed by the
Germans. Sartre contends that the commandments like “act with charity”, “love
thy neighbour”, “deny yourself for others”, “choose the way which is harder”,
are ineffective to enable the pupil to prefer decisively any one mode of action to
the other, for he finds himself in the vicious circle of fulfilling one at the cost of
the other. Nothing can infallibly prove one as being superior to the other; there is
no sure guide which can help him out of the dilemma by pronouncing in clear
terms that he owes his mother more love than he owes his country.

Sartre contends that even if an individual chooses and acts in accordance with a
prescribed principle or a doctrine of behavior, it is only because of his choice that
it becomes a guide to his action. No ethical formula can be authentic unless
man recognizes it to be so. It is man’s choice that renders a particular rule as a
guide to action. No rule is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ a priori. So also, no mode of action is
“good” or ‘bad’ by itself. Sartre says, “If I regard a certain course of action as
good, it is only I who choose to say that it is good and not bad.”26 Even if an
individual goes to an adviser for advice, again, it is he who chooses the kind of
adviser he wants. He first chooses the advice he wants before he chooses an
adviser. He goes to the adviser who gives him the advice he wants but never to an
adviser who is likely to give an advice which he does not like. Sartre says, “But if
you seek counsel from a priest, for example, you have selected that priest; and at
bottom you already know, more or less, what he would advise. In other words, to
choose an adviser is nevertheless to commit oneself by that choice”.27

Further, the atheistic existentialism of Sartre describes man as the creator of values.
God being absent, man is condemned to invent values. Sartre says, “If I have
excluded God the Father, there must be somebody to invent values.”28 Values are
not divine and eternal; they are not sacred; no value is a value unless man claims it
to be so; no value is independent of man; it is man who creates and ascribes the
meaning to a certain value; it is man who gives it significance through his
voluntary choice. That is, man’s subjectivity is the foundation of all values. For
instance, values like honesty, humanity and progress do not have any meaning
without man; they do not have a significance of their own. There is no God or
Infinite and Perfect consciousness to formulate values as having fixed and
universal validity; there is no heaven where it is written that ‘this is good’, ‘one
must be honest’, ‘one must not lie’ etc. Values do not fall from the blue but man
brings them into being. Man’s existence precedes the values he invents.
Accordingly, man’s life has precisely the significance given by man. It does not
have an intrinsic and pre-invent significance of its own, since it is not governed by
any kind of superhuman universe or being. Instead, man’s life is a sheer accident and it is what he makes it to be. The meaning of life is what man brings to it through his freedom of choice and responsibility. Sartre mentions that, “we invent values means neither more nor less than this; that there is no sense in life a priori. Life is nothing until it is lived; but it is yours to make sense of, and the value of it is nothing else but the sense that you choose.”

Sartre’s slogan—“existence precedes essence”—may serve to introduce what is most distinctive of existentialism, namely, the idea that no general, non-formal account of what it means to be human can be given, since that meaning is decided in and through existing itself. Existence is self making in a situation. In contrast to other entities, whose essential properties are fixed by the kind of entities they are, what is essential to a human being—what makes her who she is—is not fixed by her type however by what she makes of herself, who she becomes. The fundamental contribution of existential thought lies in the idea that one's identity is constituted neither by nature nor by culture, since to “exist” is precisely to constitute such an identity. It is in light of this idea that key existential notions such as facticity, transcendence (project), alienation, and authenticity must be understood.

At first, it seems hard to understand how one can say much about existence as such. Traditionally, philosophers have connected the concept of existence with that of essence in such a way that the former signifies merely the instantiation of the latter. If “essence” designates what a thing is and “existence” that it is, it follows that what is intelligible about any given thing, what can be thought about it, will belong to its essence. It is from essence in this sense—say, human being as
rational animal or *imago Dei*—that ancient philosophy drew its prescriptions for an individual’s way of life, its estimation of the meaning and value of existence. Having an essence meant that human beings could be placed within a larger whole, a *kosmos*, that provided the standard for human flourishing. Modern philosophy retained this framework even as it abandoned the idea of a “natural place” for man in the face of the scientific picture of an infinite, labyrinthine universe. In what looks like a proto-existential move, Descartes rejected the traditional essential definitions of man in favor of a radical, first-person reflection on his own existence that “I am.” Nevertheless, he quickly reinstated the old model by characterizing his existence as that of a substance determined by an essential property, “thinking.” In contrast, Heidegger proposes that “I” am “an entity whose what [essence] is precisely to be and nothing but to be.”30 Such an entity's existing cannot, therefore, be thought as the instantiation of an essence, and consequently what it means to be such an entity cannot be determined by appeal to pre-given frameworks or systems—whether scientific, historical, or philosophical. To conclude, man’s freedom and responsibility are so inalienable that it is impossible for man to be free from them. Man is free but he is not free to be free. Not to choose is to choose not to choose.

Man is responsible even for not being responsible. Man’s responsibility is not only great in the sense that it concerns mankind as a whole – man in choosing for himself chooses for all, in fashioning himself after an image fashions others also – but also unbearably heavy in the sense that can never be free from being responsible. Freedom and responsibility are so protean that they manifest even in the acts of not-choosing and not-being-responsible. By rejecting God, Same has endowed man with absolute freedom of choice and responsibility and enabled him
to face the reality of life authentically. He has revealed to man the fact that man is the sale architect of his life. He has urged man to face the dread of the fact of his being free without escape. He has declared that man being condemned to be free and responsible he is condemned at every moment to construct himself and the world without remorse. Thus the important import of Sartre’s existentialism is that “it puts every man in possession of himself as he is and places entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his shoulders.”

3.6 Problem of Being

In his essay "Existentialism is a Humanism” Sartre declares the individual mind's activity to be the foundation of Humanism; Later in his "Critique of dialectical reason", hegrounds this on the possibilities of the concrete, individual man. In his search of a connection between ‘the world of things’ and ‘the world of human subjectivity’, Sartre explains the essence of man through the concept of ‘concrete’ man.

To analyse the very nature of man’s being of totality Sartre has made the fundamental division between ‘Being-for-itself and ‘Being-in-itself. In Sartre’s terminology ‘Being-for-itself is ‘pour-soi’ while ‘Being-in-itself is ‘en-soi’. Pour-soi is distinct from en-soi. Pour-soi is the nihilation of en-soi. En-soi is the self contained being of a thing. It is non-conscious Being. It is plenitude and fullness. It is the Being of phenomenon. Sartre calls human existence ‘Being-for-itself. It is consciousness. The table, the wall etc. exists in themselves. But man alone in the world exists for-himself. It is not perfectly identified with itself while ‘Being-in-itself is perfectly identified with itself. They are related by an unbridgeable separation.
For-itself is not what it ‘is’. It is what yet to be. Sartre defines for-itself as “being what it is not and not being what it is.” 85 So it has no fixed essence. Rather it creates his essence. It is nothing but a possible being. That is to say what it is at present is not the full manifestation of its possibility. ‘Being-for-itself is becoming while ‘in-itself is being. Being-in-itself is neither possible nor impossible. It is not subject to temporality while consciousness is temporal.

For-itself lacks its totality. The possibility of for-itself refers the capability of being itself. Sartre says that the possible is the something which the for-itself lacks in order to be itself. But the element of lacking is not the feature of in-itself but of human being. So, human reality is emptiness of its Being. It consists in a gap. Hence it needs something to complete. It seeks for self-identity. Sartre says, “Consciousness lacks something for something else.. as the broken disc of the moon lacks that which would be necessary to complete it, and transform it into a full moon. What is lacked by a conscious being is ‘the coincidence of himself with himself.” 86 As ‘Being-in-itself is complete, a plenitude, so it is logically prior to for-itself. These two beings though are to be distinguished; they belong to the being in general. The other mode of being is ‘being-for-others’. This being is viewed by other which exists outside as an object for others and which is necessary to make understand ‘being-for-itself.

One of the main aspects of existentialism is the ‘initial’ absurdity of the external world (being in-itself). Man is ‘thrown’ into this world and forced to live "in the presence of absurd". Man exists, creates his essence, and becomes "being for himself" only because his mind regularly isolates himself from the world and neglects it. Only human existence, contrary to the inert existence of things, becomes manifested as a process, as the activity.
The basic principle of Sartre's conception of man is that man himself creates his essence by actively isolating himself from the environment in which he exists as a creative, developing, active and perpetually self-creating being. In the existentialistic treatment of man, even though based on the activity principle, two features are evident. First of all, while raising problem of activity as the main prerequisite for understanding the essence of man, Sartre understands human activity only as an ideal rearrangement of the ‘situation’. Freedom is related only to ideal activity which, even though emphasized as the means to overcome the absurdity of being, becomes absurd itself, because it is only ideal. Another key is his understanding of the existence as an individual psychic state of the individual, as isolated from social relations and from history. This approach results in an extreme by individualistic and subjectivist attitude to the essence of man. Man, who in Sartre's philosophy is perpetually creating himself ex nihilo, does it in an absolutely autonomous way. Thus, in Sartre's conception of man human activity is inevitably related to man's isolation. The creative, active line in man is but a phenomenon of the spirit of an isolated individual (man atom), his thinking his consciousness.

Referring to the activities of the "concrete" subject, Sartre argues that it is man that is primary, whereas groups, collectives, social "ensembles" are secondary. The subject of history in an individual man is his "whole totality" (totalite). wherever he is at work, in his privacy or in the street. It is real people with their deeds and troubles, with all their actions, passions and demands. In Sartre's opinion, ‘replacement of abstractions by concreteness’ entails an attempt to establish individuality and particularity, and to reject universality.
By declaring a concrete, definite individual to be the historical subject, Sartre explains the whole historical process as the arithmetical sum of the actions of separate individuals. In his "Critique of the Dialectical Reason" he undertakes the task of finding out how ‘a Synthesis of practices’, a ‘multitude’ of practices with all the ensuing constraints ‘Social practice does not exceed to rationality (rationalité) of individual practice’. On the contrary, if the prerequisites of existentialistic ontology are strictly observed, social practice (activities) looks external to the individual and restrains the individual’s initiative because its inertness hampers and damages the creative action of individuals. Society, according to Sartre, is a ‘multitude’ of single creatures, not related by intersubjective ties (ties of this kind are possible only in an amorphous group) and devoid of the common emotional state. Society is a discrete structure, ‘a multitude of individual fates’.

Guided by these assumptions, Sartre rejects the sociality of human existence, which is explained by him in terms of psychology (sociality is understood as something outward regarding man). Man is social when his behavior conforms to socially acknowledged values, which, however, are unworthy of ‘true’ man. In the process of his socialization man becomes a set of masks. He is something integral but this integrity is preserved by the individual only in his self-consciousness.

Personal relations are established in the form of institutions. Sartre is strictly opposed to the institutions as facts of depersonalization. Therefore, according to him, any result following from the actions of an institutionalized group is alien to the individual's interests.

Although social action and the existence of a collective or community are treated as historical factors, their role is understood as only as negative with regard to the
self-expression of the individual as individual. This hostility between the individual and society is imminent to history. The individual, in Sartre's opinion, is free only when he negates or reflects society, the environment and their related constraints. The individual's solitude or self-isolation from the world is treated as a law of existence. However, consciousness shrunk into itself finds its strength only in itself; it cannot cognize and consequently cannot manage this hostile world. Therefore the foundation of existentialism, as of the other subjectivist theories of freedom is irrationality. The freedom of the individual, the ‘existential subject’, is gained not in practical social activities, but by isolating oneself from society, ‘in oneself’. It is not incidental that for Sartre there is not ‘society’ but only ‘situation’, not ‘social relations’ but only ‘inter-subjective relations’ of individuals and groups, not "history" but only "the individual's historicity". Existentialism turns historical problems into non-historical dramas of an abstract man, therefore it can be considered as the ideological manifestation of individual's rebellion. Sartre's intention to implement "the humanistic programme of Marxism" remains unrealized.

Existentialism formulates the initial principles of analysis of man as independent of any social or historical definiteness. One of the principles of this is to treat spiritual activities as spontaneous and independent of any external reasons, a pure sphere of genuine activity. This principle follows from the assumption that human activities are separated from their material character and spiritual principle from the material one. This dualism allows considering matter as the cause of human alienation.

The activities of the anthropologically concerned individual are explained as isolated from matter, objectivity and sociality, historically created conditions and
means of activities, as well as from its own product which on being "hardened" into a material from becomes alienated. The creative activity of man, isolated from the factors that form and substantiate it, remains only abstract activity. Existentialism, in raising the human thesis about man as a creative being and in searching for this possibilities of this creative work (freedom), absoluteness is one aspect of human essence at the expense of another, isolating activities from history. Sartre rejected those incentives of human actions that one way or other can be fixed as an external cause existing beyond the individual, as well as all other social and historical determinants of his behavior. According to him, there is no way to warrant the direction which mankind should follow, as either in man or beyond him there is nobody to determine the goal and to direct progress towards this goal.

Based on the principle that there exists only direct existential practice, existentialism has absolutized the significance of the individual forms of the assimilation of the external world by man. Existential philosophy in general is characterized by absolutizing the sphere of phenomena and their explanation by means of everyday consciousness.

In the condition of alienated society, when social relations inevitably become something self-dependent, these relations become seemingly independent of the activities of the individual. Two poles appears, one being man and his privacy, the other being "the environment", "the world" and history. This illusion, when fetishized is the basis on which the philosophical idea of non-material activity arises.
3.7 Human Freedom

Freedom is a precondition for the development of humanism and humane personality. The humanness of a philosophical conception requires that the problem of freedom is dealt in this conception. Therefore, it seems important to elucidate the content of the Sartre's notion of freedom.

The basic principles of Sartre's approach to the problem of man's freedom has been grounded on and predetermined by his theory of the dialectics of ‘negation’. The notion of absolute freedom of the individual grew from ontological dualism: ‘dialectical man’ – ‘non-dialectical nature’. Freedom is considered as creation of a subject independent of any social or environmental conditions. It is the fundamental datum of human existence. Sartre says “Actually we have freedom which makes its choice, however we do not choose to be free: we are doomed to freedom, we are thrown into freedom.”

The humanism of Sartre's philosophy is based on the presumption of man's particularity and uniqueness, on the specific place of man in the world, on his not being ‘another thing’; he is not to be identified with any other object. This is argued by counter-posing ‘the world of things’ and ‘the world of man's subjectivity’. "Being in itself" is identical to itself, inert and devoid of contradictions. Whereas the main feature of ‘being for itself” is contradictoriness, dialectics. It was explanation of dialectics that predetermined Sartre's notion of freedom, in the dialectic process of absolute negation, meant to evoke contradictoriness and thus to serve as an internal impetus for initiating motion. The ability to negate is inherent only to “being for itself”, that is consciousness. Therefore it is consciousness that dialectical and thus active, negative and free.
The ability to negate is considered the essential, immanent feature of the human being. Sartre found the value and uniqueness of the human being in its absolutely indeterminate and spontaneous nature. ‘Being for itself’ is the manifestation of the sense of life and its source. The individual creates his life and therefore existence is prior to essence. Human existence has a sense and a goal, whereas the world of things is absurd and non-cognizable. The purposeful activities of a subject are separated from objective reality. This ontological dualism paves the road to his voluntaristic concept of freedom.

By his conception of absolute freedom Sartre developed only the negative aspect of spiritual freedom and paid no attention to the positive content of freedom. The philosopher emphasized the self-will of consciousness, but not the realization of the abilities and ideals of what is human in individuality. The human consciousness rejects all that is not human and thus establishes itself as the unique, as a value, and thus as the true human being.

In "Critique of the Dialectical Reason" Sartre rejects the absolute, non-substantiated concept of freedom; freedom is no longer treated as a voluntarist choice of his own being, made by man, but is linked with practical activities. The possibilities of man's freedom are to be sought in the sphere of his practical activities. In the "Critique of the Dialectical Reason" Sartre no longer considers freedom as an absolute, ideal choice of one's being, but rejects the notion of freedom-fetish.\footnote{33} The solution of the basic problems of humanism here is independent on a novel approach to dialectics. Although he goes on rejecting dialectics is nature and again criticizes dialectical monism. Dialectics is not considered solely a phenomenon of human mind but is linked with individual and
social practice. Thus he tries to ascribe the whole sphere of human activities to sphere of dialectics.

3.8 Intuition as a tool of Cognition

As Sartre emphasizes spontaneity and intuition as the only source of free action and cognition, illusion of the spontaneity of mental activities arises. He maintains that the subject (treated always only anthropologically and psychoanalytically) in his ‘free’ projects relies on the sphere of human existence that cannot be defined positively. The project, in this respect, is a phenomenon of pre-reflexive consciousness, ‘The project as transcendence is however an exteriorization of immanence’. Every man, prior to any cognition, possesses an understanding of his being, - that is one of the man ontological postulates of Sartre. Thus, the project, in his respect, is only an ‘implication’, a perception of ‘something’ which is not yet conceptualized in consciousness, but only a vague relation to the world, a ‘freely experienced totalization’. The project is understood not as a definite scheme of actions but as a manifestation of ‘authentic’ ‘being for itself’ in man.

The project in Sartre's existentialism is not considered beyond ‘being in itself’ and therefore cannot be liberated from inert forces. On the other hand, man's existence cannot be abstracted from transcendence, from ‘the beyond’ or ‘the extrasensory’. Without this relation, according to Sartre, existence loses its definitiveness and turns into a thing. This is one more reason why existentialism cannot be ascribed to subjective idealism.

When the cognition of nature and social development seems doubtful, when the world beyond man seems non-cognizable, it turns into an obstacle for human
freedom. Practical activities in this conception are not only considered as a criterion of cognition, but on the contrary, are treated as an obstacle to cognition. The only way to "overcome" this world is to separate one's activities from the inert world of things and institutes. This world means that free activities are considered as an act without any real preconditions.

The process of cognition in the existentialism conception is not linked with the cognition of objective reality. Nor is cognition of a human existence, in this conception, a grasp of the regularities of the history of mankind, its environment or activities. In Sartre's opinion, the rationalistic constructions are artificial; they do not show anything true and only obscure cognition of reality. Any kind of reflection kills authenticity and throws consciousness into the alienated, artificial of "object". Only the consciousness of an isolated subject, free of illusions, can catch the truth. Only the spontaneous, intuitive, primordial perception is still able to bring the lost "object-thing" back to man. Intuitive perception appears when man is "shocked" or touched by a confrontation with the world ‘the source of shock, the most important event is danger’. To this type of danger the philosopher ascribes starvation or bankruptcy, as its essence is also starvation. However, in the existentialist approach man perceives not objective reality, but only his own way of existence. Objective reality cannot be recognized, nor is there need to recognize it, as it is nothing to man.

This discrediting of human cognition leads to agnosticism, which in Sartre's existentialism is present also both when he defines the object of cognition and when he explains the process of cognition. What is reliable is only the "pre-reflexive" image of reality, which can be caught by the senses, whereas the
sensation itself is treated by Sartre in an isolated manner and explained by itself. The act of cognition is considered the act of the individual, which is clear to itself, offers quite a clear model and rules. The process of cognition is of images and of experiences that appear in the consciousness of the separated and isolated individual. Existentialism depreciates the possibilities of rational cognition, which it replaces by intuition and ‘perception’.

3.9 “Meaning” as Explanation of the World

Since the object "being in itself", according to Sartre, is essentially non-cognizable the subject can endow it with any "meaning" and "senses". "Man creates meanings", stresses the philosopher, by endowing the "meaning" the individual explains the world. This is quite sufficient to cognize the world. Moreover, in Sartre's opinion, there by the significance of the subject is emphasized and the creativity of the individual is stressed. By arguing that matter is an inert substance in which separate consciousness personify "meanings", that man is a creature that endows meanings, he absolutes the subjective side of these activities (interaction). Sartre's reasonable declaration that “it is absurd to identify the meanings of the object with a pure inert materiality of the object itself,” which fixes only one member of the interaction. He emphasizes as an essential property of man, his negative activity, however, in his opinion this is only the activity of consciousness, not the material activities. The philosopher does not accept one of the essential conditions of human activity. The possibility of adequate cognition of the external world. He identifies cognition as reflection and reflects the notion of reflection as ‘a useless and misleading intermediate notion’. Since social practice is not intelligible for the individual, the meaning he imposes on objects and phenomena
cannot be adequate. The individual can perceive the historical meaning of social being only as a symbol or abstract sign.

Inert being, according to Sartre, cannot be source of consciousness. However, he does not claim consciousness to be someone's creation. Thus, consciousness seems to be the cause of its own being. Objective reality is however the predicate of consciousness. Only consciousness endows inert being, which is ‘identical to itself,’ with ‘meanings’ and ‘senses’. The ability to create ex nihilo ascribed to consciousness turns into activity without content. The act of creation, which is the endowment of "sense" proceeds without any preconditions because no interaction is possible with ‘nothing’ and ‘the absurd’. In this approach, the activity of consciousness does not trespass the limit of consciousness itself. The act of rendering meaning is mystified, understanding proceeds without any preliminary activities. Practical activities as a pre-requisite of thinking and critical control are rejected. Unreliable knowledge cannot be ground upon which the freedom of man’s activities could rest. In the philosophy, man (collective, group) cannot cognize and thus cannot use for his needs the world of things and relations, which he has created himself.

The creative act is by no means programmed in our environment (this is certainly true in the case of a single, anthropologically and psychoanalytically treated individual). Sartre draws a strict borderline between the meaning the meaning of an objective situation and the creative act, he tries to escape simplification that man is conceived as the automatic outcome of the environmental conditions, demanding that man should not be limited by ‘the pure anti-dialectical moment of inert practice’. This might be the case when ‘relations of practical multitudes
(relations of individuals) will be defined by mere determining’. However, rejecting
metaphysical determinism, Sartre strictly differentiates between the significance of
an objective situation and of the creative act.

3.10 Sartre in the Twenty-first Century

Foucault once said that Sartre was a man of the nineteenth century trying to think
the twentieth. Presumably, he had more in mind than the fact that most of Sartre's
“biographies,” except for Jean Genet's and his own, were of nineteenth-century
figures. With his emphasis on consciousness, subjectivity, freedom, responsibility
and the self, his commitment to Marxist categories and dialectical thinking,
especially in the second part of his career, and his quasi Enlightenment humanism,
Sartre seemed to personify everything that structuralists and poststructuralists like
Foucault opposed. In effect, the enfant terrible of mid century France had become
the “traditionalist” of the following generation. A classic example of philosophical
parricide.

In fact, some of this criticism was misdirected while other portions exhibit a
genuine philosophical “choice” about goals and methods. Though Sartre resolutely
insisted on the primacy of “free organic praxis” methodologically, ontologically,
and ethically, on which he based the freedom and responsibility that define his
humanism, he respected what his critic Louis Althusser called “structural causality”
and made allowance for it with his concept of the practico-inert. But it is the
primacy awarded consciousness/praxis in this regard that strikes structuralist and
poststructuralist critics as naive and simply wrong. Added to this is Sartre's
passion for “totalizing” thought, whether individually in terms of a life project or
collectively in terms of dialectical rationality, that counters the fragmenting and
anti-teleological claims of poststructuralist authors. And then there is his famous denial of the Freudian unconscious and his relative neglect of semiotics and the philosophy of language in general.

One should note that, Sartre’s suspicion of Freudian psychoanalysis became quite nuanced in his later years. His appeal to “the lived” (le vécu) and to pre-theoretical comprehension, especially in his Flaubert study, for example, incorporated many features of the “unconscious” drives and relations proper to psychoanalytic discourse. And while he was familiar with Saussure and structural linguistics, to which he occasionally referred, he admitted that he had never formulated an explicit philosophy of language but insisted that one could be reconstructed from elements employed throughout his work.

But at least five features of Sartre’s thought seem particularly relevant to current discussions among philosophers both Anglo-American and Continental. The first is his concept of the human agent as not a self but a “presence to self.” This opening up of the Cartesian “thinking thing” supports a wide variety of alternative theories of the self while retaining the features of freedom and responsibility that, one can argue, have been central tenets of Western philosophy and law since the Greeks. Emphasis on an ethics of responsibility in contrast to one of rules, principles or values in recent years has led to a wide-spread interest in the work of Levinas as a necessary complement to so-called “postmodern” ethics. But Sartrean “authenticity” is equally relevant in this regard, as Charles Taylor and others have pointed out. And its location within a mundane ontology may resonate better with philosophers of a more secular bent.

Next, the recent revival of the understanding of philosophy as a “way of life” as distinct from an academic discipline focused on epistemology or more recently on
the philosophy of language, while renewing an interest in Hellenistic ethics as well as in various forms of “spirituality,” can find in Sartrean existentialism forms of “care of the self” that invite fruitful conversation with contemporary ethics, aesthetics and politics without devolving into moralism, aestheticism or fanaticism. From a philosopher of suspicious moral recipes and focused on concrete, lived experience, this is perhaps as much as one could expect or desire. Sartre dealt implicitly with issue of race in many of his works, beginning with “Being and Nothingness”. Race relations, especially segregation in the South, figured centrally in his reports from the United States during two visits after the War (1945 and 1946) and were a major topic of his many writings on colonialism and neocolonialism thereafter. It formed the theme of his play, “The Respectful Prostitute” (1946). He claimed that even as a boy, whenever he heard of the French “colonies,” he thought of racial exploitation. He wrote in “Black Orpheus” about the African poets using the colonizers' language against them in their poems of liberation, ‘Black poetry in French is the only great revolutionary poetry of our time.’ He fulminated against the violence of colonialism and its implicit “justification” by appeal to the sub-humanity of the native population. On several occasions in diverse works Sartre referred to the cry of the oppressed and exploited: “We too are humans!” as the guiding ideal of their fight for liberty. His existential humanism grounded his critique of the capitalist and colonialist “systems.” He wrote that “the meanness is in the system—a claim that resonated with liberation movements then and now.”35 But his properly existentialist understanding of that phrase, respecting the ethical primacy of free organic praxis, requires that he qualify the remark with “not entirely”; for whatever system he speaks of rides on the backs of responsible individuals, alone or more likely in
social wholes, for whom moral responsibility can and should be ascribed. This may serve as his lesson to the ontology and the ethics of race relations in the twenty-first century. His appeal for violence to counter the inherent violence of the colonial system in Algeria reached hyperbolic proportions in his prefatory essay to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

Of the other topics in current philosophical discussions to which Sartre offers relevant remarks, to conclude by mentioning feminism. This suggestion will certainly raise some eyebrows because even his fans admit that some of the images and language of his earlier work were clearly sexist in character. And yet, Sartre always favored the exploited and oppressed in any relationship and he encouraged his life-long partner, Simone de Beauvoir, to write "*The Second Sex*", commonly recognized as the seminal work for the second-wave of the feminist movement. In addition to the plausible extrapolations of many remarks made with references to the exploitation of blacks and Arabs, just mentioned, we cite two concepts in Sartre's work that I believe carry particular promise for feminist arguments.

He first occurs in the short work *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1946). Many authors have mined this text for arguments critical of "masculinist" biases, but want to underscore the "spirit of synthesis" that Sartre champions there in contrast with the "analytical spirit" that he criticizes. The issue is whether the Jew should be respected legally in his concrete Jewishness—his culture, his practices, including dietary and religious observances—or whether he should be satisfied with the "Rights of Man and of the Citizen" as his analytic, liberal democratic "friend" proposes. The abstract, analytic thinker counsels, in effect, "You enjoy all the
rights of a French Citizen, just don't be so Jewish.” Sartre, on the other hand, argues “synthetically” (concretely) for the rights of the Jew or the Arab or the woman (his examples) to vote as such in any election. In other words, their “rights” are concrete and not mere abstractions. One should not sacrifice the Jew (or the Arab or the woman) to the ‘man’.

The second concept that issues from Sartre's later writing which is of immediate relevance to feminist thought is that of positive reciprocity and its attendant notion of generosity. We are familiar with the conflictual nature of interpersonal relations in Sartre's vintage existentialist writings: “Hell is other people” and the like. But in his aesthetic writings and in the Notebooks for an Ethics, he describes the artist's work as a generous act, an invitation from one freedom to another. He even suggests that this might serve as a model for interpersonal relations in general. And in his major work in social ontology,” the Critique of Dialectical Reason”, Sartre charts the move from objectifying and alienating relationships (series) to the positive reciprocity of the group members. Some feminist authors have employed these Sartrean concepts in their arguments. There remains much still to extract from Sartre's later works in this area.35

As Sartrean existentialism frees itself from the limitations of its post-war adolescence and shows its mature psychological, ontological and ethical face to the new century, it enters with adult standing into the ongoing conversation that we call Western philosophy. Its relevance remains as real today as does the human condition that it describes and analyzes.
Notes and References

7. Ibid, p.239
9. Ibid, p.129
10. Ibid, p.249
11. Ibid, p.59
13. Ibid, p.12
15. Ibid, p.42

16. Ibid, p.45

17. Ibid, p.78

18. Ibid, p.85


25. Ibid, p.532


28. Ibid, p.124
29. Ibid, p.158
30. Ibid, p.384
31. Ibid, p.96
32. ibid, p.731