CHAPTER II

EXISTENTIAL CONCEPTION OF FREEDOM
Before proceeding to discuss the existential conception of freedom it seems appropriate to present a brief account of 'existentialism'.

There can be no single definition that can comprehensively embrace the complexities of existential philosophy. It is not a wholly new philosophy, for its roots go as far back as Socrates. Even Kierkegaard, the father of modern existentialism, acknowledged that his was a Socratic task—"know thyself".

The term "existentialism" is thoroughly discussed and elaborated by many thinkers, who agree that it is an expression of the disillusioned and war afflicted generations of the 20th century Europe in particular. In general it may be described as a revolt against traditional Western philosophy. It speaks out against various forms of 'dehumanisation' that, it believes, result from industrial society, technocracy, militant nationalism, militarism and the so-called scientific objectivism and physicalism. It is a natural out-come of the modern society, which according to existentialists, causes alienation at the social and individual planes, self-deception and denial of individuality. Existentialists proclaim that modern man's penchant for systematization—in science, in philosophy, in social theory—leads to the loss of subjectivity. The emphasis on methodology and neglecting a
proper ontology has deprived man of our age of the sense of values and humanistic outlook. Philosophy in general, is stripped of its character and content and man is lost in the labyrinth of technical jargon. Existentialism is a radical revolt against objectification and the concept of the 'typed' man. The two world wars have left man numb, cold and helpless. His dreams are shattered, his ideals are frustrated and his personality is injured, broken into many dissociated parts. Totality of being is lost to sense. He has been left alone and homeless in the midst of the brute objectivity of the world. Besides, 'reason' is dominant and no importance is given to the subjectivity of the individual human person. Under such circumstances existentialism provides a philosophy which is rightly called 'hominocentric'.

Existentialism emphasizes the uniqueness and primacy of existence—the inner, immediate experience of man's self-awareness. "Emphasis on human existence is the beginning of the definition of existentialism".¹ The fundamental drive or urge is to exist and to be recognized as an individual. If man is so recognized, existentialists assert, he may gain a sense of meaning and significance in life. According to existentialism, the most meaningful point of reference of any person is his immediate consciousness, which cannot be contained in a 'system' of abstractions. The

advocates of existentialism hold that abstract thinking tends to be impersonal and to lead away from the concrete human situation. Robert N. Beck presents an extract regarding existentialistic outlook of man:

Man must be understood, existentialists insist, in terms of possibilities, anxieties, and decisions; in terms of the tragic and absurd situations in which he finds himself. Man is not an image or reflection of an antecedently existing essence that determines his actions and his values; he is a free being. What man is can only be inferred from how he is, that is, man's essence is to be found only in his concrete existence. The desire to know the meaning of the individual man in a more radical way than have other philosophers leads existentialists to hold that the starting point of philosophy is the concrete situation of man in the world. ¹

In this way, according to existentialist thinkers reality or being is "existence" that is found in the "I" rather than the "it". Thus the centre of thought and meaning is the existing individual thinker.²

As indicated earlier, existentialism is a radical revolt against some features of traditional philosophy and modern society. The traditional or speculative world-view of man has totally been rejected by existentialists. For, according to them, in such "systems" the individual self or the thinker is lost in a

supersensible world, in abstract universals or in universal ego. Therefore, existentialism is a protest in the name of human 'individuality' against the concepts of "reason" and "nature" that were so strongly emphasized during the 18th century "Enlightenment". "The first and most obvious one is that this style of philosophizing begins from man rather than from nature."¹ A traditional philosopher studies man in terms of some systematic 'concept' or 'essence' derived from reason. While, on the contrary, 'the existentialist attitude' indicates that reflection on the existentialist experience can result in an important philosophical position. This very attitude is directed towards 'human existence'. "Existence means the state of being actual or occurring within space and time, or it refers to 'something given here and now'."² The 'essence', as traditional philosophers hold, is that which distinguishes a thing from other type of objects. "It is that which makes a thing what it is or that which all things called by the same name have in common."³ Thus, according to those classical thinkers once a person has grasped the idea or concept of the essence of thing he can think of it quite apart from its existence. Plato and many traditional thinkers have the same viewpoint regarding human individual. "Perhaps one can most easily characterise the view of man and his world which is enshrined in Plato's Republic. For Plato

³ Ibid., p. 301.
"existence" is a paltry, second-rate manner of being; existent entities are real only in so far as they manifest a "form" or "essence". To see the world as it really is, according to Platonists, is to see it as an intelligible system of essence.¹

Existentialists reject this Platonic (or classical) view of man and assert that there is something which cannot be conceptualized and whose existence comes before its essence, that is the personal act of existing, or "that being is man or, as Heidegger has it, the human reality."² There is no knowledge, the existentialists say, apart from a knowing subject. The argument of classical thinkers that man can be understood in terms of some systematic 'concept' or 'essence' derived from reason is wrong:

Existentialists oppose such traditional conceptualism and its abstract, general concepts of existence and individuality. Neither systems of thought nor rational definitions can capture individual human existence.³

Man's inner life must be understood, existentialists insist, "with its moods, anxieties and decisions."⁴

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in this way, stress on the primacy of the state of "existence" rather than the primacy of the supratemporal or supraempirical 'essence'.

Existentialism also opposes all forms of objectivity and objective functionalization of man. Objectivity, existentialists assert, has tended to make the person of secondary importance in relation with things. Sartre, in this connection, says: "Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life, instead of being a kind of moss, or a fungus or a cauliflower." Existentialism, thus, places a new emphasis on man's inner life and experience. It stresses man's immediate and subjective awareness. Stressing upon man's inner life, existentialism, raises the problem of man's individuality and personality. It represents man's rebellion against all attempts to ignore or suppress the uniqueness of his subjective experience. John Macquarrie expresses the existentialist position in the following words:

Thus one must further qualify the existentialist position by saying that for existentialist the subject is the existent in the whole range of his existing. He is not only a thinking subject but an initiator of action and a centre of feeling. It is this whole spectrum of existence, known directly and completely in the very act of existing, that existentialism tries to express.

Kierkegaard, the father of modern existentialism, has rightly remarked that individual is real and 'subjectivity is truth'. To him "individuals alone were real", and the genuine and the

critical dilemmas of the individual's life "are not solved by
intellectual exploration of the facts nor of the laws of think-
ing about them."¹ The resolution emerges through conflicts and
tumults in the soul, anxieties, agonies, perilous adventures of
faith into unknown territories. Sartre, with reference to
Kierkegaard, further asserts:

> The reality of every one's existence proceeds
thus from the "inwardness" of man, not from
anything that the mind can codify, for object-
ified knowledge is always at one or more re-
moves from the truth. "Truth", said Kierke-
gaard, "is sub-injectivity."²

Writing and advocating "individuality" as a constant theme,
existentialists are themselves fervidly individual. That is why
existentialism is sometimes called the philosophy of individual
human person:

(Existentialists) refuse to belong to schools
and systems and, for the most part, they do
not offer doctrines in the traditional sense.
Indeed, they more often speak of philosophiz-
ing than philosophy, for their message is as
much to call to self-examination and decision
as the giving of new information. ³

The emphasis on personal existence and subjectivity has
led in turn to a new emphasis on man's freedom and personal
responsibility. According to existentialists the faculty that

². Ibid., p. 6.
p. 363.
makes a radical distinction between human and non-human being is freedom. Themes, such as freedom, choice and responsibility are prominent in the writings of all existentialist philosophers. John Macquarrie, with the reference to John Macmurray, asserts:

_These matters constitute the core of personal being. It is the exercise of freedom and the ability to shape the future that distinguishes man from all the other beings that we know on earth. It is through free and responsible decisions that man becomes authentically himself. In John Macmurray's language, the 'self as agent' provides the central themes for existentialism, whereas traditional Western philosophy, specially since the time of Descartes, has concentrated attention on the 'self as subject'— and by 'subject is understood 'thinking subject'. _

Freedom is the core of existential philosophy. The human individual can create his world through his act of free will. According to existentialist thinkers, man simply 'is'. He is what he wills, he is responsible for everything he does. Therefore, he is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. And this doctrine—willing and making oneself—is the first principle of existentialism. A detailed study of the concept of existential freedom would be made in the following pages, here just the theme has been introduced.

While stressing the importance of man, existentialists also realistically face the facts of human weakness, insecurity and

limitations. In elaborating the existential world outlook, they have brought to limelight the specifically existentialist themes such as finitude, guilt, alienation, despair, anguish, death etc. Anxiety, the existentialists assert, arises as man undergoes the experience of the meaninglessness of his life. Anguish and melancholy lead to existential despair and this very "crisis", they hold, prepares man for the "leap" into authentic existence. This may come through "faith" and dependence on God, according to the theologians, or through "resolve", an act of will, according to some others, for the advocates of existentialism are both theists and atheists. Hence existentialism is an assertion of the significance of the self in the face of frustration and the impersonality of modern civilization in an artificial, man-made world.¹ Sartre and Heidegger give three names—"fallenness, being-in-the-midst-of-the-world and inauthenticity"²—to the one and the same state of human weakness and insecurity that alienates him from his authentic and true being. In short, for existentialist thinkers, "man is never just part of the cosmos but always stands to it in a relationship of tension with possibilities for tragic conflict."³

Hence, existentialism is a movement having philosophical, theological, literary and psychological dimensions, all revealing

the common belief of its exponents, that is "existence comes before essence". Existentialists maintain that every person's existence, as he himself experiences his situation in the world, is the only fruitful point of view for expressing and solving human problems. Theories and abstractions, existentialists believe, cannot cope with this basic fact. Man possessing free will and therefore, responsibility, moulds himself according to his objective. His fate and character are not determined in advance by God or society. Though his inescapable lot is anxiety, he has a moral obligation to participate actively in life.

Briefly it can be said that "existentialism" is a movement of protest, a diagnosis of man's predicament, a belief in the primacy of existence, an emphasis on man's subjective experience or personal involvement, a radical recognition of freedom and responsibility, and a projection of human sense of insecurity in the world. Having gone through this general survey of existentialist philosophy, we can proceed to explain the existentialist concept of freedom in its proper perspective.

Existentialism underlines "freedom and responsibility". Its philosophical endeavour is anti-deterministic. The emphasis of the existentialists on personal existence and subjectivity

has led to a new emphasis on man's freedom and responsibility. Describing the purpose of the movement as it is primarily concerned with man's existence, his freedom and responsibility, Blackham, in his *Six Existentialist Thinkers*, eloquently asserts:

"The goal of movement for an existing individual is to arrive at a decision, and to renew it. The (existentialist) thinker gives himself stable ethical reality by forming and renewing himself in critical decisions which are a total inward commitment. ... Through having willed in this manner, through having ventured to take a decisive step in the utmost intensity of subjective passion and with full consciousness of one's eternal responsibility... one learns something else about life, and learns that it is quite a different thing from being engaged, year in and year out, in piecing together something for a system."

According to existentialist thinkers, determinism, whether hereditary, biological or environmental, does not offer an adequate explanation of man's inner potentialities and capabilities. In existentialist philosophy the main interest is directed not so much to mankind in general, to social institutions and their collective achievements, or to the impersonal world of nature, but to the 'existence' of human individual and his choices and decisions. Man translates into action his unique inner potentialities and creative skill only because of his freedom. The existentialist viewpoint is that man, first of all, exists in the world, where through his freedom he makes and moulds himself and through his actions creates his values. He is the maker of himself.

Man is a project which possesses subjective life. For man, apart from this projection of self all that exists is a means to the realization of his being. He fulfils his project only through his freedom. He is responsible for whatever he does and, in this way, the whole responsibility of his actions falls solely upon his shoulders. Existentialism is an assertion of the significance of personal existence and decisions. For existentialists freedom is not something to be proved or argued about. It is a reality to be experienced. Man has considerable freedom within his reach provided he wills to exercise it. Freedom is a unique quest which lies in working out the demands of one's inner nature and expressing one's genuine or authentic self. Freedom means facing choices, making decisions and accepting them.

One can find the conception of freedom in all existentialist thinkers, viz. Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Marcel, Jaspers etc. But Jean-Paul Sartre alone among all the existentialists has elaborated a systematic and detailed theory of freedom. After going through the Sartrian existential philosophy, one can easily understand the problem of human freedom. It can be claimed that there is little in Sartre's theory which contradicts anything said on the subject by other existentialists, and there is nothing in it which is incompatible with the major premises of existential thinking. There is no other philosopher, except Sartre, who has tried to develop a systematic theory of the freedom of the will, even though, all existentialist philosophers believe in it.
Traditional philosophers use the term "freedom" mainly in two contexts, which are technically known as 'freedom of self-realization' and 'freedom of indeterminism' or 'freedom of the will'.

Existentialists do not accept the classical theories regarding freedom of the will. As Olson puts it:

The best introduction to the existentialist theory will, therefore, be a consideration of the reasons which induced the existentialists to reject non-existentialist concepts of freedom.

Like other existentialists, Sartre, too, rejects the traditional philosophical concepts of 'freedom'. The chief difference between Sartre and the exponents of classical theories is that, as he asserts:

Man cannot be sometimes slave and sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all.

Classical theories hold that human behaviour is often determined by an objective situation and subjective motive. Moreover, according to classical thinkers it is only reason which indicates that if behaviour is so determined it is morally wrong or injurious to one's best long-range interests that free choice

comes into play. Sartre, on the other hand, completely denies that either objective situation or subjective motives ever really move man to act. Human beings are not playthings of their passions, but, they choose their actions themselves. They are free at their will to decide and act.

Freedom is the highest value in existential philosophy. It is the value par excellence. Flight from freedom leads to 'fallenness' and inauthenticity, which is considered by existent-

ialists as the source of all evils:

Heidegger calls flight from death inauthenticity. In this state man escapes responsibility, i.e. he gives up his right to exist as a free-being. Sartre says that freedom reveals in dread. This results in inauthenticity of existence. Authentic existence is moral and inauthentic existence is immoral.

There is no realm of value or means of justification or excuse other than freedom, which is the sole criterion of human existence. Sartre asserts that in this world "we are left alone without excuse. 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 that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does."^2

Another remarkable point is that the existentialist thinker, Sartre, does not believe in the power of passion. He considers

2. Sartre, J.P., Existentialism and Humanism, op. Cit., p. 34.
a grand passion "as the destructive torrent upon which a man
is swept into certain actions as by fate, and which, therefore,
is an excuse for them."\(^1\) He thinks that man is responsible for
his passion.

Every action implies freedom. Without it man can do nothing.
There can be few themes in existentialism amidst which the most
central and prominent is 'freedom'. As stated earlier, this
theme is present in all the writings of existentialists. First
of all, it became prominent in the writings of Kierkegaard,
according to whom, to exist and to be free were almost synonymous
expressions. The interest in freedom, or rather the passion for
freedom, is not confined to any particular variety of existentia­
lists. Sartre, too, is just as insistent as Kierkegaard that
freedom and existence are indistinguishable. According to him,
one does not first exist and then becomes free; to be human
is already to be free. Freedom is the core of human existence,
which is grounded in it.

According to existentialist thinkers, freedom, besides
being identical with human existence, is also creativity. John
Macquarrie has rightly remarked with reference to Nikolai
Berdyaev that:

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 34.
If freedom is almost identical with existence itself, there is no humanity without freedom. Freedom may be dangerous, but there is no human dignity without freedom, and the risk of increasing freedom must constantly be taken. Berdyaev rightly links freedom with creativity. The highest reach of humanity is creativity, a sharing in the power of God the Creator. 'Creativity is the mystery of freedom. Man can indeed create the monstrous as well as the good, the beautiful, and the useful.'

As mentioned before, for existentialists, particularly for Sartre, there are no values external to man. Values are created by man and have no objective or permanent basis. Man only has freedom to create himself and his values as he wills and acts. Sartre declares that 'everything is permissible' and, man is really "beyond good and evil" as Nietzsche thinks. Dostoyevsky writes: "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted". This very dictum has become the starting point of existentialism particularly for Sartre and Heidegger.

According to Sartre, freedom and human reality are synonymous:

Freedom is the nature of man; in anxiety man becomes aware of his freedom, knows himself responsible for his own being by commitment, seeks the impossible reunion with being-in-itself.

For Sartre man is free to choose his actions. He has the will to do whatever he likes. The ultimate principle of Being, says Heidegger, is 'will'. Sartre concurs by saying that only in action is there any reality. Man is only the sum total of his actions and purposes. Again according to him, man creates his own world with his actions. Freedom is the basis for all human activity. To act is to modify the shape of the world.

Sartre, like Kierkegaard, insists that there are no external signs to guide man. Man must make his own rules and make them alone. He writes in *The Age of Reason*:

There was in his world no evil or good save that he set up as such. All round things had formed a circle and waited without making a sign; he stood alone in the midst of a monstrous silence, alone and free, without recourse or excuse, irrevocably condemned, condemned to be free.

It is rightly observed that all existentialists have taken the problem of freedom very seriously. Kierkegaard points out that freedom is man's greatness and grandeur. His charge against Hegel is that he has left no room in his philosophical system for human feeling or freedom. Heidegger holds that "truth's essence is freedom." True freedom according to Marcel, is

achieved when the self is conscious of the many rich possibilities of insight and development that are open to it. Man, Marcel holds, is truly free only when he opens himself to hope, fidelity, and love and when he understands that freedom points beyond itself and to a transcendental reality or ego. Marcel very emphatically says that 'man' or an individual existential being "I" is defined only by its 'liberty'. Moreover, this liberty is the primary source of subject-object relationship. As Blackham underlines:

The I is, so to speak, defined by its liberty, the possibility in the face of life to accept or to refuse it. This is the primary subject-object relation.

Marcel holds further that love and intelligence are related to freedom and they are the most concrete as well as the most creative things in the world. Similarly, the idea of freedom is also found at the centre of Jaspers' philosophical system. Replying to the questions—how is it that we are free, and how is it that existence is essentially freedom?—Jaspers says that this is because transcendence is concealed from human beings. He points out that if transcendence is revealed to them directly, they would not be free, because transcendence would dominate them. In this state the domain of existence is the domain of freedom, and that of possibility, project and choice. The same is true of Sartre's

views whose entire thought system revolves around the idea of freedom.

All the existentialist thinkers use the term "freedom" to refer to something which they consider to be a genuinely existing and valuable feature of the human condition. The existentialists do not deny that man has the power to achieve chosen goals by his own efforts, as the traditional philosophers understand by the term freedom. What leads the existentialists to reject or ignore the commonsense conception of freedom is their belief that the power to achieve particular goals is not itself of a great value. This theory rests upon three other notions.¹

First, man is a being who exists only by projecting himself beyond the present into the future. To exist is to posit goals and to pursue them. There is no escape from our condition except flight or pursuit toward projected values. This means that if one empirical desire is fulfilled, we will and must replace that desire with another. In this way, a state of complete desire fulfilment would be equivalent to 'death'. A part of the tragedy of human condition is that man is a desiring being and that desire, according to existentialists, is a state of 'lack' or incompletion. In this regard Sartre says: "The existence of desire as a human fact is sufficient to prove that

human reality is a lack."¹ He further adds that desire is a lack of being.² Thus, a state of lack is certainly incompatible with a state of perfection. In this position, according to the existentialist thinkers, the common man has defined freedom on the basis of a mistaken notion that there is a state of happiness, satisfied desire or absence of frustration which can be achieved by fulfilling empirical desire. Moreover, existentialists hold that man must desire in order to exist only, and in this act of desiring he too constitutes himself as incomplete and unfulfilled. This incompleteness or unfulfillment is necessary if man is to be 'free' even in the sense of being able to overcome obstacles. Nietzsche makes this point more clearly asserting that freedom can be measured by the resistance which has to be overcome and by the efforts it takes to maintain oneself on top. Sartre expresses the same point in his own language. Freedom, he says, "itself creates the obstacles from which we suffer."³ But the obstacles which stand in one's way would not exist as obstacles were it not for his free choice of values. In a word, to do or not to do, it is freedom itself.

Secondly, existentialists say that even if man could succeed in fulfilling all his particular, empirical desires, he would still not achieve happiness; for the desire of particular, empirical objects in the world is always suspended from and merely

² Ibid., p. 88.
³ Ibid., p. 495.
a specification of an overarching desire for the impossible. In this respect, the existentialists' argument is that "a satisfied desire in the sense of an achieved desire does not bring satisfaction in the sense of pleasure or happiness."¹

Third, the last objection of existential philosophers against the common notion of freedom that even if man could escape from desire and could find pleasure or happiness in a state of total desire fulfilment, this could only be at the cost of intensity and the existential values. And of course existentialists hold that the intense life with the existential values would certainly be superior to a state of contentment or happiness.²

These are the three arguments on the basis of which existentialists reject the commonsense conception of freedom indicating that the power to achieve particular goals is not itself a great value.

The existentialist argument against freedom through self-realization, as the classical thinkers define it, rests primarily upon the belief that man has no readymade or pre-human nature, no divine essence which is to be automatically realized. Atheist Nietzsche and Sartre agree that there is no God, and that is why there is no divine essence or human nature. For Nietzsche

² Ibid., pp. 100-107.
"God is dead" and for Sartre "there is no God". Thus he emphasizes:

...There is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing—as he wills, to be after that leap towards existence.

Further, Sartre himself defined existentialism as the view which holds that "existence precedes essence." In this connection he also referred to the Leibnizian view that man's existence comes before his essence and he is defined by the choice of his ends. In Being and Nothingness, Sartre says:

Adam's essence is for Adam himself a given; Adam has not chosen it; he could not choose to be Adam. Consequently he does not support the responsibility for his being. ... For us, on the contrary, Adam is not defined by an essence since for human reality essence comes after existence.

In other words, according to existentialist thinkers, man makes his own history by his own choices, and his true life history or individual essence could not conceivably be known or defined until after his death. William Barrett, with reference to Heidegger points out that man makes history by his actions:

We are not born at some moment in general, but at that particular moment in that particular milieu and in entering the world we also enter, however humbly, into its historical destiny. The more concretely and

2. Ibid., p. 28.
humbly we grasp the temporal roots of human existence, the more clearly we see that this existence is in and of itself, through and through, historical. As temporality is to time, so is historicity to history; as we make clocks to measure time because our being is essentially temporal, so man writes histories or makes history by his actions because his very being is historical.

Existentialists are deeply interested in the dignity of the individual person; and according to them a being who does not personally support the responsibility for his individual history and who does not choose himself or makes himself, is, in reality a person without dignity.

It is also very essential to keep in mind that for existentialist thinkers man is free by ontological necessity and that any attempt to escape from 'freedom' is necessarily self-defeating. In one particular sense, then, freedom is a universal human phenomenon which does not permit of degrees. At the same time, however, the existentialists have an axiological doctrine of freedom according to which one is aware of freedom as an ontological necessity and so ceases to try escape from freedom. An individual exposed to a situation which obliges him to become conscious of his freedom is thus more free than the individual not so obliged.

As stated earlier the view of existentialists on freedom in general rejects the traditional arguments in favour of the

freedom of the will. Such an existentialist view against the classical conception of 'freedom' is expressed in the writings of Nikolai Berdyaev. He voices the opinion of existentialists, when he emphasizes that the question is not at all that of 'freedom of the will', as stated in naturalistic, psychological or pedagogical-moralistic usage. The difficulty in these traditional arguments, Berdyaev points out, was that they attempted to 'objectify' freedom; to treat it as an object that could somehow be perceived, investigated, and either proved or disproved from outside. But for the existentialists (as for Kant), he argues, freedom is not to be proved, but is rather a postulate of action. In the strict sense, "Freedom is not something to be proved or argued about; it is a reality to be experienced". Freedom is already there as a condition of our existing (including our thinking). Berdyaev holds: "To understand an act of freedom rationally is to make it resemble the phenomena of nature"; and this very phenomenon belongs to a 'secondary' world. Freedom, according to him, must be already there before one can even think of such a world. While speaking of this type freedom that is prior to the phenomenal world, Berdyaev's language assumes a

2. Ibid., p. 178.
metaphysical or rather a mystical over tone. To stress the priority of freedom he often, like Sartre, says that freedom has the primacy over being:

But freedom cannot be derived from being; it is rooted in nothingness, in non-being, if we are to use ontological terminology. Freedom is baseless, neither determined by nor born of being.

Similarly, Sartre, in his "Essay on Phenomenological Ontology" (i.e. "Being and Nothingness") declares thus:

Freedom is not a being; it is the being of man— i.e., his nothingness of being. ... Man cannot be sometimes slave and sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all. ²

In brief, the existentialist philosophers do not use the term "freedom" in the classical or traditional sense or as common men use it. The ordinary man believes that he is most free when he is not obliged to choose or when circumstances clearly dictate which one choice is the best. The existentialist thinker, on the contrary, believes that man is most free when he recognizes that he is obliged to choose. The ordinary man says that freedom is valuable because it leads to happiness, security and contentment. The existentialist says that freedom is valuable because through it man may realize his own dignity,

1. Ibid., p. 179.
and triumph over the unhappiness to which he is irrevocably condemned. Again, the ordinary man tries to ignore the unpleasant facts of life, and if he is exposed to an "impossible situation" where no choice could conceivably be a choice of happiness, he is without recourse. Conversely, the existentialist thinker refuses to ignore the unpleasant facts of life and spends most of his time trying to find some suitable techniques by which to triumph over them. For an existentialist freedom reveals in dread. In the state of dread or anguish an existing human individual becomes aware of his freedom:

> It is in anguish that man becomes the consciousness of his freedom, or if you prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom as consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself.

To summarize the existentialist view regarding freedom, it seems appropriate to refer to Berdyaev's notion of freedom indicating its mystical roots:

> Freedom is indeed 'meontic', a nothing rather than a something, a possibility rather than an actuality. It cannot be grasped by thought but only known through the exercise of freedom; and perhaps even then it is only in those rare moments of the experience of anxiety in the face of freedom that we perceive something of that abyssal and primordial character of freedom.

It may be concluded that all existential thinkers have a conspicuously anti-deterministic outlook. Broadly speaking, it can be said that "the common interest which unites existential philosophers is their interest in human freedom."¹