Chapter IV
Comparative Study of Heidegger and Sartre
We have already critically analysed Heideggerean and Sartrean existentialist philosophy in our second and third chapters. Here we would compare not only both of them but also with their contemporaries like Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus.

Though Heidegger and Sartre had adopted phenomenological method (which I have already stated) they are critical about Husserl's phenomenological method as well. But since that position is developed out of dissatisfaction with Husserl's phenomenology, it is with this we need to begin, though not until we appreciate the existentialist debt as well. We will discuss the debts of Heidegger and Sartre to Husserl in the course of this chapter.

Like Husserl, Heidegger also understands phenomenology as a method. He was a student of Husserl, at least in part took over Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and its programme of a return "to the data themselves". In the use of phenomenological method Heidegger seeks to get back to the data of immediate experience, and describes these data as they show themselves in their primitive disclosure. Etymologically,
the word phenomenology is derived from the root words *phainesthai* and *logos*, which means that which shows itself or that which reveals itself and open to sight or lets something to be seen respectively. Thus, phenomenology, according to Heidegger, properly understood as the *logos of the phenomenon*, is the disciplined attempt to open the sight to that which shows itself, and to let it be seen as it is. In using phenomenological method, one must therefore discard all pre-conceived logical and epistemological constructions and seek to examine and describe the phenomena as they show themselves. It is the method of uncovering the hiding or interpretation which Heidegger also calls the methodical meaning of the phenomenological description.¹

Heidegger does not accept Husserl’s *eidetic* and phenomenological reduction, because the meaning of Being in which he is interested is not some general essence, but something fundamentally individualised, particularly in the case of human being. The predominant problem of phenomenology for Heidegger is the problem of Being, a problem that Husserl

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allegedly neglected through his employment of the *epoche*. According to Heidegger, *epoche* and the pre-suppositions, which support it, can only carry us to philosophical disaster. Heidegger insists that man's Being-in the world is (onto)logically primitive. There can be no Cartesian doubt, no Husserlian bracketing, and no separation of man (*Dasein*) from the world in which he lives. For Heidegger, *eidetic* and transcendental phenomenology are useless.

Although Sartre rejects Husserl's transcendental ego, the essentialism and the *epoche*, his own existential phenomenology is a synthesis of Husserl's and Heidegger's thought. Sartre substitutes the Heideggerean structure of Being-in-the-world for the Husserlian *epoche*. He argues that the existence of the transcendental ego is inconsistent with the unity of consciousness. There is unity of consciousness, so there is transcendental ego. The very postulate of transcendental ego is phenomenologically illegitimates because phenomenology describes only what appears to consciousness. Though Heidegger eschews a psychologistic vocabulary to engage in fundamental ontology, Sartre revives the Husserlian emphasis on
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consciousness but insists that consciousness is necessarily embedded in the world.

In the first part of Being and Nothingness, ‘The phenomenon’, Sartre claims that phenomenology’s reduction of what exists to the appearance of that which exists is progress, because it overcomes some dualisms constitutive of philosophical problems: interior and exterior, appearance and reality, actual and potential, appearance and essence. In the second part, ‘The Phenomenon of Being and the Being of the Phenomenon’, Sartre argues that neither of these can be reduced to the other. The Husserlian phenomena and the Heideggerean disclosure of being require one another for a phenomenology that is adequate to our Being-in-the-world. In the third part, Sartre distinguishes his phenomenology from the Idealism of the Irish philosopher George Berkeley from whom he nevertheless takes the terminology of percipere. It was the slogan of Berkeley’s philosophy that in the case of physical objects esse est percipi, to be is to be perceived.

According to Sartre there is no distinction between the perceived and the imagined objects. This view is borrowed from Husserl’s theory of things (noemata). As Sartre states, the difference
between them is 'nothing'. This 'nothing' has a special significance for Sartre as for Heidegger, and nothing will turn out to be equivalent to the important concept of freedom. The difference between perception and imagination we find is the difference between the freedom of imagination and the lack of freedom of perception. "I can say that the image includes a certain nothingness... however lively, touching or strong an image may be, it gives its object as not being."² It is obstructiveness. It is this obstructiveness, which makes a bracketing of existence impossible in the case of perception.

To understand the application of Sartre's phenomenology to imagination and emotion, one requires further clarification of intentionality and the distinction between reflexive and pre-reflexive consciousness. Simone de Beauvoir relates how Sartre turned pale with emotion when Raymond Aron described the doctrine of intentionality to him. Intentionality was first formulated systematically by the Thirteenth-century scholastic thinker, St. Thomas Aquinas. Even though Sartre has taken Husserl's intentionality for granted, he claims that Husserl

betrays his own intentionality. Sartre makes a crucial break with the doctrines of Brentano and Husserl when he insists that intended objects of consciousness exist. Brentano had thought that they 'inexist' as presented to consciousness, that is, neither exist nor do not exist. Husserl suspended belief and disbelief in the existence of objects in the external world by his *epoche* in order to describe consciousness purely. Sartre regards these positions as confused. The result of the last reduction, as Sartre put it, "is that conscious act become like so many flies bumping their noses on the window without being able to clear the glass".\(^3\) Sartre agrees with Heidegger that this initial distinction between acts of consciousness and objects (of consciousness) is not only philosophically disastrous, but also even unfaithful to the phenomenological method itself.

Here Sartre clearly disagrees with Heidegger that there is a vital distinction between reflective and pre-reflective consciousness and a distinction between reflective self-knowledge (the Cartesian cogito) and reflective self-consciousness. Sartre begins with the Husserlian dictum "all consciousness is consciousness

\[^3\] Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1956, P.100
of something" and both of them begin with the Cartesian doctrine that the existence of consciousness itself is known simply by virtue of its existence. The definition of consciousness focuses on the intentionality of consciousness. For Sartre this leads to a distinction between the two different kinds of Being—the being of objects for consciousness, (being-in-itself), and the being-for-itself of consciousness. Sartre introduces a convention of parenthesising the 'of' in the expression “consciousness (of)”. This is similar to Heidegger's characterization of Being-in-the-world. Consciousness (of) object is thus to be taken as primitive for Sartre just as Being-in-the-world is primitive for Heidegger.

Heidegger had talked about the primitive or original importance of the practical pre-ontological aspects of human Existenz, but these were not examined in detail. But Sartre, on the other hand, through his study of emotions, of the pre-verbal aspects of our relationship with other people, introduces a distinction between two different source of consciousness (intentionality)—positional and non-positional) into his studies again from Heidegger's Being and Time. Husserl, like Descartes and Kant, takes the

\[\text{Ibid, P.11}\]
cogito to be purely reflective, and then interpreted consciousness itself as necessarily reflective. But Heidegger had pointed out that the many sorts of the encounters with the world (as equipment) were not reflective or conceptual at all. Heidegger had captured this difference in his distinction between 'ontic and ontological'.

Sartre distinguishes between pre-reflective and reflective consciousness or between a positional (thetic) and a non-positional (non-thetic) consciousness. The positional consciousness is the consciousness of selfless activity. But, according to Heidegger, his sort of consciousness is not self-conscious, but simply conscious of its immediate tasks and equipment.

Heidegger and Sartre discuss the fundamental phenomenological nature of the world. Heidegger has put forward the equipmental and sign-like character of things in the world. Negativity in the world-fabric concerns Sartre. Both equipmental or sign-like character and negativity come to the world by human agency. Since they are the essential aspects of the world, then this world

\(^5\) Ibid, P. 28-35
is indeed a human one. Although Sartre makes such Heideggerean remarks that "the world of tasks, in which the original relation between things is ...instrumentality," he contends that instrumentality is a function of a deeper, more pervasive dimension of reality. The link with Heidegger becomes clearer when Sartre refers us to a kind of negativity "the one which penetrates most deeply into being, which he calls 'lack'.

Lack is nothingness, which appears as the essential condition of instrumentality.

Phenomenology become existential with the denial of this primacy of spectatorial knowledge, with Heidegger’s insistence that human existence is indeed more than mere cognition in the usual spectator sense of knowledge and such knowledge presupposes existence. Or with Sartre, that since "meaning came into the world only by the activity of man, practice superseded contemplation".

Both Heidegger and Sartre reject Husserl’s emphasis on essences. Heidegger has already told us that human being...

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6 Ibid, P.199-200
7 Ibid, P. 86
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(Dasein) is structured as Existenz and, such, can be characterised as other entities can be characterised. And Sartre has claimed in his slogan that "existence precedes essence" and man makes himself and his less-known but more important characterisation of human consciousness as nothingness.

What are these things in themselves? It is clear that they are not to be distinguished from "things as experienced" and so the traditional dualisms between phenomena and noumena, objects of experience and objects in themselves, appearance and reality find no place in existential philosophy.

If there is no distinction between object and experience, reality and appearance then how are we to distinguish essences (things in themselves) from mere appearance or from aspects.

We may wonder on this account how it is possible for us to talk about ourselves as personalities at all. Sartre's answer is bluntly that all such talk about personality is talk about the public me and not about the I of the cogito at all. Secondly, the understanding of oneself as the me is no longer a special phenomenological reflective activity, but it becomes the study of one or more objects in the world. We have seen that like
Heidegger, Sartre destroys ego-subject in order to further destroy all traditional dualisms between subject and object. We shall also find, however, that Sartre, unlike Heidegger, re-established a dualism very similar to traditional Cartesian dualism.

Merleau Ponty tells us that Descartes’ cogito is a merely verbal cogito, the pre-reflective cogito is already familiar to us from Heidegger’s discussion of Dasein’s primitive world of equipment. Merleau Ponty says we must stop defining consciousness by knowledge of self and... introduces the notion of a life of consciousness, which goes beyond its explicit knowledge of itself.

The concepts of nothing and nothingness have been recurrent in our discussions of Heidegger and Sartre. The nothing came to occupy an increasingly important role in Heidegger’s later philosophy, and it is at the very heart of Sartre’s thought.

In Heidegger’s argument on negation and the experiment of nothingness, he does not tell us what this experience consists of. Nothingness is experienced in the experiences of the absence of object, and as an object of experience, nothingness is itself a sort of Being. What is an act of nihilation? We may simply
characterise it by referring back to Heidegger's characterization of *Dasein* as "projection of possibilities", an act of nihiliation is a conscious (not to say reflective) act of going beyond the actuality of state of affairs. It is the attitude which is reflectively manifested in Husserl's *epoche* (Sartre stresses that the *epoche* can only arise through reflection) and takes an extreme form in the general question of Being in Heidegger, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Sartre rejects this as unanswerable. It is an intentional act, which is performed, in every doubt, in every question, (every question demands the possibility of a negative reply), in every hope, in every desire, in every expectation. Because we have seen that every conscious act involves expectations, every conscious act involves an act of nihilation. Heidegger cites an example of an imagination of the presence of a person in a chair besides himself, and his perception of the portrait of that person in front of him similarly is accompanied by an act of nihilation—by wondering whether any such man truly existed, his faint philosophical doubt that perhaps he has not yet awakened and maybe dreaming. These acts of nihilation involved in every conscious act and that consequently the experience of nothingness is involved in every
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experience, is a thesis, which has been argued by Heidegger in "What is Metaphysics", where he tells us that every Being contains within it the possibility of non-being. Sartre dramatically accepts this and tells us "nothingness haunts being".

Sartre tries to improve on Heidegger's famous, or infamous dictum in What is Metaphysics that 'nothingness nihilates' (Das Nichts selbst nichtet) by saying 'Nothing does not nihilate itself. Nothingness "is nihilated."' Heidegger too is trying to avoid the charge of holding that nothing in some sense exists but Sartre thinks Heidegger makes a mistake in his formulation. It is a putative affirmation of nothing's non-being logically consistent with that of the Eleatic pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides.

A.J.Ayer critisised Heidegger and Sartre together – Das nicht nichtet or Sartre's le Nenant est neantise. Ayer cannot but think that they are non-sensical. It is worth noticing that these two statements differ in one important respect: Heidegger's argument is active and Sartre's passive. Sartre criticizes Heidegger's

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notion of das nichts on the grounds that he makes it into some sort of object that surrounds the world and in a sense creates it.

In our discussions of Man, we are equating Heidegger's Dasein with Sartre's being-for-itself. It is because of this equivalence that Sartre is able to say that man is absolutely free and the radical existentialist theory of absolute responsibility follows from this. According to both of them, Man is both being and nothingness, both bound by and free from his world. He can be viewed both as a free agent and as a victim of causal circumstance.

This ambiguous nature of man is not at all new in the history of philosophy. Kant's two standpoints are equal in validity. Each standpoint as, man as object, man as agent was absolutely, correct and the 'antinomy' to which this dualism gave rise was tolerated by Kant because it was very central to his philosophy. Kierkegaard on the other hand stated only concrete subjective viewpoint and Husserl argues that the phenomenological viewpoint is the correct one and the natural standpoint must be derivative of it. But Sartre and Heidegger reject natural, objective and scientific standpoints and accept the phenomenological standpoint. Heidegger says, "I am not the
outcome or the meeting point of the numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make up, I cannot conceive of myself as nothing but the bit of the world... all my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view."\(^{10}\)

There is no concept more central to existentialist thought than the concept of freedom. Heidegger interprets \textit{Dasein} as freedom, and Sartre makes the concept of freedom the defining structure of human consciousness. Freedom is also a key concept in the works of many non-existentialist thinkers, for example, Kant, Hegel and Husserl.

Although Sartre's theory of human freedom is often interpreted in grossly implausible formulations which emphasise the concept of absolute freedom and ignore the restrictions of the situation to which this notion is tied, we may find a close similarity between Sartre's notion of freedom and a traditional conception of voluntary action.

It is in this sense that Sartre insists that freedom makes no sense unless there are obstacles - to success, and it is because of the

limited notion of 'absolute freedom' that Sartre, Camus, Merleau Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir bizarrely maintain that a slave or a prisoner is as free as a master or 'free' man.

When we declare that the slave is as free in his chains as his master, we do not speak of a freedom, which would remain undetermined. The slave in chain is free to break them, and Sartre's absolute freedom thus, refers to choice, intention, trying and adopting a conduct. My freedom is my awareness "that 'nothing' can compel me to adopt that (particular) conduct".\(^{11}\) It is the act of suicide, which Camus considers to be the ultimate choice. It is important to note that there is a fundamental difference in the choice between Camus and Sartre in spite of superficial similarities between them. For Camus, the feeling of the absurd is "given to us for it strikes us in the face"\(^{12}\) and suicide is a response to this feeling. This feeling of the absurd, however, is not brute existence or facticity but an interpretation of the world as non-satisfying, which in turn depends on a set of demands, which we have already placed before the world. What Camus does, therefore, is to take this interpretation of the world


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as something presented to us and does not allow for the possibility of our conscious alteration of that interpretation. Sartre does not commit himself to 'keeping the absurd' alive with Camus, for he sees our absolute freedom to destroy the absurd.

For Heidegger and Sartre, facticity is the fact that Dasein exists, and Dasein exists in a particular world. This notion of facticity is lifted by Sartre (from Heidegger) for whom it becomes the basic structures of being human. Dasein finds himself already in this situation. In Heidegger's famous phraseology, Dasein finds himself thrown into a particular world, facticity is thus equivalent to what Heidegger calls 'thrownness'. For Heidegger (as for Sartre, who employs the same term) facticity is the set of all that 'givens which one must encounter in one's Existenz'.

Sartre is profoundly influenced by both Husserl's and Heidegger's phenomenology of time. Husserl adopts a methodological suspension of belief in objective time to explain its possibility as an object for consciousness. World time, real time, the time of nature, scientific and psychological time are all suspended and phenomenological time, or time as it is directly given to consciousness, is treated as an absolute, indubitable,
datum. The objective temporality of an event is then explained as an achievement of consciousness. A melody, in Husserl’s example, is apprehended as an objective event through retention and protention. The past course of melody is partly retained and the future course of melody is partly anticipated in the present apprehension of the melody. The melody is constituted as an objective temporal object for consciousness by this retentive and anticipatory ‘reading into’ the present. Knowledge of the objective time dealt with commonsensically measured by clocks and studied by science, presupposes phenomenological time.

As we have seen, however, towards the end of *Being and Time*, Heidegger comes close to answering the *Seinsfrage* by claiming a temporality that is primordial with regard to Being, a kind of time presupposed by Being.

Sartre seeks to avoid a paradox, which vitiates the philosophy of time: the past does not exist because it is over. The future does not exist because it has not happened yet. The present does not exist because there is no time interval between the past and the future. Nevertheless, the appearance of all three temporal ekstases as real is existentially compelling. Sartre’s solution, in *Being and Nothingness*, is to argue that past, present and future
all exist, but as an 'original synthesis'. He means that past, present and future cannot exist in an abstraction from one another but only as a temporal whole. The past belongs to that fixed, inert and passive mode of being that Sartre calls being-in-itself. The present is the past of the spontaneous, free, subjective, conscious, manner of being called being-for-itself. The being of the future is neither being-in-itself nor being-for-itself. The future exists as a pure possibility. Sartre rejects Husserl's view that subjective time may be even methodologically separated from objective time. He endorses the Heideggerean doctrine that our being is fundamentally Being-in-the-world.

We have seen that for negative judgments Sartre sets himself apart from Heidegger. Man brings non-being into the world. Nothingness is somewhere in the world or beyond the world; rather it constitutes the inner structure of consciousness. Therefore when Sartre grants to Heidegger that anxiety is "the apprehension of nothingness"\textsuperscript{13}, their disagreement on the concept of nothingness gives a totally divergent meaning to their

\textsuperscript{13} Jean Paul Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, Op. cit., P. 66
definition. The apprehension of nothingness becomes for Sartre the apprehension of consciousness 'as such', i.e., in its nihiliating activity taken in itself without tending toward any exterior object. Now, in as much as spontaneous consciousness is inseparable from the consciousness of something, anxiety becomes a property of reflective consciousness taking as its object the very activity of spontaneous consciousness. Then there arises a question—why does this reflection cause anxiety? Because consciousness discovers that nothing, no authority or power in the world, no safeguard or law, be it physical, moral or social, no previously made decision, can protect it from its own power to deny and to itself. "I am anxiety-stricken to be what I am not, what I have to be. Thus I have decided this or that to go to see a friend, to write a book: I discover that decided that the continuity of this project is not guaranteed by anything unless it be by an act of consciousness, constantly to be renewed, which reconfirms it propells it at every moment out of inertia, laziness, or forgetfulness, into which all projects would lapse if left to themselves. As I reflect upon this emergence of my consciousness, which has no support and which itself upon its
own Nothingness, I am stricken with anxiety for my freedom: ‘anxiety is then the reflective apprehension of freedom itself.’”

By contrast, Heidegger situates nothingness and anxiety outside the sphere of inner life, reflectiveness and subjectivity. Nothingness is described as an event that arises unexpectedly in the world; it is “a withdrawal of being in its totality.” Sartre has recognised this “objective dimension” noting that “Heidegger makes of nothingness a sort of intentional correlate of transcendence.” By applying Husserlian vocabulary to Heidegger, Sartre tries to suggest that he commits the error of projecting a phantasmal double of transcendental subjectivity, an error of logic that amounts to “simply a denial to the predicate to a subject.” This Heideggerean claim about Dasein does not posit itself as an internal negation; it does not posit itself as not being the world. Being-in-the-world is the very unity and identity of Dasein, and cannot be split into two independent parts such as consciousness and world. When compared we find two inverse movements in their thinking, in Sartre the world falls on the side of the “I itself” (being-in-itself), in Heidegger

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the world constitutes a dimension of Dasein without being subjectified.

In anxiety, says Heidegger, “nothingness presents itself together with Being in totality”\(^\text{17}\) (Das nichts begegnet in der Angst in eins mit dem Seienden im Ganzen). Sartre also admits that nothingness can be no more than a modification of being, and it cannot be elsewhere, outside being. Anxiety is merely more clearly sighted, more sensitive to the fact that nothingness is always a dimension of being. “Nothingness does not form the concept antithetical to Being, but from the start, the essence of Being involves nothingness.”\(^\text{18}\) For Sartre the concept of nothingness is consciousness and the concept of anxiety can be formulated with complete precision: it is freedom. That is, according to Sartre, freedom and nothingness are equivalent, he concludes, these two descriptions of anguish do not appear to us contradictory, on the contrary the one implied the other.

The Sartrean theory of being-for others is once again developed with a refutation of the corresponding Heideggeran theory of “being-with-others”. Here too, Sartre reproaches Heidegger for


\(^{18}\) Ibid, P.35
not making consciousness and negation intervene in the definition of one’s relationship to other. The mere look of one makes the other an object. In being looked at “it is never the eyes which look at us, it I type other as subject.”¹⁹

His second objection is that Heidegger does not understand that inter-subjective relationships are based not on co-existence but on struggle. “The essence of the relations between consciousness is not the Mitsein; it is conflict.”²⁰ Sartre here takes up the Hegelian dialectics of the master and the slave, except that slavery becomes our permanent and instrument-like condition. “I am a slave to the degree that my being is dependent at the centre on a freedom which is not mine and which is the very condition of my being. This dependence is due to the fact that it is the other form that I take my objective being—my nature, my body and all my outwardness. I am a slave because I need the other to constitute me as a body in a world of which I am not a centre. But I am at the same time master, because I am able to turn the other’s aggression against him and make of him in his turn an object. The master could not be satisfied unless he were

²⁰ Ibid, P. 429
recognised not by a slave but by another master, another subject. But he is never to meet one unless he himself becomes a slave, and so on in an endless play of exchanged roles. Thus the doctrine of Being-with (Mitsein) appears to Sartre as at once alienating. "\(^{21}\)

This kind of alienation we can see in Simone de Beauvior's, explanation of a man woman relationship where the woman treats the man as her master, enslaving herself to him. "Woman must forget her own personality when she is in love. It is a law of nature. A woman is a non-existent without a master. Without a master, she is a scattered bouquet. She will humble herself to nothingness before him." \(^{22}\)

This violent exacerbation of the conflict from a Heideggeran standpoint is the result both of Sartre's reduction of other to a pure object and his interpretation of their out of the mode of instrumentality, what Heidegger calls 'present at hand'. Sartre would seem to forget that, in Heidegger's view, my possibilities are always at first (in Heidegger words: "proximally and for the

\(^{21}\) Ibid, P.267

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most part" (Zuzachst und Zumeist)\textsuperscript{23} those of the others: it is necessarily among possibilities not my own in the beginning that I choose those which I will appropriate.

However, it is with respect to the interpretation of death that Sartre is most vigorously and viscerally opposed to Heidegger, and to such a degree that he seems to run short of arguments very rapidly. Sartre declares flatly that death is “absurd”.\textsuperscript{24} When he sums up Heidegger’s position, he seems to understand well that being- unto -death means for \textit{Dasein} “an anticipation and a project of its own death as the possibility of no longer realising presence in the world”.\textsuperscript{25} The possibility as what is most entirely its own, that which no one can assume in its place, permits \textit{Dasein} to be free of the They and to discover itself in itself in its individual uniqueness. Sartre rejects these two points: that death may enter into project, and that it may be a possibility truly different from others. “Death,” says Sartre “cannot be awaited. To expect death is not wait for death. We can wait for only a determined event.”\textsuperscript{26} For Heidegger, it is confrontation

\textsuperscript{23} Martin Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}, Op. cit., 37,76
\textsuperscript{24} Jean Paul Sartre, \textit{Being and Nothingness}, P.533
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, P.533
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, P.535

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with the possibility of death, which insures the manifestation of angst even in the most rigidly inauthentic people. For Sartre, on the other hand, death plays little role in the recognition of freedom and the experience of anguish. Sartre is of the view that it is only at the time of death that human being is complete. Before death a brave person could become a coward or a coward could become brave. Only death brings an end to freedom.

We had already placed our objection to Heidegger regarding his concept of death. But earlier criticism of Sartre does not bear up, for its death is a project, that is to say a projecting of an extreme possibility from which the horizon of all one's possible is sketched, it could not be an event that Dasein awaits in the passive sense of the world.

Like Heidegger, Sartre's and existentialism is phenomenological. Marxism is a theory of history with the prescriptive prognoses for the future. Existentialism explores agency in a spontaneous present, which bestows only a derivative existence on past and future. Marxism is a social theory in which class is the subject and object of change. In existentialism individuals do things and
things are done to the individual. Marxism has pretensions to be a science. Existentialism regards science as a part of the very problem of dehumanization and alienation.