Existentialism as Humanism: An Interpretation of Sartre's Philosophy of Freedom and Responsibility

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Abstract: In Existentialism Is a Humanism, Jean-Paul Sartre outlines the fundamental principles, the alpha and omega, of existentialist philosophy. He begins his iconic lecture with the central claim that existence precedes essence, asserting that human beings first exist and only later define their essence through their choices, attitudes, and actions. According to Sartre, individuals must therefore assume full responsibility for the decisions they make, leaving no room for predetermined values or moral codes imposed by society or religion. In this sense, existentialism emphasizes subjective freedom and moral autonomy. Sartre further argues that existentialism does not lead to despair or nihilism. On the contrary, it empowers individuals by making them the creators of their own destiny. By declaring that life has no inherent or pre-given meaning, Sartre does not suggest that life is futile; rather, he insists that each person must create meaning through authentic commitment and action. Freedom thus becomes the central principle of existentialism, yet this freedom is inseparable from immense responsibility. Every individual, through their choices, implicitly affirms values not only for themselves but for humanity as a whole. Responding to critics who accuse existentialism of promoting moral chaos, Sartre defends the deeply humanistic character of his philosophy. He emphasizes existentialism's concern with human reality, personal freedom, and ethical responsibility. Rather than endorsing moral nihilism, Sartre argues that existentialism calls for a profound ethical awareness grounded in individual responsibility rather than externally imposed moral systems. Consequently, it encourages individuals to develop an authentic moral code through conscious choice and responsible action.

Key words: Existentialism, Humanism, Existence precedes essence, Freedom, Responsibility, Anguish, Abandonment, Despair, Subjectivity, Authenticity, Self-creation, Individuality, Moral responsibility, Consciousness, Nothingness

Method: The study employs a qualitative, conceptual review based on Bertrand Russell's Knowledge and Wisdom, combined with interpretive and normative reflection to relate his distinction between knowledge and wisdom to contemporary scientific and technological contexts. The references are in APA style.

Introduction: 'Existentialism Is a Humanism' is a famous philosophical lecture delivered by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1945, later published as a book. In this work, Sartre explains and defends the philosophy of existentialism, which had often been misunderstood and criticized as pessimistic, immoral, or hopeless. He clarifies that existentialism is not a negative philosophy, but rather a deeply human-centered philosophy that emphasizes freedom, responsibility, and the dignity of human choice. Sartre argues that human beings are not created with a fixed purpose or essence. Instead, humans first exist and then define themselves through their actions. This idea is expressed in his famous statement, 'existence precedes essence,' which means that individuals are responsible for creating their own identity and meaning in life. According to Sartre, there is no predetermined human nature, and each person must make choices that shape who they become.

In this lecture, Sartre also responds to critics who believed existentialism leads to despair or moral chaos. He explains that existentialism is actually a form of humanism because it places human beings at the center and recognizes their freedom, responsibility, and ability to create values. Rather than relying on God or external authorities, existentialism teaches that humans must take full responsibility for their actions and their role in shaping their lives and the world around them. Thus, 'Existentialism Is a Humanism' serves as an important introduction to existentialist thought and highlights the idea that human beings are free, responsible, and capable of giving meaning to their own existence through mindful choice which leads to action.

About Jean Paul Sartre: Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980) was a French philosopher, novelist, playwright, and literary critic, widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century and a leading figure in existentialism. His philosophy focused on human freedom, responsibility, and the idea that 'existence precedes essence,' meaning that individuals are not born with a fixed nature but must create their own identity through their actions and choices. Sartre's major philosophical works, such as Nausea (1938), Being and Nothingness (1943) and his lecture Existentialism Is a Humanism (1946), explain that humans are free beings who must take full responsibility for giving meaning to their lives. His ideas significantly influenced philosophy, literature, political theory, and psychology, and he also actively participated in political and social debates of his time.

In 1964, Sartre was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature by the Swedish Academy in recognition of his profound impact on modern thought and literature. However, he famously refused to accept the prize. Sartre believed that a writer should remain independent and should not be institutionally honored; as such recognition could influence or limit the writer's freedom and integrity. He had consistently refused all official honors throughout his life, and his rejection of the Nobel Prize reflected his commitment to his philosophical principles. This decision made him the first person to voluntarily decline the Nobel Prize in Literature and further demonstrated his dedication to intellectual independence and personal responsibility.

Theistic Existentialism: It is a branch of existentialist philosophy that believes in the existence of God and emphasizes the individual's personal relationship with God as a central part of human existence. It combines the existentialist focus on freedom, responsibility, and individual experience with faith in God. Theistic existentialists believe that while humans are free to make their own choices, true meaning and purpose can be found through faith and spiritual commitment. Theistic existentialism teaches that human beings face uncertainty, anxiety, and suffering, but faith in God helps them overcome these difficulties. It emphasizes that faith is not based purely on logic or proof, but on personal commitment and trust in God. Individuals must choose to believe, and this choice is an expression of their freedom and responsibility.

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard is considered the founder of theistic existentialism. He argued that faith in God is essential for finding meaning in life and that individuals must make a personal 'leap of faith' (Kierkegaard, 1985). He believed that human existence involves struggle, anxiety, and uncertainty, but faith provides hope and purpose. Another important theistic existentialist was Gabriel Marcel, who emphasized the importance of faith, hope, love, and personal relationships. He believed that God is the source of meaning and that human existence cannot be fully understood without spiritual awareness. Similarly, Karl Jaspers believed in transcendence and argued that humans can find deeper meaning through faith and philosophical reflection. Theistic existentialism teaches that humans are free and responsible for their choices, but faith in God provides ultimate meaning, guidance, and purpose. It highlights the importance of individual faith, personal experience, and the relationship between human existence and the divine.

Atheistic Existentialism: It is, on the other hand, is a specific form of existentialism that clearly rejects the existence of God. According to atheistic existentialists, there is no divine creator, no predetermined purpose, and no universal moral law given by God. Humans are completely free and fully responsible for creating their own meaning, values, and purpose in life. This freedom can be both empowering and frightening because it means that individuals cannot rely on any super natural authority to guide their decisions. Philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Friedrich Nietzsche and Albert Camus strongly supported atheistic existentialism. Sartre argued that since God does not exist, humans are entirely responsible for their choices and must create their own identity.

Camus emphasized the idea that life may seem absurd, but humans must still find ways to live with dignity and purpose despite this lack of inherent meaning (Albert Camus, 1955). In atheistic existentialism, the meaning of life is not discovered but created by each individual through their choices, actions, and decisions. Existentialism, in general, focuses on human freedom, responsibility, and the creation of meaning and it can include belief in God or rejection of God. Atheistic existentialism, however, is a narrower branch that specifically denies the existence of God and teaches that humans alone must create their own meaning and values. Both emphasize individual freedom and responsibility, but they differ mainly in their views about the role of God in human life.

Indian Philosophy and Western Philosophy: These are two major philosophical traditions that developed in different cultural and historical contexts. While both seek to understand fundamental questions about reality, knowledge, and human existence, they differ in their approaches, goals, and emphasis. Indian philosophy is primarily

concerned with the problem of human suffering and the attainment of liberation (moksha). It is deeply connected with spiritual and religious traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Indian philosophers focus on understanding the nature of the self (Atma), ultimate reality (Brahma), karma, rebirth, and the path to liberation. Philosophy in India is not only theoretical but also practical, aiming to transform human life and lead to spiritual realization. Thinkers like Adi Shankaracharya emphasized the unity of the self and ultimate reality, while Gautama Buddha focused on overcoming suffering through right understanding and practice.

Western philosophy, on the other hand, developed in ancient Greece and focuses more on rational inquiry, logic, and the analysis of knowledge, reality, and ethics. Western philosophers emphasize reason and critical thinking as the primary tools for understanding truth. Early philosophers like Socrates encouraged questioning and self-examination and he said 'an unexamined life is not worth living,' while Plato explored the nature of reality and ideal forms, and Aristotle developed systems of logic, ethics, and science. While the distinction is often generalized, it holds true that Western philosophy has a tendency toward intellectualism and empirical understanding, whereas Eastern traditions are more explicitly oriented towards spiritual liberation. Another important difference is in their ultimate aim.

Indian philosophy seeks liberation from the cycle of birth and death and emphasizes inner transformation. Western philosophy mainly seeks knowledge, truth, and understanding of the world through rational and logical analysis. Indian philosophy integrates religion, ethics, and metaphysics into a unified system, whereas Western philosophy tends to separate philosophy from religion and treats it as an independent discipline. Indian philosophy is spiritual, practical, and liberation-oriented, focusing on self-realization and freedom from suffering while depending on God. Western philosophy is rational, analytical, and knowledge-oriented, focusing on understanding reality, truth, and human existence through reason. Both traditions have made significant contributions to human thought and continue to influence philosophy today.

Existentialism as a Defense of Human Freedom and Responsibility: The article closely follows the structure and line of reasoning presented by Jean-Paul Sartre in his lecture Existentialism Is a Humanism. In the very beginning, Jean-Paul Sartre explains that his purpose is to defend existentialism against several criticisms made by its opponents. Existentialism has been accused of encouraging despair and inactivity by suggesting that human actions are meaningless and ineffective. Critics, especially Communists, claim that existentialism leads to quietism, making people passive and detached from practical life. Others, including Christian critics, argue that existentialism focuses too much on the negative aspects of human existence, such as suffering, weakness, and isolation, while ignoring beauty, hope, and human solidarity. Sartre also notes that existentialism has been criticized for emphasizing subjectivity and individual experience, which some believe separates individuals from society and weakens the sense of collective responsibility.

Christian critics further accuse existentialism of denying God and eternal moral values, thereby allowing individuals to act freely without moral guidance or accountability. In response to these criticisms, Sartre argues that existentialism is actually a form of humanism because it affirms the importance of human freedom, responsibility, and personal choice. He explains that existentialism does not promote despair or pessimism but instead empowers individuals by recognizing their ability to make choices and create meaning in their lives. Sartre suggests that people fear existentialism not because it is pessimistic, but because it places full responsibility for life and decisions on human beings themselves. Ultimately, he presents existentialism as a philosophy that emphasizes human dignity, freedom, and the possibility of shaping one's own existence through conscious choice.

Meaning and Types of Existentialism: Jean-Paul Sartre explains that the term existentialism has become widely used but is often misunderstood. Many people use the word casually to describe artists, writers, or thinkers without clearly understanding its meaning. Because it has become fashionable, the term is applied loosely, and as a result, it has lost its precise philosophical significance. Sartre emphasizes that existentialism is not a scandalous or vague trend, but a serious and disciplined philosophy intended for careful philosophical understanding.

He further explains that there are two main types of existentialists: Christian existentialists and atheistic existentialists. Christian existentialists, such as Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, believe in God, while atheistic existentialists, including Martin Heidegger and Sartre himself, do not believe in God. Despite this difference, both groups share a common principle: they believe that existence comes before essence. This means that human beings first exist and then define their nature and purpose through their choices and experiences. Sartre concludes by emphasizing that existentialism begins with human subjectivity, placing the individual at the center of philosophical understanding.

Essence Precedes Existence in Manufactured Objects: At this juncture, Jean-Paul Sartre explains the relationship between essence and existence by using the example of a manufactured object, such as a paper-knife. He separates the human existence and the manufacture of a thing. He states that when an artisan creates an object, they already have a clear idea or design of its purpose and function before making it. This means that the essence, or the defining nature and purpose of the object, exists before the object itself is physically created. The object is produced according to a pre-existing plan and technique, and its purpose is already determined by its creator.

Sartre uses this example to show that, in the case of manufactured objects, essence precedes existence because their nature and function are decided in advance. Sartre uses the example of a paper knife or a letter opener in his 1946 lecture 'Existentialism is Humanism', to illustrate that for manufactured objects, essence precedes existence. The object exists only after its design and purpose have been conceived. This technical example helps Sartre prepare his argument that, unlike objects, human beings do not have a predetermined essence and must create their own purpose through their existence and choices (Thomas R. Flynn, 2006). For manufactured items, the purpose is decided in advance; for human beings, there is no predetermined purpose, making them fundamentally free to define their own essence through their actions.

Sartre explains that in traditional religious and philosophical thought or metaphysical thought, God is viewed as a creator who designs human beings with a specific purpose in mind, much like an artisan creating an object, a paper knife. Just as an artisan has a clear idea of a paper-knife before making it, God is believed to have a definite conception of human beings before creating them. This means that human essence, or the fundamental nature and purpose of humans, exists first in the mind of God, and individual humans are simply realizations of this divine plan.

Sartre also points out that even when philosophers of the eighteenth century, such as Denis Diderot, Voltaire, and Immanuel Kant, rejected or critically redefined the traditional idea of God, they nevertheless retained the belief in a universal human nature that precedes individual existence. In Kant's moral philosophy, for example, human beings are understood as rational agents governed by the moral law grounded in reason, which presupposes a shared rational essence (Kant.I. 1993). According to this view, all human beings participate in a common rational structure that defines what it means to be human. Sartre contrasts this Enlightenment commitment to an essential human nature with existentialism, which rejects the notion of any predetermined human essence and instead maintains that human beings first exist and only later define themselves through their actions and choices.

Descartes' I Think, Therefore I am: Rene Descartes' statement 'I think, therefore I am' (Cogito, ergo sum) expresses the first certainty he discovers after subjecting all beliefs to radical doubt in Meditations on First Philosophy. Descartes questions the reliability of the senses, the existence of the external world, and even mathematical truths, imagining the possibility of a powerful deceiver. Yet he realizes that while he can doubt everything else, he cannot doubt that he is doubting. Doubting is a form of thinking, and thinking requires a thinker. Thus, the very act of thought proves the existence of the self as a thinking being. This insight becomes the foundation of his philosophy. The certainty of the thinking self does not depend on the body or the physical world, but on consciousness itself. For Descartes, the 'I' that exists is essentially a res cogitans, a thinking substance, distinct from the body.

The cogito therefore marks a turning point in modern philosophy, placing the rational, self-aware subject at the center of the search for knowledge and establishing reason as the primary ground of certainty. He proposed substance dualism which is the theory most closely associated with Rene Descartes, especially in his work Meditations on First Philosophy. It is the view that reality consists of two fundamentally different kinds of substance: mind and body. The mind (res cogitans) is a thinking, non-extended substance; it does not occupy space and is characterized by consciousness, thought, and awareness. The body (res extensa) is an extended, physical substance; it occupies space and is governed by mechanical laws.

According to Descartes, these two substances are distinct in nature: the mind can exist without the body, and the body can be conceived without the mind. Substance dualism attempts to explain human beings as a union of these two different realities. While the mind and body are separate substances, Descartes argued that they interact; he even speculated that this interaction occurs in the pineal gland. The theory is important because it sharply distinguishes mental phenomena (thoughts, feelings, intentions) from physical processes, shaping much of modern philosophy of mind. However, it also raises the famous 'interaction problem:' if mind and body are completely different kinds of substance, how can they causally influence each other? They are traditionally believed to influence each other through

interactionism, where mental events cause physical actions and physical events cause mental sensations. Descartes famously proposed the brain's pineal gland as the seat of this interaction.

Existence Precedes Essence and Human Responsibility: This passage expresses the central idea of Jean-Paul Sartre's atheistic existentialism: 'existence precedes essence.' Sartre argues that if God does not exist, there is no predefined human nature or divine blueprint for what a human being is supposed to be. Unlike objects (such as a knife, which is made according to a concept or purpose), human beings simply appear in the world first. Only afterward, through their actions, choices, and commitments, do they define themselves. A person is not born with a fixed essence; rather, each individual becomes what they make of themselves.

Sartre emphasizes that this view gives human beings both dignity and responsibility. Humans are not passive objects like stones or plants; they are conscious projects who continually shape their own future. They are not merely what they wish to be in a superficial sense, but what they actively choose and commit themselves to through their actions. Because there is no predetermined human nature and no God to define moral standards in advance, each person is fully responsible for what he or she becomes. This radical freedom, and the responsibility that comes with it, is the first and foremost principle of existentialism.

Individual Choice and Universal Responsibility: Sartre argues that existentialism places complete responsibility for existence upon each individual. According to him, a person is not only responsible for shaping his own life but also, in a broader sense, responsible for all humanity. When an individual chooses a course of action, he is not merely deciding for himself; he is affirming a vision of what he believes a human being ought to be. Every choice expresses a value judgment, and in choosing what one considers good, he implicitly declares it is good for others as well.

Sartre explains that this is the deeper meaning of subjectivism: human beings cannot step outside human subjectivity, and their choices inevitably project an image of humanity. Whether one decides to join a particular political group, adopt a religious attitude, or marry and have children, each act presents a model of human conduct. Thus, personal decisions carry universal significance. In shaping himself, a person simultaneously shapes an image of mankind, bearing a responsibility that extends beyond the individual to humanity as a whole. Sartre argued that because there is no pre-defined human nature or divine blueprint, every individual is completely free to define themselves through their actions.

Anguish, abandonment and despair: Sartre explains that existentialist 'anguish' arises from the deep awareness of one's total responsibility. When a person makes a choice, he is not merely selecting a personal course of action; he is implicitly presenting that choice as a model for all humanity. In choosing what he believes to be right, he becomes, in a sense, a 'legislator' for mankind, since his action expresses an image of how human beings ought to act. Realizing this immense responsibility naturally produces anguish, a profound moral anxiety rooted in freedom.

Sartre maintains that although many people deny feeling such anxiety, they are often disguising or fleeing from it. Individuals may claim that their actions concern only themselves and dismiss the question, 'What if everyone acted this way?' However, existentialism insists that this question cannot be avoided without self-deception. Even when someone lies or makes excuses, the discomfort felt within reveals an underlying recognition of universal responsibility. Thus, anguish is not weakness but an honest awareness of the serious and far-reaching consequences of human freedom. This radical freedom brings with it a terrifying, total responsibility for our choices, which creates a feeling of profound anguish.

Jean-Paul Sartre refers to what Søren Kierkegaard called the 'anguish of Abraham,' drawn from the biblical narrative in which God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. In Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard portrays Abraham's trial as a profound moment of inward anxiety, where faith requires a solitary and uncertain leap beyond rational justification. Sartre highlights the inner crisis Abraham must face: even if a voice or vision commands him, how can he be certain that it truly comes from God? How can he be sure that he is not deceived, mistaken, or even delusional? The example emphasizes that no external proof can definitively confirm such a command as divine, leaving the individual entirely responsible for the decision.

Sartre uses this story to show that human beings cannot escape responsibility by appealing to divine authority or external signs. Even if someone claims that an angel or God has spoken, it is still the individual who must decide whether to believe and obey that command. There is no objective proof that can remove doubt. Thus, anguish arises

from the realization that one must choose without absolute certainty and bear full responsibility for that choice. In the end, the decision rests entirely with the individual, who cannot shift the burden to God, fate, or external authority.

Anguish as the Condition of Responsible Action: Sartre argues that no one can ever find absolute proof that they are justified in acting as a model for humanity. Whenever a person chooses a course of action, it is ultimately that individual who decides its value. Even if a voice, authority, or command appears to guide them, they must still interpret and accept it. There is no external guarantee, no divine sign or moral certificate that can remove personal responsibility. Each individual acts as though all humanity were watching and potentially shaping itself according to that action. Sartre explains that this realization produces anguish, but not a paralyzing or passive kind. Rather, it is the serious awareness that one's decisions carry weight for others.

Like a military leader who must interpret orders and decide on an attack, knowing lives depend on that decision, every person chooses among real possibilities and gives value to one by selecting it. This anguish is not meant to stop action; instead, it is the very condition that makes authentic action possible. It reflects the deep responsibility individuals bear toward themselves and toward humanity as a whole. In a different philosophical tradition, the Upanishadic mahavakya 'Tat Tvam Asi' (That Thou Art) from the Chandogya Upanishad (Radhakrishnan.S. 1994) suggests a profound unity between the individual self and ultimate reality. While Sartre does not affirm metaphysical unity, his view similarly intensifies responsibility: in choosing oneself, one implicitly chooses an image of humanity. Thus, just as 'Tat Tvam Asi' dissolves the sharp separation between self and ultimate reality, Sartrean anguish dissolves the illusion that one's actions concern oneself alone.

Abandonment, Freedom, and the Absence of Divine Guarantees: Jean-Paul Sartre explains 'abandonment' as the unavoidable consequence of a world in which God does not exist. By this, he means that if there is no God, then there is no pre-established moral order, no eternal values written in a divine mind, and no ultimate authority to justify human actions. Sartre criticizes secular moralists who attempt to remove God while retaining absolute moral values as if they still existed independently in some abstract realm. For existentialism, this is inconsistent. Without God, there are no ready-made moral laws, no a priori good, and no external source of meaning. Human beings cannot rely on divine commands, fixed human nature, or universal moral codes to guide their behavior. In this respect, Sartre's position echoes Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation of the 'Death of God,' which signals the collapse of absolute, divinely grounded values and the need for humanity to confront the consequences of that loss (Nietzsche, 1974).

Jean-Paul Sartre echoes the provocative insight attributed to Fyodor Dostoevsky that 'If God did not exist, everything would be permitted,' a line commonly associated with The Brothers Karamazov (Dostoevsky.F, 2002). The phrase is a critique of a world without a foundational, objective basis for morality, emphasizing that in such a scenario, humans are left to invent their own, taking full, unmitigated responsibility for the outcome. Sartre takes this not as a celebration of chaos but as the starting point of existential responsibility. If existence precedes essence, then individuals cannot explain their actions by appealing to a predetermined nature or destiny. There is no determinism and no excuse. Human beings are 'condemned to be free:' condemned because they did not create themselves or choose to be born, yet free because once they exist, they are entirely responsible for what they do. There are no passions, signs, or external forces that can absolve them; even these must be interpreted and owned by the individual.

Thus, abandonment means that human beings stand alone, without justification from heaven or fate. There is no luminous realm of values behind or ahead of them. Yet this condition is not meant to produce despairing inaction. Rather, it reveals that the future is not predetermined but must be created. Humanity has no fixed destiny laid up in heaven; instead, each person must continuously invent himself and, in doing so, shape the meaning of humanity. In this sense, man is both forsaken and radically responsible; the sole author of his actions in a world without divine guarantees. As Francis Ponge strikingly expresses it, 'Man is the future of man,' emphasizing that humanity must create its own destiny rather than discover it in a divine plan (Ponge. F, 1972).

The Dilemma of Choice and the Absence of Moral Certainty: Sartre presents a powerful example to illustrate what he means by abandonment and moral responsibility. He describes a former pupil who, during World War II, faced a painful choice: either leave France to join the Free French Forces in England and fight against the German occupation, or remain at home to care for his grieving mother, who depended entirely on him for emotional and practical support. His father had shown sympathies toward collaboration, and his elder brother had been killed in the war. The young man felt torn between avenging his brother and serving his country, or fulfilling his immediate duty of care and compassion toward his mother.

Sartre uses this case to demonstrate that no moral doctrine can provide a clear, predetermined answer. Christian ethics, which emphasize love, sacrifice, and charity, offers no decisive solution: is it more loving to serve one's nation or to care for one's mother? Kantian ethics, with its principle of treating humanity always as an end and never merely as a means, also fails to resolve the dilemma. If the young man stays with his mother, he risks neglecting those fighting for his freedom; if he joins the resistance, he risks treating his mother as a secondary concern. Ethical principles remain too abstract to dictate the correct action in this specific, concrete situation.

Sartre further rejects the idea that feelings can provide certainty. The student suggested that he should follow whichever feeling, patriotic duty or filial love, proved stronger. But Sartre points out that feelings gain their meaning only through action. One cannot measure the depth of love in advance; it is defined and confirmed by what one actually does. If the student stays, that act defines his love for his mother; if he leaves, that choice defines his commitment to the national cause. To appeal to a feeling as justification before acting creates a circular argument, because the feeling itself is validated only by the action it is supposed to guide.

Through this example, Sartre emphasizes that human beings are alone in making their choices. There is no divine command, no universal moral law, no psychological certainty that can remove the burden of decision. The individual must choose without guarantees, fully aware that the choice creates value rather than discovering it. This is the essence of existential freedom: in a world without predetermined moral answers, each person must invent his path and accept complete responsibility for it.

Abandonment and the Responsibility of Choice: Sartre argues that human beings cannot rely on feelings, moral formulas, religious authority, or external 'signs' to determine their actions. He contends that emotions are not reliable guides because they are shaped by the very actions individuals choose to perform. A person cannot look inward to discover a ready-made authentic impulse, nor can they depend on established ethical systems to dictate what must be done. Even seeking advice is itself an act of choice, since selecting a particular adviser already supposes a preference for the kind of counsel one expects to receive. Thus, responsibility for action ultimately rests with the individual alone. Sartre gives an example of a young man who is confused about what he should do in a difficult moral situation. The young man asks others for advice.

But Sartre says that even when he chooses to ask a priest, a teacher, or someone else, he has already made a choice. By choosing a particular person, he has chosen the kind of answer he is likely to receive. So, he is still responsible for the final decision. Sartre also explains that religious 'signs' do not have one fixed meaning. People have to decide what those signs mean. He tells the story of a Jesuit who faced many failures in life. Instead of becoming bitter, the man believed that his failures were a sign from God telling him to join a religious order. However, Sartre points out that this meaning was not forced on him by God or fate. The man himself decided to understand his failures in that way. He could have understood them differently and chosen another path.

In short, Sartre's idea is that people always choose the meaning of events in their lives. They cannot escape responsibility by saying that fate, God, or other people made the decision for them. Through these examples, Sartre underscores the existentialist notion of 'abandonment:' human beings exist without predetermined essence, divine instruction, or universal moral law to guide them. They are condemned to be free, and with that freedom, comes anguish. Every choice defines their being, and they must bear full responsibility for the interpretations and commitments they create. In this way, existentialism affirms human dignity and responsibility, insisting that individuals invent themselves through action rather than discover a fixed moral design.

Sartre explains the meaning of 'despair' in a very practical way. He does not mean sadness or hopelessness. He means that a person should depend only on what is within their control and on the real possibilities connected to their own actions. Sartre says that when people plan something, they naturally depend on certain practical chances. For example, if they are waiting for a friend to arrive by train, they assume the train will run on time. But they should not depend on things that are beyond their control. There is no God or fixed plan that will arrange the world according to their wishes. So, they must act without false hope that everything will turn out the way they want.

Some critics, especially Marxists, argued that people can depend on others and on future generations to complete their work, such as bringing about a revolution. Sartre replies that people can trust those who are actively working with them in a shared cause, because they know their commitment. But they cannot blindly trust unknown people, future generations, or 'human nature,' because human beings are free and may choose differently. The future is not

guaranteed. After one's death, others may continue the work or they may choose something completely different, even something harmful like Fascism.

However, this does not mean they should give up or do nothing. Sartre clearly says that they must commit themselves to a cause and act fully. People should work for their goals without illusions and without depending on guaranteed success. They cannot be sure that their efforts will succeed, but they must still do what is in their power. In simple terms, Sartre teaches that individuals should act responsibly, depend only on what they can truly control, and continue working for their ideals even without certainty about the future.

The Rejection of Quietism and the Primacy of Action: Sartre strongly rejects the idea of quietism. Quietism is the attitude of people who say, 'I cannot do anything, so let others do it.' Sartre argues that his philosophy teaches the exact opposite. According to him, there is no true reality except action. A person is not merely a bundle of dreams, talents, or good intentions; rather, a person is defined by what he or she actually does. As scholars explain, existentialism emphasizes that human beings create themselves through their choices and actions, not through passive waiting or excuses (Solomon.R,C, 2005). Thus, a person's identity is shaped by lived commitments and concrete deeds rather than by unrealized potential.

Sartre explains that many people comfort themselves by blaming circumstances for their failures. They say they could have been great, loving, or successful if life had given them better opportunities. They believe they have many hidden talents or unrealized abilities inside them. But existentialism does not accept this excuse. It teaches that there is no love unless a person truly loves through actions, and there is no genius unless it is shown in real work. The greatness of a writer exists only in the books he has actually written. A person cannot be called a genius for works that were never created. This idea is similar to Shakespeare's well-known line, 'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves' (Shakespeare. W, 2008). The line also emphasizes that individuals are responsible for their own lives rather than their fate.

Sartre says that a human being is the sum of his or her actions. A person builds life through choices and commitments. Dreams and hopes that are never acted upon do not define a person positively; only real efforts and real deeds do. Although this idea may seem strict, it also gives dignity and responsibility to every individual. It suggests that everyone has the power to shape identity through action. This view is similar to Ralph Waldo Emerson's idea in Self-Reliance, where he stresses that a person must trust oneself and act independently rather than depend on external circumstances (Emerson.R.W, 2003). Thus, a man's life becomes his portrait, drawn by his own actions and self-reliant choices.

Existentialism believes that human beings are responsible for what they become. People often criticize existentialism because it shows characters that are weak, cowardly, or morally bad. However, Sartre explains that these characters are not like that because of their birth, heredity, or environment. Instead, they become that way through their own actions and choices. A person is not born a coward or a hero. A coward becomes cowardly by repeatedly choosing to act in a cowardly way, and a hero becomes heroic through courageous actions. Existentialism is therefore not a pessimistic philosophy. In fact, it is optimistic because it places human destiny in the hands of individuals themselves.

Existentialism teaches that people can change their lives through their actions and commitments. Even a coward can choose to stop being cowardly, and a hero can stop being heroic. What truly defines a person is the total commitment they show through their actions. Jean-Paul Sartre explains that existentialism begins with the individual's self-awareness. The starting point is the simple truth expressed by the philosopher René Descartes: 'I think, therefore I am' (Descartes, 1996). From this awareness of oneself, human beings recognize their freedom and responsibility for shaping their lives. Thus, existentialism emphasizes action, responsibility, and personal choice as the fundamental foundations of human existence.

Sartre argues that existentialism respects the dignity of human beings because it does not treat people as objects controlled by fixed causes like heredity or environment. Unlike materialistic theories that see humans as mechanical things, existentialism views individuals as free and responsible beings who create their own values. However, when a person becomes aware of himself, he also becomes aware of others. Human life therefore exists in a world of intersubjectivity, where people understand themselves through their relationships with others and through the recognition they receive from them.

Sartre also says that there is no fixed 'human nature.' Instead, all human beings share a common human condition. People may live in different historical or social situations: such as being a slave, a noble, or a worker, but everyone faces similar basic realities like working, living in the world, and eventually dying. Because of these shared conditions, human actions and goals can be understood by others across cultures and times. Human universality is therefore not something already given; it is constantly created through the choices and actions of individuals.

Free Commitment and the Responsibility of Choice: Sartre explains that the central idea of existentialism is free commitment. Every person shapes himself through the choices he makes, and through these choices he also creates a model of humanity. When an individual chooses a certain way of living, that choice represents what he believes human beings should be like. Because of this, each choice carries great responsibility. Some critics say that existentialism leads to subjectivism or moral chaos, claiming that if people are free to choose, then nothing really matters. Sartre rejects this criticism. He argues that human beings cannot avoid choosing.

Even refusing to choose is itself a choice. In every real situation of life, such as relationships, work, or family, people must decide how to act, and they must accept full responsibility for their decisions. Sartre also emphasizes that these choices are not random or careless. They are made within real-life situations and conditions. Therefore, moral choice is not an act of mere impulse but something creative and meaningful. Sartre compares it to the creation of a work of art: just as an artist shapes a painting through careful decisions, human beings shape their lives and define humanity through their choices and commitments.

Sartre explains that existentialism does not teach an aesthetic or artistic morality. He only compares morality to art to explain how human choices work. Just as an artist creates a painting without following fixed rules beforehand, human beings create their moral values through their actions. There are no ready-made moral rules that can tell a person exactly what to do in every situation. Instead, individuals must decide for themselves and take responsibility for their choices. Sartre argues that moral life is a process of creation and invention. People shape their character and identity through the commitments they make. For example, a person facing a difficult decision cannot rely completely on philosophical systems like those of Immanuel Kant. In the end, the individual must create his own moral path based on the situation he faces.

Sartre argues that although existentialism emphasizes freedom, it does not mean that people cannot judge human actions. According to him, individuals always make choices in relation to others, and these choices can be evaluated logically. A person may deceive himself by blaming his actions on passions or external forces, because existentialism maintains that human beings are completely free and responsible for their choices. Such self-deception hides the truth of human freedom. Sartre also explains that authentic human action is guided by the recognition of freedom. When individuals understand that values depend on their own choices, they realize that freedom becomes the foundation of all values.

However, freedom is not merely individual; it is connected with the freedom of others. A person who truly values his own freedom must also respect and support the freedom of other people. Therefore, Sartre says that moral life involves living with honesty and responsibility toward one's freedom. People who deny their freedom through excuses or deterministic explanations act in bad faith, while those who accept their freedom and responsibility live authentically. Although moral decisions vary according to situations, the fundamental aim of morality remains the commitment to freedom for oneself and for others. Sartre explains that different moral choices may appear opposite, yet they can still be equally valid if they are made through genuine freedom and commitment.

To illustrate this idea, Jean-Paul Sartre compares two literary characters: Maggie Tulliver from The Mill on the Floss by George Eliot and La Sanseverina from The Charterhouse of Parma by Stendhal. Maggie sacrifices her love for Stephen out of a sense of solidarity and moral responsibility, while La Sanseverina believes that intense passion gives life its true value and may justify personal sacrifice. Although their moral choices appear very different, Sartre argues that both decisions can be meaningful because they arise from free and conscious commitment. According to Sartre, 'one can choose anything, but only if it is upon the plane of free commitment' (Sartre, 2007). He emphasizes that the value of an action does not depend on fixed moral rules but on whether the choice is made freely and authentically. Therefore, existentialism allows individuals to follow different moral paths, provided that these choices are made responsibly and with a sincere commitment to freedom.

The Creation of Human Values: Sartre addresses the criticism that existentialism makes human values meaningless because individuals create them for themselves. He explains that since there is no divine authority to establish values

beforehand, human beings must create values through their own choices and actions. According to him, life has no predetermined meaning; it gains meaning only through the way individuals live it. This view is similar to the argument of Friedrich Nietzsche that individuals must create their own values rather than rely on traditional moral systems (Nietzsche. F, 2002). Thus, each person is responsible for giving value and purpose to life.

Sartre clarifies the meaning of humanism. He rejects a traditional form of humanism that treats humanity as a fixed and perfect ideal or praises humanity based on the achievements of a few individuals. Such a view, he argues, wrongly assumes that human nature is already defined. Instead, existentialism presents a different kind of humanism in which human beings are always in the process of becoming. They define themselves by going beyond their present condition and by pursuing goals and possibilities. This perspective resonates with the evolutionary view of Charles Darwin, who showed that living beings are not fixed but continually develop and change over time (Darwin. C, 2009). Through this continuous process of self-creation and self-transcendence, human beings shape both their own existence and the meaning of humanity.

In the concluding part of his speech, Sartre explains that existentialism presents a form of humanism centered on human freedom and responsibility. According to him, there is no universe beyond the human universe, which is shaped by human subjectivity and action. Human beings are not governed by any external lawgiver; instead, each individual must decide and create meaning through personal choices. This idea is beautifully echoed in the words of the Telugu poet Jayaraju: 'You are the rock, you are the sculptor, and you are the sculpture in this creation' (Jayaraju, 2023) The line suggests that a human being is both the material and the maker of one's own life. In the same way, Sartre argues that a person realizes true humanity not by turning inward but by striving toward goals that go beyond oneself and contribute to liberation and meaningful achievement.

Sartre also clarifies that existentialism is based on an atheistic perspective, but it does not aim to promote despair. Rather, it emphasizes that even if God existed, humans would still remain responsible for shaping their own lives. Nothing can rescue a person from the responsibility of self-creation. For Sartre, existentialism is therefore not a philosophy of hopelessness but an optimistic doctrine of action, encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their freedom and to give meaning to their lives through conscious choices and commitments.

Conclusion: Existentialism, Rational Humanism, and the Necessity of Philosophy: This conclusion explores Jean Paul Sartre's Existentialism is a Humanism as a philosophy of freedom and responsibility, while simultaneously examining the broader necessity of philosophy in improving human life. Sartre's existentialism insists that 'man is nothing else but what he makes of himself,' highlighting the urgency of authentic choice. To deepen this exploration, Bertrand Russell's rational humanism is brought into dialogue, emphasizing clarity, reason, and the ethical pursuit of a just society. By revisiting Sartre with Russell beside him, the article demonstrates that philosophy is not a distant abstraction but a practical necessity: a compass for navigating both personal authenticity and collective welfare. The synthesis of existential urgency and rational clarity reveals philosophy as indispensable for human flourishing, offering readers a fresh perspective on how freedom and reason together shape the art of living wisely.

Philosophy often feels like a distant pursuit, reserved for dusty libraries and abstract debates. Yet in truth, it is woven into the fabric of our daily lives, shaping the way we think, act, and even hope. Jean-Paul Sartre, in Existentialism is a Humanism, reminds us that we are 'condemned to be free,' thrust into a world where our choices define us (Sartre.J.P, 1992). Bertrand Russell, from another tradition, insists that philosophy must sharpen our reason and guide us toward clarity and justice (Russell.B, 1946). Between Sartre's existential urgency and Russell's rational discipline lies a profound truth: philosophy is not a luxury but a necessity, a compass for navigating both the solitude of personal freedom and the shared responsibilities of human society. To ignore philosophy is to drift; to embrace it is to live deliberately.

Having set the stage with this contrast, we can now turn to Sartre's existentialism. His insistence that 'existence precedes essence' makes clear that philosophy is not abstract speculation but a direct confrontation with the reality of human freedom. Humans are not born with a fixed nature; instead, we define ourselves through our actions. This freedom is exhilarating, yet it also carries a heavy burden, for it means that every choice we make contributes to the shaping of our identity. Sartre's humanism insists that philosophy must remind us of this freedom and guide us toward authentic living, where we embrace responsibility rather than flee from it (Sartre.J.P, 1992).

Yet freedom alone is not enough. Without guidance, it risks dissolving into chaos. This is where Bertrand Russell enters the conversation, offering philosophy as a discipline of reason and clarity. He believed that philosophy should

sharpen our logical faculties, enabling us to distinguish truth from illusion and resist the seductions of dogma. Where Sartre emphasizes the urgency of freedom, Russell stresses the discipline of reason. Together, they suggest that freedom must be exercised with rational reflection, for without reason, freedom risks becoming reckless, while reason without freedom risks becoming sterile and detached from life (Russell.B, 1946).

Taken together, Sartre and Russell illuminate two sides of the same coin: the individual's responsibility to live authentically and the collective responsibility to build a just society. Sartre warns against 'bad faith,' the denial of our freedom, while Russell cautions against surrendering reason to dogma. Their blend reveals philosophy as both personal and social in scope. It empowers individuals to confront the anxiety of freedom while also guiding societies toward fairness, compassion, and progress. In this way, philosophy becomes a bridge between the solitary project of self-definition and the communal project of justice.

This convergence underscores a vital truth: philosophy is not a luxury but a necessity. Sartre grounds it in the lived experience of freedom, while Russell grounds it in rational inquiry and ethical responsibility. Both insist that philosophy must guide us through the dilemmas of modern life. Whether confronting existential anxiety or navigating social injustice, philosophy provides the compass we need to live deliberately and wisely.

Toward an Integrated Humanism: In Existentialism is a Humanism, Sartre reminds us that philosophy is not a detached speculation but a lived reality: we are free, and with that freedom comes the responsibility to shape our lives authentically. Bertrand Russell, from another tradition, insists that philosophy must sharpen our reason and guide us toward clarity, justice, and collective welfare. When we bring these voices together, a powerful truth emerges: philosophy is indispensable for human flourishing. It is both the mirror that reflects our freedom and the compass that directs our choices toward meaning and progress. To embrace philosophy, then, is to embrace life itself: not as a passive existence, but as an active project of authenticity, rationality, and shared humanity. In this way, philosophy becomes not only a discipline of thought but a necessity for living wisely and well in the modern world.

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