

## Sartre and Marx and Engel's on Freedom

Jean-Paul Sartre's fundamental views on freedom are simple – man's freedom is absolute. How he comes to this conclusion is more complex. He starts with the assertion that God does not exist. Sartre neither explains this nor makes any attempt to justify his atheism. This does seem a rather risky way to start a theory but as Sartre later explains his theory does not rely on atheism. From here Sartre goes on to launch the pre-requisite idea of Existentialism- existence precedes essence. Sartre, this time does take the time to explain his idea. He compares a human to the paper knife. The paper knife has a designer, its concept and purpose exists within the mind of the creator before the knife is actually made. Its essence precedes its existence. Humans on the other hand, according to Sartre, we have no designer as there would need to be a God meaning that a purpose can not exist before our existence, leading Sartre to conclude that man's existence precedes essence.

From this basis Sartre comes to the conclusion that man is essentially without purpose. With no God or pre-existent reason to give our life meaning we are in effect thrown into a world in which we are alone and purposeless. This is a frightening concept and the main reason why existentialism has a reputation of being a very depressing philosophy. However it is our purposeless existence which gives birth to our absolute freedom. With no God or pre-existent purpose we are free to do whatever we wish, or as Dostoyevsky wrote "If God is dead then everything is permitted". Without a God there can be no pre-existing rules to live by or moral obligations. Man is free to be whatever he wants to be. The view that some people are born to do certain things to become certain people disappears. To illustrate this point I will use an example of a murderer. The person who commits the murder was not born a murderer or destined to kill by some strange fate like force. The person simply, using their own free choice, chose to kill. A less extreme example would be of a great musician. He is a great musician because he freely chooses to practice his instrument and to learn not because it was his pre-existent purpose. Because of this freedom we can define our selves as anything we want. For Sartre there is no God no fate no determinism only choices and it is through our choices that we can define ourselves. We can't not choose in whatever situation we are in there will always be choices. Even choosing not to choose is a choice. In Sartre's lecture "Existentialism and humanism." He uses an analogy of a painting to further explain this point. He says our lives are like a painting and because we have no essence the canvas at the beginning of a painting is blank. We are free to paint whatever we want like we are free to live how we like, there are no rules. Every line represents a choice we make and slowly we begin to create our painting, starting from nothing and ending up as a complex complete picture.

Sartre has now managed to turn a depressing theory into a very optimistic one. As, in his own words, "a coward is not a coward because of a

cowardly heart or set of lungs" meaning that one chooses to become a coward and, according to existentialism, choose not to be one. However With absolute freedom comes absolute responsibility for our actions, our lives, everything. It is us alone who can be blamed for our actions and lives we lead. For example if someone was to think of good example. In Existentialism and Humanism Sartre explains how our reaction to this responsibility causes us to feel three powerful emotions Anguish, abandonment and despair.

Need to explain the 3 concepts but first re familiarise with material. Also explain good faith and bad faith.

Anguish - Crazy woman. Abraham

Abandonment - Pupil asking for advice, Jesuit priest.

Despair and quietness - Friend at the station, death, Proust and woman in the restaurant.

Sartre's account leaves us in the difficult position of not caring and being cut off from other people. In Sartre's early play "No Exit" he seems to be in this position as the character Garcin famously states that "Hell is other people". However Sartre soon changes this bleak view exchanging it for a more optimistic view on other individuals resulting in him dubbing Existentialism a humanism. He says that when we come to define ourselves we can only do this in reference to other people. A person could not say he was a brave person with out comparing himself to some one else. No one can define them self as anything without a reference to another person. This is known as Inter subjectivity and though it we can find value in other humans (I need to greatly expand the point of Inter subjectivity shall do more reading on the subject).

Some might look at this account of freedom and say that it seems to idealistic to be taken too seriously. How can Sartre say that I have absolute when there are so many things I am not free to do? I'm not free to be seven foot tall or be a Mexican or be able to fly. What's happening here is freedom is being confused with omnipotence. Sartre adds the new concept of facticity to his theory to explain this. Facticity takes in to account that there are certain things I will never be able to do because they go against my physicality and the laws of physics. It includes all the aspects of my life that I have no choice in; my parents, my place in time, my nationality etc. This does not impinge or limit my freedom I am still entirely free to create my own purpose and essence I just have to do it in the physical situation I am in. facticity is not so much a limitation of my freedom, rather the frame in which I can exercise my freedom in. I'll use Sartre's analogy of the painting to illustrate facticity. We are absolutely free to paint what ever we like but the colours, paper fact we can only paint flat are outside our control. We must use these as a frame work in which to paint the picture of our choice. Facticity is a limitation of freedom not a limitation of our freedom.

Although this new feature of the theory does solve some of the more abstract problems it still leaves many unanswered problems about our absolute freedom. Existentialism may be a fine theory for mid century French bourgeois

intellects who are given freedom to act as they wish but how can the theory be used by people living in countries in political, social or economic crisis? How can Sartre say that someone living under an oppressive government has absolute freedom? (I read that Sartre said that when France was under Nazi occupation the people were the most free. I think I will add this in but first I need to read further in to the point and actually understand what he means). Take for example a man who is living in a politically damaged country in the third world. He has to work all day for next to nothing to try and keep himself and his family alive. The options and choices the man faces are extremely limited. This man surely can't have the same freedom that Sartre has. He is not free to define himself as anything he chooses to be. He could not decide to become a writer or doctor as he would lose his job, income and eventually starve himself and his family. Sure in a metaphysical sense the man is still absolutely free to make this decision and in this sense Sartre's theory does still stand. Saying this does not really help the situation and I'm sure most people would agree that the man still doesn't have a choice as metaphysical freedom can't really compete with starvation. This leaves existentialism in a difficult situation as at best it seems insensitive and blasé to the struggles people in difficult circumstances face. An additional problem faced by the account is that there are certain cases in which we do not really have a choice. A resistance fighter captured by the enemy, imprisoned and given the choice; tell us where the leader of your movement is or die. Can we really say that this man has a choice when his life is being threatened? In Sartre's short story "The Wall" he explores this idea. The book tells the story of Pablo Ibbieta, a resistance fighter who is captured. He faces a similar dilemma in which he has to reveal where the rebel Ramon Gris is or face the firing squad. In the story Pablo actually chooses to face the firing squad but most people who are not fictional existentialist heroes would properly agree that the choice they face is not a free one.

To add further to the criticisms laid against Sartre's account would be the problems of emotions. In almost every situation we face certain emotions which vary in strength depending on the given situation. For example a husband might, during a heated argument with his wife, in a fit of rage hit his wife. Did the man have total control over his actions or was his anger so intoxicating that he temporarily lost control of his freedom to choose. Can he truly take full responsibility for his actions? It is true to say that under certain emotions such as anger, fear and love our freedom is at least limited. Through looking at these criticisms Sartre's account does not look untrue rather it appears far too rigid and unforgiving to be applied to every day life. And for a theory which is not supposed to be bourgeois and for the every one this is a serious problem.

Sartre however is not finished yet. He takes these points on board and adds a further concept to his theory, freedom to power. This asserts that although man will always have absolute freedom to choose, his power, which is

how pleasant the choices will be, varies depending on the situation. In simplest terms the greater ones power is the more choices one has and the more pleasant they are. Sartre and the African worker have exactly the same absolute, fundamental freedom yet Sartre's power is much greater giving him more options and pleasant choices. To use our favorite painting analogy we are free to paint what we want, using the unchangeable colours, paper and physical laws as a frame work in which to paint but with the condition and number of paints and paper varying from painter to painter. Each painter is still free to paint the picture they want to paint just some painters are more limited in the difficulty of their painting. Sartre's point of power to freedom to power can be illustrated in the novel "Catch 22". Towards the end the character Yossarian is faced with an unpleasant series of choices. He can condone and promote the actions of Coronal Cathcart which he thoroughly disagrees with, carry on fighting which does not want to do, face a court martial or run away. Because of Yossarian's reduced amount of power he is not free to simply go home as he wants, he must face one of the unpleasant choices presented to him. Yossarian does freely act in the situation by running away, and like all good existentialists he acts authentically taking full responsibility for his actions. For Sartre, merely stating and explain that some peoples freedom is limited by there power is not enough and goes forward to try and solve this problem by combining his existentialism with Marxist ideas.

### Marx and Engels views on Freedom

Marx and Engels views on freedom differ considerably from Sartre's. Sartre's existentialism is a theory of freedom whilst Marxism presents its self as a political practice with underlying issues of freedom.

Marx and Engels differ greatly from Sartre in their approach to mans freedom. They offer a materialist view which can be seen in this quote from Marx "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness". What the two mean by this can be illustrated by looking at primitive people. In early stages of humanity mans existence was entirely driven by its basic needs. People did not concern themselves with literature, sports or music because their material surroundings had not developed that way. As societies developed and became more complex so did the peoples existence. It is the Material conditions of the time which determine the ideas of that time Marx and Engels interpretation history and its development as being caused by its economic base is known as Historical Materialism. According to Marx and Engels there have been four stages in historical production. The first being a primitive form of communism before societies existed. There was no concept of private property or class the people of the tribes would work together in order to ensure the survival of the tribe. The next stage in the historical development is the slave or ancient society.

Here begins the class society and the idea of private property. The class is divided into master and slave. The master now, ruling in a state which has developed in order for them to control the slave, is able to possess private property. Now because of the increased population agriculture is practiced in order to supply the people. In this slave society it is the slave who is the main source of production yet they possess nothing and earn nothing, they have no freedom. The need for conquering more slaves ultimately proves to be the downfall of this society and leads to the birth of aristocracy.

The third stage known as Feudalism still has class divides now between aristocrat and the peasant. Now land is the primary source of production and the nation state grows. New classes emerge in order to trade with other nation which leads to the fourth stage in historical materialism, capitalism. Like in the previous systems capitalism leaves a clear class divided this time between the bourgeois, who own the means of production, and the proletariat who create the produces. The capitalist society is ruled by an elected government yet this does not mean that rights are secured for all, laws are made in order to protect the capitalist. Often capitalist governments exclude and exploit certain groups of people in order to increase profits. The wage contract is now used by the capitalist to pay the proletariat for his work yet the hours and pay of his work are subject to change whenever the capitalist chooses. Often the workers wage is but a fraction of the value of their work. It is the workers exploitation which allows the capitalist to profit and creates the class struggle which eventually will destroy the current society leaving communism to take over in which man will be free from alienation and reunited with their human nature.

Marx and Engels views on human nature are virtual the opposite of those of Sartre in the sense that they offer an essentialist view of humanity. Sartre denies any form of human nature instead puts forward the idea of human condition. Marx and Engels argued that man does not have a fixed human nature as many attributes thought to be apart of a permanent human nature are radically different in different cultures and time periods. The only consistent feature is mankind like animals need to labour on nature in order to satisfy its self. Man however distinguishes its self from the animals by developing our methods of production, 'The species-nature of animal is an eternal repetition, that of man is transformation, development and change'. Marx and Engels assert that it is mans nature to be creative and through his labor is able to alter nature. As well, and in a similar sense to Sartre, Marx and Engels state that it is only through labor and action that man is able to create and develop himself. Marx and Engels refer to labor as being a vibrant, creative process of shaping the world and ourselves not the soul destroying work the proletarians are forced to do under a capitalist system. Human nature shows man to be a species being, which must cooperate in order to produce out means to live. Through our labor we not only connect with nature but also develop the relations with each other. Our cooperative labor has led to a development in the

productive forces yet at the same to the bourgeois take over of the means of productions. This has caused a divided amongst humanity, the workers are no longer in control of their own labor; the nature of it has become alien. Man, under the bourgeois is not longer a species being, he has become divorced form his own nature and is unable to truly be free.

Found this quote and might put it in

'Society does not consist of individuals; it expresses the sum of connections and relationships in which individuals find themselves.'

Marx and Engels developed there ideas of alienation from the work of Hegel yet they redefined the cause of our alienation. Hegel wrote that our alienation was rooted in our minds; his successor Feuerburch gave alienation a religious context yet Marx and Engles, believing in materialism, saw mans labour as the foundation of his alienation.

Marx and Engles our see alienation actualised in three different ways in the capitalist society. Firstly man is alienated from his product. In nature, and in all societies man produces what he needs to lives and then is free to sell, trade or simply use it for himself. Under capitalism this natural progress is broken as the labourer is no longer in control of his product, he is working and creating product which will become the property of others. Capitalism sees that the worker will create products which the bourgeois will take. The existence of private property and the bourgeois ownership of the means of production the workers are forced to labour to not only satisfy their needs but also to produce a surpluses which is taken by the capitalist, again alienating the worker from his product.

Secondly, alienation is caused by our specific routines of work. All people work in a specialised field which they are not free to leave in order to pursue other activities. This is because capitalism forces us to work routine, boring and soul destroying labour in order to survive, its is a far cry from the creative labour process described by Marx and Engles. Our potential to develop and thrive has been stunted as we are not free to work in different spheres of production. Marx proposed that we should be able to "hunt in the morning, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic."

The last form of alienation derives from the unplanned and uncontrolled nature of the market. The market means that those who are not wealthy, the proletarians, are excluded and are subject to its power. The market force is an alien power and results in the workers loss of freedom.

For Marx and Engel's for us to truly be free we must overcome our alienation and return to our natural, species nature. Once the communist state is fully realised then man will truly able to be free, free from alienation and free to create themselves.

Criticism (not to sure about these)

“ I was thinking of writing a criticism based on the idea of are the bourgeois alienated and then a rejoinder from Marx about how they to are alienated.”

A criticism which can be held against both Marx and Engels and Sartre's views of human nature comes from the developments of science who say that the Philosophers are not taking in to account genetics when dismissing human nature. In there defence the developments in genetic science was not existent during the times which the Philosophers were writing in so we can hardly blame them for not taking in taking in to consideration the issues of genetics. Scientist argue that all humans are some how determined to act in certain ways due to their individual genetic make up. So Marx and Engels view that man is entirely driven by Material conditions does not match up to science, never a good position for a theory to be in. (I need to put a Marxist rejoinder in here maybe an illustration). Like wise Sartre falls in to this trap by saying man is driven only by his one wills and is free to choose anything. If we look at an example of a child of a drug addict who's genetic make up is susceptible to drug addiction; is it really fair for Sartre to say that they are entirely free to not take drugs? In response to this an existentialist could argue that our genetics are part of our facticity in which we must exercise our freedom. The drug addicts child through might be more vulnerable to addiction than some one with out those genes but nether the less those genes do not entirely govern their life, they still posses the freedom to choose not to become a drug addict no matter how hard it might be.

### Comparisons between Marxism and Existentialism

Sartre and Marx and Engels conception of what freedom is and our relationship to it is differs' immensely. Sartre claims that our freedom is absolute, that we are freedom and cannot escape it, “man is condemned to be free”. Through his writings Sartre is trying to illustrate this whilst showing us how to embrace our fundamental freedom. For Marx and Engels freedom is something we have lost due to our alienation realised in the capitalist society. The forced work we are required to do in the current society makes goes against our human nature. We are unable to be free in the capitalist society as we are alienated from our selves our species and our product. Furthermore both theories' starting points for freedom are radically different. Sartre starts with the individual's freedom and then moves out to society as a whole. Marx and Engels on the other hand work the other way around placing the starting point for freedom in the society and then moving back to the individual.

The greatest difference between the two theories is their position on materialism. For Marx and Engels materialism is the driving force behind everything and is essential for our understanding of Freedom. Conversely Sartre views materialism as a negative concept. He states that 'all kinds of materialism lead one to consider every man, including himself as an object' Sartre views are rooted in the cogito and mans own consciousness is our driving force and not our material surroundings. (Need to expand this point)

Despite the two theories initially appearing poles apart we are able to see many similarities between the two even before Sartre moved his theory to incorporate Marxist ideas. Firstly both theories place an emphasis on action over ideas. Marx and Engels consider ideas to be nothing without action or praxis behind them and that to change the world one must act and not contemplate. Sartre holds similar views; in "existentialism and humanism" he disagrees the notion that a existentialism is contemplative and instead asserts that existentialism, like Marxism, believes in action above contemplation. Sartre we must choose to define our selves and carry out our choices through action. 'The genius of Proust is in the works of Proust' this quote illustrates Sartre's view that in order for us to be anything we must act.

Further more Marx and Engels believe in a similar idea to Sartre on the developing nature of the individual and their potential to define themselves. Marxism follows the belief that because of our alienation we are unable to for fill our true potentials. Marx and Engels believe that only once the communist state is born will man be truly able to reach there potential to develop by working what ever sphere of activity. Unlike Sartre, Marx and Engels do take in to account mans circumstances when concerning his abilities to create himself showing the theory to be a more realistic account of mans ability to create themselves.

Sartre's existentialism has a more optimistic view off human freedom. Marx and Engel's tell us we can't be free under capitalism, on our own we can never be free and that in order to be free we must rise up along with the whole world. In Marxism the individual does not have much control over freedom and as we only have control of the individual this leaves us in a position of weakness and uncertainty.