

ABSTRACT

In the context of human freedom there is a great debate between determinism and indeterminism. By freedom, we generally mean freedom of the will which makes the very institution of morality possible. Determinism is the view that every event, including human choices and volitions, is caused by other events and happens as an effect or result of these other events. Indeterminism denies this, and adds that some events, among them human choices and volitions, happen without any cause or explanation. There are some philosophers who argue that freedom is possible only if determinism is true and indeterminism leads only to accidentalism. The debate regarding human freedom is age long but inconclusive.

In traditional philosophy, freedom indeed has been considered as a postulate of morality. The very institute of morality has been thought to be dependent on the possibility of freedom. Philosophers, therefore, were eager to prove human freedom with the aid of reason. In doing so, they have objectified freedom, as if it is a phenomenon in the world. This was how the normative tradition approached to freedom and moral philosophy as such. Existentialism did not develop much in the way of normative ethics; however, a certain approach to the theory of value and to moral psychology,

deriving from the idea of existence as self-making in situation, are distinctive marks of the existentialist tradition. According to the existentialists, the idea of freedom is the origin of value – where freedom is defined not in terms of acting rationally but rather existentially. How value and freedom in existentialism are related is worth discussing.

Sartre states that there could be no solution to the problem so far we consider freedom as something objective. He states that it is strange that philosophers did not attempt first to explicit the structure contained in the very concept of action. It is worth mentioning here that existentialists take self as an agent rather than a subject. Agent is one who acts. It does not however mean that they are introducing a new dimension of existence replacing thought. To consider human beings as thinking subject is only an abstraction but for existentialist, “Man exists as a whole. He can not be pieced together from thought, feeling and will.”

Existentialist philosophers take action in its inclusive sense. Gabriel Marcel distinguishes between inclusive and exclusive senses of action. In its exclusive sense, action is taken as outer act and human beings are only ‘functional man’ in this sense. Functional man, reduced to a factor in the empirical, social reality, is deprived of mystery, dignity, personhood and

humanity itself. Thus, action in its exclusive sense is mere function of activism. In the inclusive sense action includes both thought and passion. The existentialist concept of action embraces within itself the whole mystery of human existence. Sartre adds some more to this concept of action. According to him, to act is to modify the shape of the world; it is to arrange means in view of an end. An action is on principle intentional. Secondly, the action necessarily implies as its condition the recognition of a 'desideratum', i.e., an objective lack. Finally, he says, the issue between determinist and indeterminist is that the latter are concerned to find cases of decision for which there exist no prior cause and the former that there is no action without a cause. Sartre says that to speak of an act without a cause is to speak of an act which would lack intentional structure that is the necessary feature of every act. Thus, an act cannot be said to be directed towards nothing. The end is the 'cause' that exists prior to the act as a lack. How then freedom possible?

The existentialists reject such question regarding the possibility of freedom. Rather, they would ask: what and how is it to be free? Sartre would say that to exist is to be free; it is not that first I exist and then I am free. But "freedom" and "existence" are two different words and have different uses. How to conceptualise freedom as distinct from existence? Nikolai

Bardayeve, the Russian existentialist, may help us in this regard. He explores the following characteristic of freedom. Traditional arguments treated freedom objectively. To treat something as an object is to believe that it can be perceived, investigated and proved or disproved from outside. But freedom is not to be proved rather it is the postulate of action. To endeavour to understand freedom objectively is to treat it like a phenomenon of nature. But freedom must be already there before we can even think of such a world. It implies that freedom has the primacy over being. Any system or any ontological system that recognizes the absolute primacy of being is a system of determinism. In that system freedom is derivable from being. The act of freedom in Bardayeve's sense is pre-rational; it cannot be grasped by thought. It has to be known through exercise of freedom. To this Sartre adds, the cause, act and the end rises simultaneously.

Sartre's concept of freedom, no doubt, is unique. Is the problem of freewill settled then? The answer is to be found within and the real sense of the question may be restated as "Am I satisfied with Sartre's answer to the problem of freedom?" Let us see where the existentialist concept of freedom leads us to. Their explanation exposes the paradoxical nature of freedom. It is paradoxical because it is possible only in a situation and there is a situation only through freedom. Human freedom everywhere meets obstacles

which it has not created. However, these obstacles have meaning only through the free-choice. My situation is constituted by my place, my past, my environment, my fellowmen, my death etc. My freedom is paradoxical with respect to each of these constituents of situation. Everyday I confront with these obstacles but to remain human, I cannot submit to all these and give up my freedom to choose. Thus, we are condemned to be free. Probably it was inevitable that the paradox should end in the absurd of Camus. The absurd is conjunction of human want of rational explanation from the world and the world's answer to the question. The answer is silence.

Thus, the tragedy with which Kant's philosophy ends still remains in the existentialist philosophy of Sartre and others. Freedom seems to be a burden to both Sartre and Camus. How can one live with the awareness of the paradox, the absurdity of human existence? Although they have argued against suicide, I think we should reexamine whether to live or not to live. Camus stated that the most important question in philosophy is that of suicide. Sartre has explained well the human condition but failed to stop people from committing suicide. Our state of West Bengal is on the top of the list of peoples who have committed suicide. From my state of being, I would like to revisit the problem of freedom with J. P. Sartre. Existentialism

does not philosophize from academic interest only; it tries to change the attitude of the people, to change them like a missionary.

In the very first chapter, the concept of freedom pulled me back to the traditional discussion of determinism, indeterminism and fatalism. In the second, the approach of the traditional philosophers, such as Aristotle, Descartes etc. to the problem of freewill will be discussed. Existentialists maintain, they have objectified freedom and by that, reduced human being into a mere observer. Christianity, by its concept of theodicy, has contributed a great deal to the belief that humans are free. Its share in the problem will be discussed in the third. In the Fourth and the Fifth, I discuss the existentialist response to the problem. I discuss mainly Sartre but others will come into the discussion for reasons. Freedom, if it is not essence, it is the meaning of human existence. Facticity is the obstacles and limitations that make freedom meaningful. I hope to find better way to live, to bear the “burden” with a little bit comfort in the concluding chapter. I can identify my problems in existentialist literatures, but I am desperately in search of solutions to those in the same line.