

Chapter - IV

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EXISTENTIALISM

As one of the main trends in the 20th Century Ethics, and its relation to Marxism

We propose to devote this chapter to a consideration of Existentialism because the Marxian concept of alienation is shared in common by existentialist thinkers, even though there are divergences. It is also significant that Sartre himself declared himself as a Marxist in his *Critique of Reason*, where he talks about the reality of the group, as distinguished from the individual. Marx's and the existentialists' concept of alienation has its roots in Hegel's '*Phenomenology*' of Mind. Marx developed the concept both in the *pre-Capital* writings and the *Capital*. The economic interpretation of the concept has been uppermost in Marx's mind. The existentialists of course have been avowedly metaphysical on this point.

"Existentialism" is a distinct philosophical trend in the 20th century. It is derived from Latin 'existencia' meaning existence. It originates after the first world war of 1914-1918 and gains a widespread popularity after the second world war. It continues its tradition of 19th century philosophy represented by *Nietzsche* (1844-1900) and *Schopenhauer* (1788-1860) and later *Kierkegaard* (1813-1855), the renowned Danish philosopher. It conveys the ideas of irrationalism in Western social thought. It is still in progress and the most prominent representatives of this movement are

Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), *Martin Heidegger* (1889-1976), *Gabriel Marcel* (1889-1973), *Jean-Paul Sartre* (1905-1980) and *Albert Camus* (1913-1960).

According to Arthur Schopenhauer philosophy is nothing but the correct and universal understanding of experience itself, the true exposition of its meaning and content. His main Work, '*Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*' (The World as Will and Idea) appeared in 1819. The title suggests that his philosophy is in a sense a form of idealism. According to him reason has merely a formal function and in adhering to this view he differs fundamentally from the classical German idealists. To him: 'Reason is feminine in nature: it can only give after it has received. Of itself it has nothing but the empty forms of its own operation'. Along with Kant he takes the world as idea, as only appearance but he rejects Kant's uncognizable 'thing-in-itself' and maintains that blind and irrational will is the essence of the world. His voluntaristic idealism is a form of irrationalism. The will which rules the world excludes any natural and social laws and any scientific cognition. The world in all the multiplicity of its parts and forms is the manifestation, the objectivity of one 'will to live'. Schopenhauer attaches such significance to 'will' that it exceeds the boundaries of human existence and assumes a cosmic meaning as the 'Universal Will' is objectified in the world. His world-outlook is thoroughly pessimistic. Happiness is always negative and positive morality arises from sympathy for others, i.e., from our sharing of their sufferings. The good man recognises that the distinction between himself and others belongs to a 'fleeting and illusive phenomenon'. Religion is the denial of the 'will to live', the peace of the complete renunciation of all conscious desire. Denial of history as a progressive dialectic process is another peculiarity of his voluntarism — he described it as a 'heavy and confused dream', a

continuous reiteration of the same experiences, only the names of the places and persons being different.

Existentialism follows the lead of another school of thought which can be considered the immediate predecessor of this movement, i.e., the Philosophy of Life or Vitalism as represented by *Friedrich Nietzsche* (1844-1900), *Henry Bergson* (1859-1941) and *Wilhelm Dilthey* (1833-1912). These three thinkers rank first among the influences which have shaped existentialism.

Vitalism is a group of ideas which brings to the whole of philosophy of life. It is anti-rationalistic and pragmatic. It regards time and change as fundamental and it is in favour of historical and evolutionary outlook. In ethics it rejects eternal norms and external imperatives. It is non-theistic in its outlook.

Nietzsche and Bergson differ from each other in the points of emphasis inspite of their common participation in the body of ideas defining vitalism. They agree in their attack on intellect. Our intellect, says Bergson, cannot grasp the true nature of reality. When we conceive of reality as the intellect presents to us, we fall into error. The way to grasp reality in its true nature is only through intuition. It is through intuition that we may become conscious of our oneness with reality as a whole. Intuition enables us to grasp the nature of constant change which is the stuff of reality. Intuition is instinct conscious of itself, i.e., of its real nature as perpetual change. There is no self which changes; there is nothing which changes; there is simply change. Bergson, not Nietzsche, is alone in the formulation of a positive theory of knowledge, embracing the activity of the intuition. Bergson's ethics approaches creativity in terms of love rather than what Nietzsche calls 'power'. The classical philosophical categories

of mind and matter are reduced by him by the category of life understood as the 'Will-to-power'. Power, according to him, serves as a criterion for evaluation of the significance of phenomena. In opposition to a realistic interpretation of experience and reason, Nietzsche holds that our knowledge is subjective and instrumental. In its empirical foundations our knowledge involves sense organs, whose operation is relatively crude. Cognition is alleged to be effective only as an instrument of power. His epistemological relativism leads to re-assessment of all values in ethics - thus his ethics is the ethics of relativism of values which culminates in the opposition of 'slave morality' to 'master morality' related to his vision of superman who will reject our present meek religiously based values by more real ones based on the human 'will-to-power'. He emphatically denies the socialist ideal for he views it as an 'uprising of slaves in morality'. He is out and out an atheist — he rejects christianity or christian religion as it proclaims man's equity before God, as it has affected self-humiliation of man, killing in him the 'will-to-power'. He substitutes for religious myths the myths of 'God's death' (God is dead) and 'eternal return'. And since God is dead, we will have to re-think the whole foundation of our lives and find their meaning and purpose only in human terms and in this he puts emphasis on our freedom to change the basis of our values. In his main work, *The Will to Power* (1889) he adumbrates the thesis that value and power are the same; our conduct, moral codes are valuable only so far as they promote power. Values lie in the increase of power, not in the pleasure. Pain signifies resistnce, not decrease of power. An ethics which advocates pleasure-principle wishing to avoid pain always will fall into 'pessimism of sensibility' because suffering or pain is universal in our life. The illusion of moral freedom and responsibility emerges from the introversion among subject peoples of their thwarted impulse for external power. The sickness of spirit in the individuals should be the concern of the moralist — its

essence is fear and apathy. A remedy, according to his prescription, is to be found in art. In a godless world there is much occasion for disgust and terror, which art can deal with by transformation into the comic and sublime.

Amidst the diversity of points of view we notice a unity of basic conviction and attitude. Here we may quote Leslie Stevenson to make this assertion more clearer and distinct.

"In so far as a common core can be discerned there would seem to be three main concerns which are central to existentialism. The first is with the individual human being, rather than with general theories about him. Such theories, it is thought, leave out what is most important about each individual - his uniqueness. Secondly, there is a concern with the meaning or purpose of human lives, rather than with scientific or metaphysical truths about the universe. So inner or subjective experience is somehow regarded as more important than 'objective' truth. Thirdly, the concern is with the freedom of individuals as their most important and distinctively human property These three concerns, then, are really aspects of one basic theme".¹ (Leslie Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature*, chapter VII, page 78).

The existentialists affirm the uniqueness of the concrete and real as over against the abstract and possible. They are unanimous in rejecting idealist rationalism of the Cartesian origin and level their criticism against mind-body dualism.

In Descartes' proposition which is the foundation of his metaphysics, 'Cogito ergo sum' — I think, therefore I am, 'existence' of a personal, continuing ego underlying consciousness is inferred from the fact of consciousness. Because there is consciousness there must be the 'I' to be conscious, Thus essence precedes existence — a distinction

is made between essence and existence. By 'essence' we denote 'what a thing is', by existence 'that it is'. What is definable in a thing we call its essence. We define a man as a rational animal — here animality and rationality are the essences of man, they constitute the very essence of man. When we say : 'Man is a rational animal' — animality and rationality are contained in the very nature of man and our judgment is analytic, explicative, because it analyses or explicates what is contained in man.

On the other hand, existence is not analyzable. Existence implies non-existence—a thing may exist or may not exist; either it is existent or non-existent and there is nothing in between existence and non-existence, Being or not-Being. Can we deduce existence from essence ? To use Kant's illustration, as it is found in his discussion of the ontological proof for the existence of God : God is the most perfect Being and as God is the most perfect He must be actually existent and it follows from the definition of God as perfect Being. But Kant contends that the idea of the most perfect Being includes, no doubt, existence, but it is not real or actual existence. What we can infer is the ideal existence of God, and not His real existence. From the idea that I have three hundred rupees in my purse, I can not infer that I have actually three hundred rupees in my purse. Existential propositions are synthetic. In order to exist, a thing must be more than a mere idea - there must be actual sensation of it, it must be presented in experience.

System of thought which allows a superior status to essence, perhaps even to the point of letting existence be absorbed into essence is expressed in Hegel's philosophy of essentialism. By construing 'Becoming' as a passage from non-existence (not-Being) to existence (Being) Hegel completes the absorption of existence into essence. Its counter-position is existentialism which gives priority to existence over

and above essence. But existentialism assumes a variety of forms, the most radical division consists in between the theistic (religious) and the atheistic (non-religious). Kierkegaard, whom we consider as one of the prominent representatives of the movement, is generally regarded as the first modern existentialist. His existentialism stands in quite opposition to Hegel's essentialism. "Like Marx, he reacted against the Hegelian system of philosophy, but in a quite different direction. He rejected the abstract theoretical system as like a vast mansion in which one does not actually live, and maintained instead the supreme importance of the individual and his choices."² (Leslie Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature*, p. 79).

Kierkegaard considered Hegel as the head of the school of speculative philosophers who reasoned from the viewpoint of the universal — mankind, people, the state and excluded the ontological significance of the personal principle. If we ignore the significance of the individual and put undue emphasis on the social aspect then we lose what is most essential, what constitutes the very basis of personality, its existence. In the *'Unscientific Postscript'* Kierkegaard expatiates on the idea of subjective truth, an important corollary to his conception of existence and in his *'Philosophical Fragments'* some applications to the general theory of being are suggested. Genuine philosophy, according to Kierkegaard, can only be existential, i.e., can have a profoundly personal character. He regarded man as an existence and introduced such concepts as 'fear', 'despondency', and 'resolution' which were subsequently developed by the later existentialists. He recognised three modes of existence of the individual or three main ways of life, viz., the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious and each individual is required to choose between them. But he personally considered that the religious type of existence or the religious

way of life, especially the christian way of life, to be the highest.

The basic category of his religious doctrine is paradoxical — the divine world and the human world are in principle incommensurable. Faith implies rejection of logical thinking and introduces one into the sphere of paradoxes which are absurd from the point of view of human logic and ethics. Kierkegaard subjected to scathing criticism any attempt at combining these two spheres or an attempt at compromising between them. He exposed the official christian morality of his day anti-christian embracing hypocrisy at its core. This caused his conflict with the official church in the last years of his life. But it was not without effect - this challenge of Kierkegaard led to a revision and reevaluation of the ethical standards of his day. In his '*Book of the Judge*' he described his own activity as follows :

"He whose task it is to produce a correct idea, has only to study, precisely and deeply, the rotten parts of the existing order - and then, in the most partial way possible, to stress the opposite of it"³ (Kierkegaard, *Book of The Judge*, p.172.)

Thus Kierkegaard's ideas not only served as a source of existentialism and his religious doctrine had had a profound influence on the teachings of other protestant and Catholic philosophers.

But though the movement started with this Danish christian philosopher it has gained a overwhelming popularity in the mainland of Europe after the second world war, especially in Germany and France. The movement comprises a bewildering variety of thought particularly in regard to its theological implications. It has been a major force in theology in both camps, protestant and Catholic, — it ranges from determined

atheism to Protestant Biblicism and Catholic theism as well as in Philosophy. The prominent representatives of existentialism are :

(i) *Karl Jaspers* (1883-1969), a leading exponent of German existentialism;

(ii) *Martin Heidegger* (1889-1976), one of the founders of German existentialism;

(iii) *Gabriel Marcel* (1889-1973), French Philosopher, writer and the chief exponent of Catholic existentialism;

(iv) *Jean-Paul Sartre* (1905-1980), a French Philosopher, writer and the chief proponent of French atheistic existentialism;

(v) *Albert Camus* (1913-1960), a French Writer, Philosopher and a remarkable representative of atheistic Existentialism.

The influence of the movement is not, in any way, confined within the domain of philosophy or theology alone but has spread over to literature, paintings and other fine arts. The sources for 20th Century existentialism may be traced to Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, and also to the phenomenology of Husserl (1859-1938). These philosophers make their starting point 'existence' - their main concern being man's existence in this world and its related problems without making any assumption as it really is and thus they give philosophy a subjective, quasi-psychological twist, making it the study of human consciousness.

E.g., Heidegger, whose major work, '*Being and Time*' appeared in 1927, combined the irrationalist tendencies of Kierkegaard, Philosophy of life, and Husserl's Phenomenology — his central concern being with human 'existence'. The basic category of Heidegger's philosophy was

'temporality' understood by him as man's inner experience. 'Mood', a form of spontaneous, undeveloped consciousness, was considered to be primary by him. The apriori forms of human personality are 'care', 'dread' etc. which constitute man's subjective being. In order to comprehend the 'essence of existence' man must deny himself any considerations of aim or practicality, realise his mortality, frailty. It is only through a permanent realization of 'being faced with death' that man can visualise the validity and substantiality of each moment of life and get rid of aims and scientific abstractions.

The diversity of points of view may be due to the category of 'existence', for the term existence is undefinable. In our way to define it we have to take into consideration its essence and what it amounts to is the absorption of existence into essence, systematization which is nothing but to sacrifice the unique singularity of the individual. The word 'existence' in itself carries with it a definite intelligible meaning and it cannot be ignored by any genuine philosophy. Now how do we grasp the true meaning of 'existence' ? Is it through crisis or through communication ? In answer to these two questions we come across two major theses : (i) 'Existence is met with through crisis' and (ii) 'Existence is met with through communion'.

The advocates of the first thesis in their very attempt to make 'existence' totally independent of 'essence' take an uncompromising view and consequently they are anti-rationalist and violently anti-traditionalist than the advocates of the second thesis. The former group is more radical, more uncompromising in subordinating existence to essence than those who discover it through communion. For Kierkegaard, e.g., the word 'existence' denotes chiefly the mode of being which is characteristic of man - this passionately intensified form of human life makes the mind

susceptible to experiencing a crisis and through crisis, his individual existence.

However, the existentialist thinkers commonly and unanimously have voiced against all kinds of systematization. To bring together the different items of existence under a closed system is to ignore or overlook the very uniqueness of particulars. An individual is individual because he differs from others and this difference or distinctness constitutes the singularity, the uniqueness, the concrete particularity of that individual. Similarly, a particular is particular, because it differs from others and this difference constitutes the very 'thisness' of a particular thing. To bring or any attempt to bring all the individuals under a system is to sacrifice the distinctness of the individual as individual. Such an ideal systematization is found in Hegel's Absolute Idealism. All finite things, according to Hegel, are a necessary unfolding of the Absolute Idea. Finite individual selves are logically bound up with Absolute and, therefore, the individual cannot have freedom — freedom being another name for rational necessity. Hegel constructs the essential structure of the universe along with its historical development. Is this great and grand edifice erected on the solid ground or in touch with the real universe as it really exists ? By raising such questions like this Kierkegaard has raised violent protest against all kinds of essentialism, either Platonic or rationalist essentialist tradition of which Hegel is a prominent representative, a president-member on the essentialist committee.

Kierkegaard's vital concern is with the individual, the concrete individual and his real existence. Our intellect, he holds, is unable to transcend the realm of essences. The very experience of this inability induces a crisis of despair and when this crisis reaches at a climax, the

individual is paralysed by the 'dread' — a fear not of any concrete or real danger but rather a dread of nothing. This theory of Crisis expressed in his "*Either/or*" and '*the Concept of Dread*' is the key-point of the later representatives of the movement.

Kierkegaard's ideas influenced Karl Barth and in 1919 Karl Barth published his '*Dialectical Theology*'. The conclusion drawn by Barth from the theory of crisis is itself no philosophical theory but a Biblicism which denounces philosophy as an absurd guide towards faith.

To Karl Jaspers goes the honour of first advocating Existentialism in modern times. He started his career as a psychiatrist and this determined his philosophical views to a great extent. He saw in psychopathological phenomena not the expression of personality disintegration of the individual but man's ardent search for his distinct individuality and he came to the conclusion that any rational depiction of the world can be regarded as a 'rationalisation' (one of the mechanisms for resolving mental conflicts) of emotional desires which can never be realized completely. According to him the main task of philosophy is to show that all conscious manifestations of man in the spheres of science, art and religion are based on the unconscious activity of the existence. Thus the irrational world dominates the rational world. According to him the real meaning of existence becomes evident to man only during periods of deep shock, e.g., acute illness, death, unattonable guilt. Only at this particular moment man becomes free from the burden of everyday cares and anxieties as well as his interests and scientific views of reality. He faces a profoundly intimate existence and his true experience of God. Thus in passing through a crisis he may establish a contact with that unknown something that lies beyond the perspective limitations of his knowledge. This is the rise into transcendence. According to Jaspers in man's search for truth there is a

limit and it generates a crisis of intellectual despair — this limit is set by the perspective character of his knowledge, he knows only a segment of reality and the 'Encompassing' eludes his grasp. Jasper's distinction of limited perspective of knowledge with the 'Encompassing' which is unlimited and unknowable reminds us of Kant's dualism between phenomena and noumena, between thing-in-itself and thing-as-it-appears and his agnosticism.

Both Dialectical Theology of Karl Barth and Existentialism of Karl Jaspers turn away from the philosophical core of the question, the former by a leap into divine revelation and the latter by substituting for the whole problem the dualism of the part and whole relationship.

Martin Heidegger attacks the ontological centre of the problem. What is meant by Being ? However, he offers no clear and consistent answer. The concept of Being, according to him, originates with the Platonic conception of the Idea. Long before Socrates among the Ionians, he finds a more authentic vision of Being. He points out that the traditional philosophy has attempted to explain Being with the help of essence. In Hegelian philosophy essence is supposed to be prior to existence. Heidegger makes a sharp distinction between essence and existence and shows that essence cannot exhaust existence.

With Sartre the principle : 'Existence precedes essence' is truly fundamental. Essence presupposes existence. First man is then comes the essence of it. Jean-Paul Sartre was born in 1905 and had a brilliant educational career. His views were moulded by the thought of great European philosophers, especially that of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger. His famous work *"Being and Nothingness"* (1943) expounds his philosophy of existence. On the subject, *'Existentialism and Humanism'*

he delivered a lecture in Paris in 1945 in which he gave an exposition of 'atheistic existentialism' but on the whole it was superficial not depicting his real understanding on the subject. In later years of his life he had amended His individualistic existentialism. While emphasising the progressive nature of the Marxist philosophy he sought to complement Marxism by basing it on existentialist anthropology and psychology.

Proceeding from the main thesis of existentialism-existence precedes essence - he built his phenomenological ontology on a radical antithesis of being and consciousness. In ethics he adhered to the position of pure subjectivism with freedom the main category. Regarded from the point of view of individual consciousness, freedom appeared as the essence of man's behaviour, the source of activity and the only possible mode of his existence. He vehemently denied the objective moral principles and its criteria and the objective determinants of human behaviour. Each person has to choose his morality. In his '*Critique of Dialectical Reason*' vol. I (*Critique de la raison dialectiques*) in 1960 he changed his view seeking to overcoming the subjective limitations of his conception.

Sartre denies God and like Nietzsche he holds the absence of God to be of utmost importance for us all. There are no transcendent values, neither the laws of God nor anything else. There is no meaning or purpose either in the universe or in human life. We are permitted to do anything we like — we are left out in the world to look after our own fate and destiny. Each person has to design himself not in accordance with laws imposed from outside but according to his own choices. We are free, absolutely free - human freedom being the main category or the foundation of values.

This position Sartre arrived at from his existentialist view of man.

The simple and undeniable fact is that we exist and we have to decide what to make of ourselves. Sartre's assertion of human freedom is associated with his typical existential outlook, as, in his view, we are condemned to be free and there is no limit to it. We are doomed in it, he says. This notion of freedom occupies a fundamental position in his existential philosophy. From the notion of consciousness he arrives at the conclusion that freedom is the essence of man's behaviour. How does he arrive at this conclusion ?

The dualism between being and consciousness is shown by the fact that consciousness must necessarily assume an object, it must be always conscious of something other than itself and because of it we are able to make judgments of objects, Again, a judgement may be either positive or negative. Looking at the sky at night I feel as much sure of the non-existence of the sun there, as of the existing of the moon and the stars. So conscious beings can conceive what is non-existent, what is truly not the case. Thus Sartre sees the connection between 'Consciousness' and 'nothingness'. In Indian Philosophy Vaisesikas consider the negative category of Abhava or non-existence as the seventh category.

'Nothingness' appears in Sartre's title of the book, "*Being and Nothingness*" and inspite of its conglomeration of verbiage it plays a crucial role in making a conceptual connection between consciousness and freedom. "For the ability to conceive of what is not the case is the freedom to imagine other possibilities, the freedom to suspend judgement. We can never reach a state in which there are no possibilities unfulfilled, for whatever state we are in, we can always conceive of things being otherwise. (Sartre thinks that we are always trying to reach such a state, to become objects rather than conscious beings; hence his description

of human life as 'an unhappy consciousness with no possibility of surpassing its unhappy state', 'a useless passion').....The power of negation is, then, the same thing as freedom - both freedom of mind (to imagine possibilities) and freedom of action (to try to actualize them). It follows that to be conscious is to be free."¹⁴ (L. Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature*, p. 82-83).

Following Kierkegaard Sartre uses the term 'anguish' to describe this consciousness of one's own freedom - it is not fear of an external object but the awareness of the ultimate unpredictability of one's own behaviour. 'Anguish' is painful and we generally try to avoid it, but there is no way out or path of exit from it, for it is a necessary truth that we are free. It is 'bad faith' to attempt to escape anguish or consciousness of our freedom by imagining that we are not free, by trying to convince ourselves that our actions are determined by our character, our role in life, our social conditions. Sartre illustrates 'bad faith' with the help of an example.

"He pictures a girl sitting with a man who she knows very well would like to seduce her. But when he takes her hand, she tries to avoid the painful necessity of a decision to accept or reject him, by pretending not to notice, leaving her hand in his as if she were not aware of it. She pretends to herself that she is a passive object, a thing, rather than what she really is, a conscious being who is free."¹⁵ (L. Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature*, p. 84).

From the point of view of Freudian Psychology one may try to give an explanation of 'bad faith' in terms of unconscious mental states. According to a follower of Freud, in the case of the above example, the girl under reference is repressing the knowledge that the man, her close companion, has made a sexual advance to her. To this explanation Sartre

agrees to differ; he points out that there might be a repressing agency, the Censor, within the mind which would determine what is to be repressed and what not, i.e., what is to be allowed to consciousness. So the censor is conscious of the repressed idea and if 'Censor', allows its repression, it is surely in 'bad faith'.

However, Sartre is of opinion that it is possible to avoid 'bad faith' and achieve 'authenticity'. He says that in making our individual choices we should be fully aware not to allow anything that determines our choices. We are absolutely responsible for everything we do and we must accept this responsibility for everything about ourselves. There is no escape from it, to flee from responsibility is itself a choice.

Sartre illustrates this point in *'Existentialism and Humanism'* — it is impossible to prescribe anything in matters of individual choices. Here he cites the case of a young Frenchman, at the time of second world war, who is confronted with a situation in which he has to make a choice in between two alternatives : 'To be with mother who lived only for him or to leave his dear mother for an encounter with suffering and death'. Throughout his life every individual, like this young Frenchman, is bound to arrive at a crossroad necessitating a moral decision. "Turn right, and you will lose our head; turn left, and you will find happiness" - in the situation like this a person must take his own decision, he is free to choose any of the alternatives. Sartre holds that no ethical doctrine, christian or Kantian, can prescribe the young French man the one alternative totally neglecting the other one. It is difficult to say anything positive or negative to the young man. Sartre, when his advice is sought for, said merely : 'You are free, therefore choose'. "If you want to end up in hell, just stay in bed : The world is unfair : if you accept it, you are an accomplice; should you wish to change it, you'll become a rascal" — this idea, uttered by one of Jean-

Paul Sartre's characters, highlights an aspect of the situation of choice against the background of social and moral alienation.

According to Sartre *authentic choice* has an intrinsic value of its own. In the example of 'bad faith' Sartre condemns any self-deception, any pretension, any refusal to face reality. Instead of self-deception, he admits of free choice and thus he puts emphasis on self-knowledge and in admitting self-knowledge he differs from Freud in crucial ways. He rejects the idea of unconscious causes of mental events or unconscious motivation — the job of the existential psycho-analysis is not the uncovering of hidden, repressed mental causes of a man's behaviour but to look for the meaning of it. So to understand a person the prime concern is to look for his choices.

But can self-knowledge or authenticity be the only basis for how to live ? Should Sartre commend the man who chooses to kill a man with full awareness of what he is doing ? If the man fails to provide us with reasons for such a choice, is not his choice wrong ? If no reason can be given for choosing the one way of life rather than another, the choice is arbitrary. But we must admit the merit of his analysis because of the fact that the more we become self-aware or self-conscious, the more we are capable of becoming something else. Sartre urges us to become more truly self-aware and to exercise our ability or power of changing ourselves.

According to existentialist thinkers the individual is unique by itself — their general trend is to safe guard the individuality against collectivism. Any form of collectivism, either group collectivism of the primitive societies or collectivism prevalent in a socialist society, brings the individual's existence at peril. Existentialism wages its war against totalitarianism in the modern era. They grant full freedom to individuals. Sartre points out

that each individual capable of making a choice is always creating values. The individual himself makes decision and selects one from many and in this act of choice he, as a conscious individual, completely feels his freedom. All responsibility lies with the individual in his act of choice. And in this choice, in this act of decision-making, the uniqueness of the individual is to be sought, is to be looked for. In a society or in a group or in a closed system the individual may not get his ideal freedom. That does not mean that existentialists deny, by implication, society or its necessity — their main contention being if individual freedom is lost, everything is lost. Though they accept society's existence they find an unending contradiction between the individual and society. The freedom that is ideal for the self is never realized in society. The social environment, its 'climate of opinion' limits his freedom. Therefore, the individual always lives the life of despair, agony. He feels that he is a failure in the struggle for existence and thereby he invites pessimism. Life becomes almost meaningless to him. But of one thing he is absolutely certain — he is certain that death must eventually come to him either at this moment or in some remote future; it is inevitable, is the only truth and he cannot escape it. He is bound to accept it as no other alternative remains for him, for his free choice.

The central theme of Albert Camus' 'Philosophy' is concerning the meaning of human existence. He concluded that man's existence in this world is absurd and made the category of the 'absurd' the basic principle of his philosophy. According to him the senselessness of human life is personified by the mythological image of 'Sisyphus' who for his perfidy, is doomed for ever to roll uphill a heavy stone which always rolls down again. Unable to bear this senselessness man revolts and in this he spontaneously strives to find a way out of his '*Sisyphean plight*'. His frame

of mind is that of a hopelessly lonely man in the absurd world. According to him death is the only revolution in human life - all other revolutions are not revolutions proper. To an individual, at a particular moment, death becomes the only reality.

Camus' existentialism seems to be a rebel philosophy, a philosophy of crisis, despair and death. The world is absurd, the human life is meaningless. Death is the only reality. But with Gabriel Marcel, the chief exponent of the so-called catholic existentialism, it was precisely through existential experience that one could apprehend God and for this reason it was necessary to renounce rational proofs of God's existence. His approach to the Being is through 'I-thou' relationship. By introducing the idea of the absolute person, his existentialism rejoins the tradition of christian metaphysics and theology. Thus with Thomistic theo-ontology Gabriel Marcel, the Prodigal son of God, returned to his real abode, the abode of God; but Albert Camus, a 'stranger' to this world, lost his path in the labyrinth of the 'absurd world' and by his rebellious attitude he at last discovered his path in death.

It is generally believed that the discussion of alienation occupies a central position in existential philosophy. But, in fact, such a discussion may be found in the writings of Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre and Paul Tillich. Here also we come across a radical division between the religious and the atheistic existentialism. Heidegger's central concern is with human existence and his existential philosophy ends in the inevitability of one's death. Like the German Philosopher Nietzsche Sartre is a radical atheist while Paul tillich is a leading existential theologian.

Heidegger's discussion on alienation occurs in his famous book, '*Being and Time*'. He distinguishes two fundamental ways of living — (i)

authentic way of life and (ii) inauthentic way of life. Authentic existence, according to him, is purely self-determined existence. It is shaped and governed by decisions and choices which are truly one's own and the decision the individual makes is with full freedom and full awareness of the fundamental conditions of human life. The latter, viz., the 'inauthentic' existence is determined by impersonal social expectations and conventions and in this existence the individual always exhibits a systematic refusal to face with such conditions. Heidegger commends the authentic existence and he sees that there is an inherent human tendency to fall into the mode of inauthentic existence and he uses the term 'falling' as antonym of authentic existence. However, each type of existence is a potential way of being for man which each of us may not actualize in spite of our efforts to do so. Man's alienation takes place when he is alienated from his authentic existence and authentic way of living.

He speaks of alienation in connection with three interrelated phenomena associated with 'falling'. The first is thinking about death which is one of the individual's 'possibilities-of-being' — a possibility which may be realized eventually all on a sudden at any given moment of existence. The significance of this stark fact is fundamental to Heidegger as it is a necessary condition of authentic existence.

Heidegger observes that people are reluctant to admit this fact that death is inevitable and no one knows when it will come. The cultivation of such an indifference to death alienates man from his authentic or real existence, his non-relational 'potentiality-for-being'. Authenticity is not only conceived simply in terms of 'being-towards-death' but also in terms of self-directedness of one's own life in accordance with projects one resolves upon. Thus these two existences, authentic and inauthentic, involve a relation to the future. He also observes that man has a tendency

to be so absorbed in novelties and distractions of the present that he totally forgets the truth of his 'having-to-die' which is essential to his authenticity or authentic existence. It thus contributes to man's alienation from his ownmost 'potentiality-for-being'. Man is alienated again when he achieves superficial understanding of himself which does not lay the foundation of his authentic existence.

Heidegger's conception of alienation is to some extent similar to the Hegelian and Marxian conception of 'self-alienation' which is conditioned in terms of disparity between a person's essential nature and his actual condition. But Heidegger differs radically from Hegel as well as from Marx, because they try to explain 'being' with the help of essence and place undue emphasis on 'man's essence'. Here man's alienation is his loss of himself and his transformation into a thing from essence. To Heidegger the status of man's essence is not fundamental. What is more fundamental is his 'being', his 'existence' — that man has no fixed essence over and above the basic and inescapable conditions of his existence. Hegel and Marx talk of alienation in essentialist terms which Heidegger himself requires us to reject and to see alienation from the view point of man's existence.

According to Marx, man is alienated from what he does, from things, i.e., products of his labour, from his fellow men and finally from his essence, his true nature and what concerns him most is the dehumanization of man. Man's alienation from his essence is the central thought depicted by Marx in his 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844' which he wrote in Paris. Whether man has an essence or not is a debatable question. Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist philosopher, vehemently opposes essentialism and he emphatically urges that man has no essence. According to him, man lacks the 'solidity of

things' and he is condemned to be free. He works out this principle in detail not only in his philosophical writings but also in stories, novels and plays and shows how men constantly succumb to 'bad faith' hiding from themselves their freedom pretending to be as if they were things rather than what they actually are, i.e., conscious beings who are free. What constitutes the main difference between Marx and Sartre may be summed up in the following.

Sartre concentrates on the psychological processes that lead men to see themselves as objects, as things, as unfree while Marx concerns himself with the economic processes or conditions that lead to man's estrangement, alienation from his essence in a capitalist society in which man is not free, man is not in himself, man is dehumanized. Marx sees the unfree as victims caused by the social system while Sartre insists that we are our own victims - we are really free but we pretend to be unfree.

In "*Being and Nothingness*" Sartre uses the term 'alienation' from the existentialist point of view. It is used in connection with the phenomenon of one's experience of oneself as one is viewed by another subject, viz., as an object. But in his "Critique of Dialectical Reason" Sartre has modified his position in the Marxian line after long seventeen years from his publication of the book, 'Being and Nothingness' in 1943. 'The real nature of man is the totality of social relations,' Marx said in his theses on Feuerbach in 1845. Each is a product of the human society he lives in. Sartre denied that we are determined by society or by anything else, and asserted that every human individual is completely free to decide for himself what he chooses to be in his 'Being and Nothingness'. But they commonly denied the existence of God.

Here we confine our attention only to the conception of alienation

as depicted in his *'Being and Nothingness'*, and, in his view, he certainly differs from Marx.

In both cases, it is through the mediation of another person that the phenomena in question occur; but here the similarity ends. And this similarity is merely formal; for the way in which the person affects the individual is quite different in the two cases. "For Marx, it is when I surrender my labour to the control and direction of another man in return for wages that my labour and my product become 'alien' to me; and it is this, in turn, which results in my 'self-alienation', or failure to realize my essential nature. For Sartre, on the other hand, the Other simply Looks at me; our relation has nothing to do with that which obtains between worker and employer. And the 'self' which I thereby experience as 'alienated' is to be conceived neither in terms of my labour, nor my product, nor my Marxian essential nature (which is realizable only when my labour and my product are truly mine). It does not matter which Sartrean 'self' one considers - that which I experience subjectively or that which I experience as 'Known by the Other'; neither corresponds at all closely to the foci of alienation which Marx discusses."⁶ (Richard Schacht, *Alienation* pp. 225-226).

Paul Tillich conceives of estrangement in essentialist terms. And it constitutes a significant departure from the position held by most existential philosophers, especially Heidegger and Sartre who emphatically reject the view that that man as such has any essential nature which defines how one ought to be and which may or may not actualize.

According to Tillich man, as he exists, is not what he essentially is and ought to be. He is estranged from his true being. Tillich considers it to be the 'question' associated with human situation and it is the task of

theology to find out answers to such questions. Secondly, he regards Jesus as 'the bearer of the 'New Being' or as the one in whomman's existential estrangement is overcome'. To the notorious problem of existential estrangement Jesus is the real solution for he has the power of conquering the existential estrangement.

More recent writers associated with existentialism, after Heidegger and Sartre, are Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel and Albert Camus. Jaspers makes frequent use of the terms '*alien*' and '*alienness*' and does not develop any consistent view of it. In '*Being and Having*' Marcel speaks of alienation while discussing the contrast between 'the thinker' and 'the ideologist' - the thinker never makes an unconditional commitment to any particular idea while the ideologist, in his devotion to one of his ideas, is unconsciously enslaved to a part of himself. His ideas are not novel as they are derived from Marxian ideas. The name of Albert Camus is commonly mentioned in the discussion of alienation. In '*The Stranger*' Camus' character Meursault is an excellent example of a man extremely alienated from the people and the society around him. Camus depicts his character simply as an stranger or alien. He does not extensively use the term, nor does he develop any systematic theory of alienation.

Coming over to Ethics the existentialists place special emphasis on the problems of morality. According to them, social morality is unreal, the real morality lies outside the social. In the debate between the individual and the society they advocate extreme form of individualism - the moral positions of the individual and of society are mutually exclusive and incompatible. According to their subjective-idealist moral outlook man becomes the philosophical centre of the universe as they hold that existence precedes essence. First man is; man exists. First man is

existent, then comes his essence and hence they advocate existentialism and their ethics is known as 'existential ethics'. They oppose essentialism of all kinds and try to adhere consistently the viewpoint of subjectivity. Though their main concern is existence, i.e., man's existence in this world but their analysis is not confined to this realm alone but reaches beyond the boundaries of man himself-often it has been given a metaphysical twist and even some of the existential thinkers of theological brand try to derive relief of their crisis faced in this world from their existential estrangement from man's essential unity with the God. Tillich goes a step further in holding his faith in Jesus in whom the conflict between the essential unity of God and man and man's existential estrangement is overcome.

The real man, as viewed from his natural essence and social dimensions, forms a sphere of unreal existence. What is then men's real existence ? Man exists and he exists independently of any social definitiveness; he is fully free and he falls into crises of existence by pretending to be not free. What is more, the real quality of existence is not a fact but a problem, an idea, a choice, a project, an imperative of sorts. Thus the moral imperative has been given here an ontological status. Social morality makes a man act in conformity with certain prescribed moral ideals totally alien to his existence and, therefore, they are hostile, alien and directed against the individual's hopes and wishes. So social morality is unreal and what is real is existential morality. This militant moral relativism rejects morality as a normative science rejecting vehemently universally significant elements. Although man's social existence is not 'genuine' he is nevertheless compelled to remain in the absurd world as one of its members and must find his bearings in it while all the time rebelling against it and in this rebellious attitude he becomes conscious of his own unique

existence. *"I rebel, consequently, I exist"*. — wrote Albert Camus. But if the moral reality lies beyond the society, the criticism of the prevailing social relations along with the implied wish to change them lose all meaning.

The fact that individual is an end in himself ultimately results in man's loneliness, isolation and makes him a passive spectator, an stranger, outsider, alien even in his existence. Lonely and pitiful, he faces alien 'nothingness' and he cannot but to bear the burden of his fate and the reality of his existence is realized at every moment through fear, crises, worries and fundamentally the awareness of death which may or may not be realized in the immediate future, but which must be realized eventually at any moment. One thing is certain and inevitable and that is death - thus the fear of death is the main feature of existence and ultimately it leads to pessimistic outlook of life and the world.

Existentialism associates its understanding of morality with the question of freedom. The most detailed exposition of it we have in Jean-Paul Sartre, the French Philosopher and one of the leading advocates of atheistic existentialism. For Sartre there is no God, no rules of God, no absolute values, no essence. Man is left alone with himself. As there is no God, nor his commands, man is free, absolutely free — but this freedom is a curse to him; he is doomed to be free. In freedom man is absolutely free to choose anything he likes but due to 'bad faith' he pretends to be determined by outside influence.

Sartre holds that an individual has an absolute right to life, a right that cannot be taken away by any necessity or any kind of violence. What Sartre means to say is that the individual is free to dispose of his life as he thinks fit, i.e., even he has the right to death. Now, if man's supreme

freedom lies in death, can a living person be possibly free ?

Asserting that the individual is the maker of his destiny, that everything depends on the strategy, the design, the project he has outlined for himself, existentialism seems to elevate man to a higher status and assert his absolute sovereignty in his own affairs, but in reality the result is very different — it is followed with despair, hopelessness and pessimism. It considers man's freedom of will with utter disregard to environment or society and makes the two - man's freedom of will and the environment — as two alien separated realities. To them the environment is not really important and hence it does not matter what social system man lives under. It gives absolute status to man's independence and thus separates the individual from the environment making an unbridgable gap between the two. And the consequence is : Without society man's independence becomes an absurdity, a meaningless abstract concept.

The existentialists' conception of total responsibility of the individual does not imply that an individual should be aware of himself as a member of the human race and proceed from the objective needs of social development, that he should be able to assume responsibility for his own decisions. To take for granted each man's absolute responsibility for everything tantamounts to individual caprices. If it were admitted, Sartre would have to commend the man who might choose to devote his life to exterminating Jews — it is to give free access to everyone, the individual or the group or the class, to do anything even it is done with full awareness of what he or the group is doing. Thus existentialist ethics is individualistic, abstract and has no bearing on the social man.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

01. Leslie Stevenson *Seven Theories of Human Nature*, Chapter 7, p. 78.
02. Leslie Stevenson *Seven Theories of Human Nature*, Chapter 7, p.79.
03. Kierkegaard *Book of the Judge*, p. 172.
04. Leslie Stevenson *Seven Theories of Human Nature*, Chapter 7, p.82-83.
05. Leslie Stevenson *Seven theories of Human Nature*, Chapter 7, p.84.
06. Richard Schacht *Alienation*, p. 225-226.