



Implications of Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism

Emmanuel Jerome Udokang

Department of Philosophy and Religions University of Benin Benin Edo State.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 26 April 2016;

Received in revised form:

9 June 2016;

Accepted: 14 June 2016;

Keywords

Satre, Humanism,
Existentialism,
Humanistic
Existentialism,
Implications.

ABSTRACT

A close look at Jean-Paul Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism reveals an avalanche of implications that clamour for a dismissal of Sartre's thesis. These implications range from metaphysical implications, to religious, ethical, sociological and other implications. The task of this paper is to critically look at some of these implications and consequences of his Humanistic Existentialism.

© 2016 Elixir All rights reserved.

Introduction

The philosopher who lies at the heart of this work is Jean-Paul Aymand Sartre, a key figure in the philosophy of existence (existentialism) and phenomenology, and one of the leading figures in the 20th century philosophy. He was a French philosopher, playwright, novelists, political activist, biographer and literary critic. He was born in Paris as the only child of Jean-Baptiste Sartre, an officer of the French Navy and Anne-Marie Schweitzer. His mother was of Alsatian origin and the first cousin of Nobel Prize laureate Albert Schweitzer.

Sartre became attracted to philosophy upon reading Henri Bergson's Essay, Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness. However, the most decisive influence on Sartre's philosophical development was his weekly attendance at Alexandre Kojève's seminars, which continued for a number of years. Sartre died on April 15, 1980.

As a philosopher, Sartre's philosophy lent itself to his being a public intellectual. He envisaged culture as a very fluid concept; neither pre-determined, nor definitely finished; instead, in true existential fashion, "culture was always conceived as a process of continual invention and re-invention" (Being and Nothingness 96). This marks Sartre, willing to move and shift stance along with events. He did not dogmatically follow a cause other than the belief in human freedom, preferring to retain a pacifist's objectivity. It is this overarching theme of freedom that makes his work subverts the bases for distinctions among the disciplines.

His novel philosophy is his humanistic existentialism where he over-emphasized the theme of human freedom. For him, once freedom's light is beacon in a man's heart, the gods become powerless against him. Man, then is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does. In other words, for Sartre, everything has been figured out for man, except how to live his life. It is this Sartrean humanistic existentialism with absolute freedom as its central theme that is the cause of this work. Our aim is to source out the implications of holding such a position in a

world where man is not a beast living for itself alone but living in the community with multiplicity of other subjects. But before we proceed to do this we need to examine in details Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism.

Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism

To render this paper intelligible, let us begin by examining what Humanism is. In his book *The New Humanism*, Udo Etuk sees humanism as "one of the major systematic philosophies in the history of civilization" (5). He posits two senses in which humanism can be understood as a philosophy namely, humanism as "a view of life" and humanism as "a human activity or enterprise". Since humanism "claims to be and to present the correct and integrated view of the universe and of man's place in it", he rightly concludes that it is a systematic philosophy (6-7). For the purpose of this paper we will adopt Corliss Lamont's position as quoted by Etuk in his work *The New Humanism*. He writes:

Humanism is the view point that men have but one life to lead and should make the most of it in terms of creative work and happiness; that human happiness is its own justification and requires no sanction or support from supernatural sources; that in any case the supernatural, usually conceived of in the form of heavenly gods or immortal heavens, does not exist; and that human being, using their own intelligence and cooperating liberally with one another, can build an enduring citadel of peace and beauty upon this earth (9-10).

Humanism like existentialism is a philosophical attitude which can be seen in many world-views such as theism, naturalism, transcendentalism, etc. though incorporated in some systems of philosophies and world-views, humanism expresses some vague dissatisfaction with them and a firm determination that human values and potentialities should not be swallowed up in a system that either takes no account of man or that makes him something less than he truly is. Like existentialism, humanism is absolutely man-centered.

Humanistic existentialism stands for the dignity, the rights and the freedom of man. It spurns any philosophy or theology which squeezes man into categories or systems that rob him of

his humanity. In its defense of human dignity, humanism takes the following extreme positions: firstly, humanistic existentialism vehemently opposes any form of determinism, theistic or naturalistic. It holds that man cannot be completely subject to the physical law.

Humanistic existentialism also holds that man is not subject to any moral imperatives except those he prescribes for himself. Any other law, whether from above or below which he has not made by himself, enslaves him and robs him of his human dignity.

It is on this ground that humanistic existentialism rejects all forms of the natural-law theory or the divine law theory and recognizes only the concept of law advocated by social utilitarianism.

Thirdly, humanistic existentialism asserts that man's future is to some extent undetermined and open in spite of the natural and historical forces beyond man's control. Thus the humanists believe that man is not merely a helpless victim of history but a maker of history. Man's future is dependent on his everyday choices. Man becomes what he makes himself not what God or nature may have programmed him to become. Humanistic existentialism as we have seen above, both implicitly and explicitly dismisses the idea of a creator God. It argues that if man is a creature of God, he cannot but be subject to God's will as a pot is subject to the will of the potter. It then holds that if man exist and be free, the idea of God must be rejected. Thus humanistic existentialism concludes that theistic authoritarianism is destructive of man's humanity and dignity; it deprives man of his freedom of choice, limits his possibilities and imposes an alien law on him.

Humanistic existentialism also rejects naturalism because of its unacceptable materialism and determinism. Man's freedom cannot be compromised with the law-like regularity with which natural processes seem to occur. Man is free. He can make a difference in the course of events. Man has an open future; he is not determined by natural laws and forces. He has within his power to change the course of history.

With regard to the historical antecedent of humanistic existentialism, the idea of humanistic philosophy as "man centered" mostly evolved from Pico's famous Oration on the Dignity of Man, (1492), but its full articulations in the 19th Century is seen in Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) in which he argued that religion was nothing more than the projection of the noblest aspirations of humans. He concluded that the proper study of the philosopher and the theologian is not what transcends man but man himself and his values.

The strain of humanistic philosophy continued with Frederick Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God in modern culture in his analysis of the existential situations of humans as beings in the world.

In his *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (1946), Jean-Paul Sartre argued that "existence precedes essence" and consequently there is no human nature, no God. Man is what he makes himself, man is how he acts. Man's humanity consist in self-determination.

With humanistic existentialism, especially as put forward by Heidegger, Sartre, Camus and Simone de Beauvoir, the question of man's destiny becomes for the first time all-important, for nothing is settled and everything matters. What one will make of himself is left open. God has not defined it for man, it is man who defines it for himself. Humanistic existentialism makes everybody responsible for everything.

Man's dignity stems not from having being given a favoured place in the universe but for the fact that while his existence is contingent, his life is his own creation.

In proclaiming existentialism as humanism, Sartre distinguishes two meanings of humanism. He rejected the first one which, as a theory, "upholds man as the end-in-itself and as the supreme value." He regarded this form of humanism as absurd because, according to him, man cannot be an end since he is still to be determined.

With regard to the other meaning of humanism in which sense existentialism is humanism Sartre has this to say:

... the fundamental meaning is this: man is all the time outside of himself: it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that he makes man to exist; and on the other hand it is in pursuing transcendent aims that he himself is able to exist ... There is no other universe, the universe except the human universe, the universe of human subjectivity. This relation of transcendence as constitutive of man (... in the sense of self-surpassing) with subjectivity ... it is this that we call existential humanism... this is humanism because we remind man that there is no legislator but himself; that he himself, thus abandoned, must decide for himself; also because we show that it is not by turning back upon himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself ... that man can realize himself as truly human (*Existentialism* 310).

This new humanism of /Sartre is what we have chosen to call humanistic existentialism in this work and is the subject of our critique. The contents of Sartre's humanistic existentialism which will be critically surveyed in this work include the following: the rejection of God's existence, of human nature and essence; his two modes of being; the precedence of existence over essence; his pessimistic view of inter-human relationship; his proclamation of man's absolute and unlimited freedom; his rejection of objective norms or moral codes and so on.

1.10.3 Subjectivity

A very important concept that Jean-Paul Sartre employed in the exposition of his humanistic existentialism is subjectivity. It is Sartre's belief that what all existentialists have in common is that existence precedes essence or that subjectivity must be the starting point in every philosophical enterprise.

Before Hegel, subjectivity was a pejorative notion, denoting a violation of the authoritative demands of the mind; in Hegel's philosophy it assumed a new meaning signifying "a rejection of misconceived objectivity and a reaffirmation of the unconditional decision of the subject" (Navickas 4). Kierkegaard employed the concept subjectivity as an answer to Hegel's abstractionism which denigrates the individual. For him, subjectivity is the very antithesis of philosophy which deals with abstract ideas. Thus Kierkegaard means by subjectivity a total, personal assimilation of Christianity as a unique mode of life. According to Kierkegaard a speculative philosopher examines the object of his thought in a totally impersonal and uninvolved manner, he is completely separated from the objects, and he merely looks or gazes at it or examines it. Such a philosophical speculation is what he called objectivity. On the other hand, subjectivity means the practicing and living of Christianity. For him, to exist is to be subjective. Man's subjectivity involves a decision. It involves self-affirmation and choice as well as responsibility for oneself.

For Jean-Paul Sartre, the primacy of existence is translated into the primacy of subjectivity and action. He says:

Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing (Existentialism 291).

Sartre employed human subjectivity to protest against man's fixed or predetermined essence. The primacy of subjectivity, therefore, means that man makes himself what he is. There is no definition for man other than the one he gives himself. As one defines himself, so will he be. We make ourselves what we are by a self-defining project.

Sartre's concept of subjectivity, which we will constantly come across in this study, consists in the assertion that no condition imposes itself on us without our subjective evaluation or estimation of that condition. Subjectivity as understood in Sartre's existentialism is further explained by Luijpen and Co. as:

The aspect of man's reality by virtue of which he rises above being the blindly determined result of processes and forces (101).

Thus for Sartre, subjectivity means that man is a subject and not an object. He has a conscious subject capable of reflecting on his existence, making choices and of defining his future. He has no given essence. He is a "bundle of possibilities", a "conglomeration of potentialities," he is a project and is "always ahead of himself." He makes himself what he will become.

Sartre insists that being-subject means being-free, for through his subjectivity man rises above his being-a-thing. He says:

Man is nothing else but that which he makes himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. And this is what people call its subjectivity ... but what do we mean to say by this, but that man is of a greater dignity than a stone or a table? For we mean to say that man primarily exists- that man is ... something that propels itself towards a future and is aware that it is doing so. Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life ... (Existentialism 291).

Sartre makes it very clear that his concept of subjectivity does not belong to the Cartesian subject. Lawler in his book *The Existentialist Marxism of Jean-Paul Sartre* summarizes the Sartrean concept of subjectivity as follows:

Subjectivity is (1) the formal principle of conscious mediation of all situations, (2) the absence of objective determination in a world of possibilities without determinate meaning of its own, and (3) a deeper "layer" of consciousness that underlies and is manifested in the various particular that mostly occupy our attention (12).

Sartre's subjectivity and humanistic existentialism can be seen as a combination of three contemporary modes of thought stemming from Marx, Husserl and Heidegger who share in common their concern for man's active role in forging his own destiny. For them the human being reflects on his existence, takes a stance towards it, and moulds it in accordance with the fruits of such reflection. The human being is not fixed. He is, as Heidegger says "always ahead of himself", "always on the way" (67-69).

The Metaphysical Implications and Consequences of Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism

One of the primary projects of Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism was to rescue man from the impersonal, transcendental and abstract rationalism of traditional philosophy. To realize this project, Sartre launched his phenomenological ontology which he adopted to restore the dignity of man which was lost in the transcendental and mystical metaphysics of the medieval philosophy.

A close look from the metaphysical plane reveals that Sartre did more harm to man and to metaphysics than god. Sartre's entire philosophy rests on a twofold option namely postulatory atheism and Husserl's postulate of a self-sufficient phenomenology. With the aid of the phenomenological method Sartre denies the existence of the invisible. He denied God, human nature or essence, the soul and the spirit, the ego and so on. With phenomenology appearance is reality.

Thus one of the metaphysical implications of Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism is his creation of another form of dualism in philosophy. His philosophy claimed to have ended the dualism of essence and appearance, an age long philosophical problem. But as Grimseley in his *Existentialist Thought* rightly observed, another dualistic problem remains after the end of the old dualism. He says:

"Appearance" is not separated from "being" as formerly, but there still remains the problem of relating the single appearance which "is" now to the other appearances which it is not but to which it is indissolubly linked. Although the phenomenon has been reduced to the "appearance", the being of that appearance still remains to be clarified (91).

Another metaphysical implication of Sartre's view arising from his confinement of human existence to the one sphere of consciousness is his sad and painful stripping of the human ego of its ontological and psychological richness and vitality by reducing it to a mere *res cogitans* (Reinhardt 167). It will be very unfortunate to apprehend man as merely consciousness. Sartre's anthropological views are still limited as those of Descartes.

The acceptance of Sartre's ontological views will simply mean the rejection of traditional metaphysics. This is because in his phenomenological ontology Sartre dogmatically posited his own terms while rejecting the concerns of traditional metaphysics. He denied human nature, the distinction between being and its manifestation, substance and accidents, act and potency and the philosophy of essence. There is also Sartre's abuse of the traditional meaning of contingency, necessity, absurdity and facticity as well as his dogmatic and unproven postulation of the two modes of beings. No one can accept these unproven positions of Sartre without implicitly and explicitly dismissing traditional metaphysics and its primary concerns.

In Sartre's phenomenological ontology the being in itself lacks the qualities required to constitute consciousness. Being by nature inert and purposeless, it would not serve as a causal purposive agent in the production of a zone of subjectivity. Yet it is implied that everything happens as if being did give rise to nothingness as its primary project. Critics believe that for Sartre to banish this problem to the region of metaphysics is to confess his inability to face one of the most pressing issues of philosophy (Collins 62). It also implies that distinction between ontology and metaphysics provides him an escape route of hiding from critical inspection of the difficulties created by his theory of being.

Sartre ignored the central problem of philosophy viz, the question of being. He preoccupied himself with being-in-itself and being-for-itself to the detriment of being. He ignored the more basic proposition of Heidegger that being precedes existence. This is because without the open clearing of being on which man can stand to project himself, he cannot exist. Sartre's existentialism is blind to this priority of being and is thus accused by William Barret of being like the Cartesian thought, "locked up in the human subject" (248).

Sartre by refusing to participate in the preoccupation of modern philosophy: the question of how it is possible for the subject and object to be – the search for the truth of being and the root of man, was faithful to his new humanism which leaves man rootless (Barret 250). The implication of this terrible omission is that his Humanistic Existentialism which is a phenomenological analysis of the human existence devoid of an ontological foundation is nothing but a castle on the air.

In the opening pages of Sartre's major work *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre affirms that there are no meanings apart from those which are posited by man himself. This implies that there can be no problem lying beyond phenomenology concerning a possible relationship between human meanings and the meaning of being. This approach which, according to Roberts, may rest on a "gratuitous assumption" is a clue to Sartre's persistent conviction that the non-human in itself is simply meaningless (197-198).

There are many other metaphysical implications present in Sartre Humanistic Existentialism some of which have been criticized quite earlier but suffice it to say that Sartre's ontology is nothing but a mass of unproven dogmatic postulation which ignored the concerns of traditional metaphysics.

Religious Implications of Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism

The non-existence of God is to Sartre as necessary as breathing. It is a major stand sustaining his entire philosophical edifice. For Sartre if man is to be affirmed, God must be denied. His postulatory atheism is adopted to justify his claim of the absolute freedom of man. Without God freedom and responsibility are boundless.

We have earlier discussed the place of Sartre's atheism in his Humanistic Existentialism with some of the criticisms it has attracted since he took up this posture, here we will briefly look at some the unanswered problems raised by Sartre's atheism with their attendant consequences.

It must be initially pointed out that Sartre took the notion of "divine mind" quite literally and anthropomorphically as implying what his phenomenological investigation has uncovered concerning consciousness. As we pointed out above, consciousness is always that of something, hence there can be no "consciousness" apart from the world. This anthropomorphism misled Sartre to dismiss the doctrine of God's creation of the world out of nothing because this presupposes the existence of a subject (God) before there were objects. The difficulty arises because in Sartre's dogmatism the idea of consciousness which creates its objects contradicts the nature of consciousness (Roberts 214).

Sartre's major problem lies in his exclusion of other beings like God and the lower animals from possessing consciousness. Hence they are neither being-in-itself nor being-for-itself. Even in his trying to attribute consciousness to God he merely attributed human consciousness to God thus making it impossible to conceive Him (a being-for-itself) creating the world.

It is always implied in Sartre's entire thought, the notion of God who is within human sphere of being. A God who thinks and works like man in all things. Such a God cannot therefore account for the existence of all things. Thus Sartre's failure is in presuming that "whatever is true of human consciousness must be carried over unmodified into the connotations of the idea of God (Roberts 216).

Another fundamental difficulty of Sartre which led him to his postulatory atheism is that of reconciling belief in God

with the existence of man's unlimited freedom. Sartre fell into the error of atheism because he thought there were only two alternatives. The first option for him is rationalism, which in trying to deduce existence from essence makes every existent dependent upon God thereby making determinism inescapable. This leads to the disappearance of freedom. The second option is atheism, which dismisses God and elevates man as a creator of values and endowed with absolute freedom.

What is really needed which Sartre fails to furnish is a definition of human nature which includes freedom instead of being "prior" to it. With such a definition we can say that man receives the power to be free from God and that his exercise of freedom is always a fulfillment or an abuse of this gift.

Judging from the fact that we cannot summarize our life on earth as that of anguish and the feeling of abandonment (feelings which emanate from the absence of God in the universe and the absolute freedom of man) Sartre's denial of God's existence becomes nothing but an illusion. The implication of such deceptive thought is the absurdity of human existence, which Sartre himself acknowledged.

If Sartre is sincere in his assertion that he is not happy about having to face life without divine help, that he finds it "very distressing that God does not exist" (*Existentialism* 294); if he is being honest and not merely ironical in expressing this attitude, the implication is twofold. Firstly, it calls attention to the fact that if God is real, He communicates with man through inwardness, consciences, and decision. Secondly, it means that Sartre's ontology prompts him to make the mistake of thinking that human decision is the whole story. He assumes that the content of religious belief is nothing but projection not communication, but if the reality of God is compatible with freedom, "then Sartre's account of man's longing to be (like) God may take on a quite different significance" (Roberts 219).

A fundamental religious implication of Sartre's entire Humanistic Existentialism is nothing but the abolition of religion which he sees as alienating man from his freedom and responsibility. For Sartre as well as Nietzsche and Marx belief in God is the worst enemy of man's freedom, and if man is to be liberated, the idea of God and nature must be abolished. It is only when this is done that man will be abreast with his freedom and its attendant responsibility. It is only at this stage that man can be delivered from bad faith.

If there is no God man's religious sentiments becomes empty. Man can no longer retain the status of a religious being. Praying to God, going to church as well as other religious obligations will simply be abolished. This implication of Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism has drastic far reaching consequences on man's life in the world.

A Sociological Critique of Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism

It is an indisputable stand of traditional philosophy that man is a social being. This position is commonly justified by experience. The human being needs the presence of others to make his world a better place and to live a fulfilled life.

In the light of this indisputable truth, it becomes very embarrassing to see Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy which regards itself not only as existentialist but also as "humanistic" denying this social dimension of human existence. Sartre's humanistic existentialism is a philosophy on a rescue mission – out to liberate man from the clutches of abstract philosophizing that has swallowed it up along the centuries. One can rightly affirm without fear of falling into any error

that the extreme pessimistic view of Sartre's social theory has made his philosophy an enemy of man's life in the world.

Sartre's social theory has been roundly criticized above in the section of Being-for-others. He summarized inter-human relations as marked by conflict and not co-operation. Man beholds the presence of the other as alienating and murderous and this creates in him fear, shame and hatred.

Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism sociologically is enslaving and not liberating. It sets the philosophical hand of the clock too backward. One striking feature of this social theory is that it moves from the twentieth century philosophy not forward to the twenty-first century but back to the seventeenth century.

Sartre's theory very much resembles that of the seventeenth century English philosophy, Thomas Hobbes. For Hobbes, in his social contract theory, man is a wolf to men. All men are enemies in "the state of nature" and therefore some kind of "contract" is needed to bring men together in the society by a sovereign who institutionalizes all force. This is also the view of Sartre. It is right, therefore, to say that Sartre's social theory is Hobbesian.

In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* where Sartre outlines his sociological position there is an apparent repetition of Hobbes position and a reaffirmation of Sartre's pessimistic view of human relations present in *Being and Nothingness*. Namely: the view that there is no real community between men. Man's relations are either "sadistic" or "masochistic" and every man is somehow the enemy of everyone else. Sartre's sociological theory is too far behind that of Marx, the only new thing he introduced in the *Critique* is the notion of social contract upheld by force and this is nothing but a repetition of what Hobbes was saying in the seventeenth century.

The extreme individualism of Sartre runs quite against our daily experience of man's social life where man co-operates with others fraternally to achieve some specific goals. We witness the indispensable co-operation in various areas of human endeavours in industry, in civil service, in sports, in family life and so on. Sartre's social theory will have the consequence of that of Hobbes in which human life is solitary, brutish and short.

Sartre's introduction of the social contract upheld by force to prevent security risk consequent upon such state of nature will have the implication of dealing a deadly blow to his theory of unlimited freedom. With the social contract man is no longer absolutely free, his freedom is restricted so as to prevent him from being a threat to the existence of others.

If, as we saw earlier, Sartre's social theory excludes the possibility of community life, of love and friendship and of good language and desire, it then means that his Humanistic Existentialism will have no place in African social milieu where communalism, solidarity and brotherhood are the basis of man's life with others. In the African context it is asserted that a tree cannot make a forest, the individual is because there is the community. His existentialism also has no place in Christianity where the acceptable social life is that built on selfless love which for Sartre is impossible and is an effort geared towards futility.

Sartre's Humanistic Existentialism also dealt a blow in man's social life by asserting that human existence is lived in bad faith. Man's public life is, for Sartre, marked by self deception whereby he is constantly denying his boundless freedom and responsibility. This again implies that man's social life is fake, it is never his real life. This goes on to

corroborate his firm stand that human existence is absurd, it is not worthy living, it is a miserable state. This cannot be true of the life we are all enjoying and are doing everything to prolong.

Finally we can say that Sartre's sociology is quite unrealistic of the human existence we all partake. It is a deceptive social theory that presents a chaotic society where everyone is trying to objectify the other, a society where there is no love and friendship, Sartre's view stands against reason and experience.

Ethical Implications of Sartre's Absolute Freedom

It is true that Sartre never intended his major work *Being and Nothingness* to be a book on morality but most of his assertions on man's unlimited freedom contained in this book has more moral implications than most ethical books. This aspect of his Humanistic Existentialism has attracted more questions and condemnations from critics than any other aspect. This led Sartre to promise in a footnote in *Being and Nothingness* to write another book "on an ethical plane". This promise was never fulfilled. His essay *Existentialism Is a Humanism* written in 1946 is sometimes taken to be the definitive statement of his moral views though it is itself full of many unanswered questions. Many critics have found glaring deficiencies in Sartre's ethical positions. These consequences of his interpretation of human freedom "begets an area of confusion and gratuitous assumptions" (Lescoc 323).

A critical look at Sartre's affirmation of man's absolute freedom and is repudiation of all conceptions of human nature show the link between this and the rejection of the very influential tradition of ethical thought which grounds moral values in human nature. And once moral values are not grounded in human nature and are denied any supernatural foundation in a divine plan, the implication becomes that in Sartre's view judgments of moral value have no objective content at all. They can simply be interpreted as "expressions of choices or preferences" (Baldwin 290).

The anti-naturalistic positions of Sartre in his essay *Existentialism* is a Humanism corroborate this interpretation of Sartre. He says:

If God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behaviour. Thus we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse (295).

Prior to this saying, Sartre had said that choosing between things is to affirm the value of that which is chosen for we always choose good and not evil (*Existentialism* 291-193). The above positions which are central to Sartre's position presents Sartre's ethics as a version of "emotivism" or "prescriptivism" according to which judgment of value are essentially expressive or prescriptive and not descriptive (Baldwin 290).

If man is his own measure in the absence of an objective moral standards, if he alone invents values, if he is his own legislator as Sartre says, where then can we find the sound foundation for civilized community living? This problem raised by Sartre's unrestrained individualism and his absolute freedom cannot simply be dismissed by saying that the man who chooses for himself is also responsible for all men. To choose to commit himself is the same as to choose to be a legislator for mankind.

It is very embarrassing to see Sartre jumping from affirming his own freedom to affirming that of others. He had earlier shown the impossibility of this. He has denied the

existence of human nature on which one could have based the assumption that what is good for one individual is good for men generally. Sartre's view of interpersonal relations is that of egoism and conflict where the "we-feeling" is represented primarily as a threat to freedom. How can Sartre then justify his transition to a position that fellowship and love can become "the fruition instead of the frustration of freedom" (Roberts 223)? We can also ask how we can know what is good for all men since there is no objective standard of measurement but every individual is creating his own value. How can we know the value of others?

Critics have also insistently asked whether man is really good and benevolent enough to be entrusted with such a task. If all choose different values freely and honestly on the same moral issue can one rightly accuse any of wrong doing? If, for example, one man judges tax evasion to be wrong and another to be right can we take the first man's judgment to be a good moral judgment and make it an objective moral standard? What can we say of the other man's honest and free judgment? The implications of Sartre's position are multiple and deeper investigation exposes Sartre's difficulty and the confusion in his ethical positions consequent on his position of man's unlimited freedom.

In his attack on conventional ethics, Sartre singles out for special attention what he calls "the spirit of seriousness" which is a form of bad faith. According to him, this attitude pretends that the difference between right and wrong has already been settled axiomatically, so that no kind of creative ethical venturing is necessary. The implication of this position of Sartre is nothing but a rejection of universal moral standard. For him there are no objective moral standards binding man in the performance of his actions. Man is free to decide what he likes faced with particular situations. He tried to argue this with the example of a young man faced with the dilemma of looking after his mother in occupied France and leaving to join the Resistance in England. He concluded by saying there is no apriori moral standard that can help the young man resolve his dilemma. Sartre must have gone too far in thinking that the existence of general moral principles means they must be applied in every particular circumstance even where they are irrelevant. Objective moral principles are only available to assist man in making moral decision to complement the dictates of his freewill.

Mary Warnock in her book *Existentialism* maintains that Sartre's Existentialism together with other Existentialist thoughts made no contribution to moral philosophy. Criticizing Sartre's essay *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, she said the essay did not meet the objection raised above that there could be no such thing as an existentialist morality, if all that man can do is to evaluate the world for himself alone. She also faulted the superficial Kantian moral theory it contained since (as Sartre himself later realized and regretted the publication) it is quite impossible to envisage "the true existentialist man taking responsibility for anyone's choice but his own", or adopting the Kantian position that men are to be treated as ends in themselves. To take this view is to be guilty of "the spirit of seriousness" or bad faith (125). She therefore concluded that this essay cannot be a proper statement of Sartre's moral philosophy or that of Existentialism in general.

Even at the end of *Being and Nothingness* the implications of Sartre's positions on freedom and responsibility led him to an impasse. Any attempt to present an ethics with any generality will be nothing but "the spirit of seriousness" or bad faith. The one established fact is that

values were personal, contingent and chosen by the individual for himself alone. Thus there are no absolute values or inalienable rights for these express bad faith (Warnock, *Existentialism* 129).

Faced with this chaotic social and moral impasse the only way open to Sartre's existentialism is advocating that each man must save himself by choosing his own life of freedom. This appears to be the sad end of Sartre's ethical theory.

Sartre's ethical position has been massively criticized for its deficiencies and provocative assertions. James Collins analyzes the implications of Sartre's brand of freedom. He says:

Freedom is here reduced to spontaneity ... Condemnation to freedom would then mean not only that one cannot avoid acting freely and well by the very fact of initiating any project with resoluteness and afore thought ... Sartre realized that an unqualified acceptance of this view will lead to a glorification of power displayed for its own sake (82).

Reviewing the Sartrean ethics, F. H. Heinemann in his book *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* finds Sartre's interpretation of man's freedom inadequate and incomplete. According to him the Sartrean man is completely free of the influence of emotions and passions. This, his man becomes a would-be creator who becomes only naturally responsible and not morally responsible. This interpretation of course begets total irresponsibility (127). Commenting on Sartre's assertion that "The most atrocious situations in war, the worst tortures do not create an inhuman state of affairs (Being 639), Heinemann says:

This statement reveals the confusion, not only of this writer, but of our time. It seems irresponsible ... because it implies a justification of the most cruel actions of the most inhuman dictators (128).

John Wild criticizes Sartre's deficient view of human existence. In his book *The Challenge of Existentialism*, he contends that though Sartre has not written his promised book on Ethics his ethical directions is already clear in outline from. He says:

We may describe this as an ethics of pure freedom man has no constant tendencies. There are no changeless norms, to which he can look for guidance of his conduct Whether I decide to die for justice or drink at a bar, the matter is indifferent... Liberty itself is the only stable norm (164-165).

For Walter Odajnyk the Sartrean man is usurping the prerogative of God whom Sartre has denied. Since he creates his own essence and creates values for himself and for others Odajnyk says he is a God "but a God chained; he is condemned to make these decisions," he can't escape his role to play God, a choice he had not made himself (13).

Frederick Copleston in the same view refers to Sartre's ethical doctrine as a "philosophy of atomic individualism," wherein the individual's choice alone creates values. He says:

If by "atomic individualism" we mean the doctrine that there is no universally-obligatory moral law and no values which are not created by the individual's choice, Sartre's philosophy is obviously a philosophy of atomic individualism (194-95).

Since it is the individual who creates values whether for himself or for others, Copleston contends that should another individual in all sincerity refuse to assume this social responsibility (by making capricious choice his value) one must admit that his choice is not worse than the first man's choice; they are both equally valid within Sartre's doctrine.

In trying to save his position on freedom and ethics from being charged with a reckless libertarianism Sartre insisted that thought the individual in making his choice is not responsible to any authority divine or human or to traditional values, he should not in exercising his freedom violate the freedom of others. This has the implication that man does not exercise absolute freedom as Sartre had taught.

Helmunt Kuhn takes Sartre up on this point asserting that Sartre in saying so is abandoning his existentialist position. He says that in decreeing that the individual man must respect the freedom of others, Sartre is really appropriating the Kantian principle that man can never be used as a means he is always an end (158-159).

Conclusion

From what has been revealed above and many other deficiencies of the Sartrean Ethical theory one can say that Sartre offered moral philosophy more problems than solutions. Any attempt to solve these problems within the Sartrean phenomenological analysis of human existence will be a fruitless effort. It will entail a total rejection of Sartre's entire philosophical edifice from his atheism to his doctrine of existence and essence, the two modes of being, inter-human relationship and his doctrine of absolute freedom. It is within this reasoning that one understands why Sartre never wrote his proposed work on Ethics – it will mean discarding all his previous philosophical doctrines.

Works Cited

Baldwin, Thomas. "Sartre, Existentialism and Humanism". *Philosophers: Ancient and Modern*. Ed. Godfrey Vesey. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987. 287-307.
Barret, William. *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1962.

Collins, James. *The Existentialists: A Critical Study*. Chicago: Regnery, 1964.
Copleston, Frederick. *Existentialism and the Modern Man*. Oxford: Blackfriars, 1948.
Grimsley, Ronald. *The Existentialist Thought*. London: Cardiff U of Wales P, 1960.
Grossmann, Reinhardt. *Phenomenology and Existentialism: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1984.
Heinemann, F. H. *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament*. New York: Harper, 1958.
Kuhn, Helmut. *Encounter with Nothingness*. London: Methuen, 1951.
Lescoe, Francis J. *Existentialism: With or Without God*. New York: Alba, 1974.
Odajnyk, Walter. *Marxism and Existentialism*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1965.
Reinhardt, Kurt. *The Existentialist Revolt*. New York: Ungar, 1960.
Roberts, David E. *Existentialism and Religious Belief*. New York: Oxford UP, 1959.
Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Trans. Hazel E. Barnes. London: Routledge, 1993.
Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Essays in Existentialism*. New York: Citadel, 1976.
Sartre, Jean-Paul. "Existentialism is a Humanism" in *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre*. Ed. Walker Kaufmann. New York: World Pub., 1968. 287 -311.
Warnock, Mary. *Existentialism*. London: Oxford UP, 1970.
Willy, John. *The Challenges of Existentialism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1959.