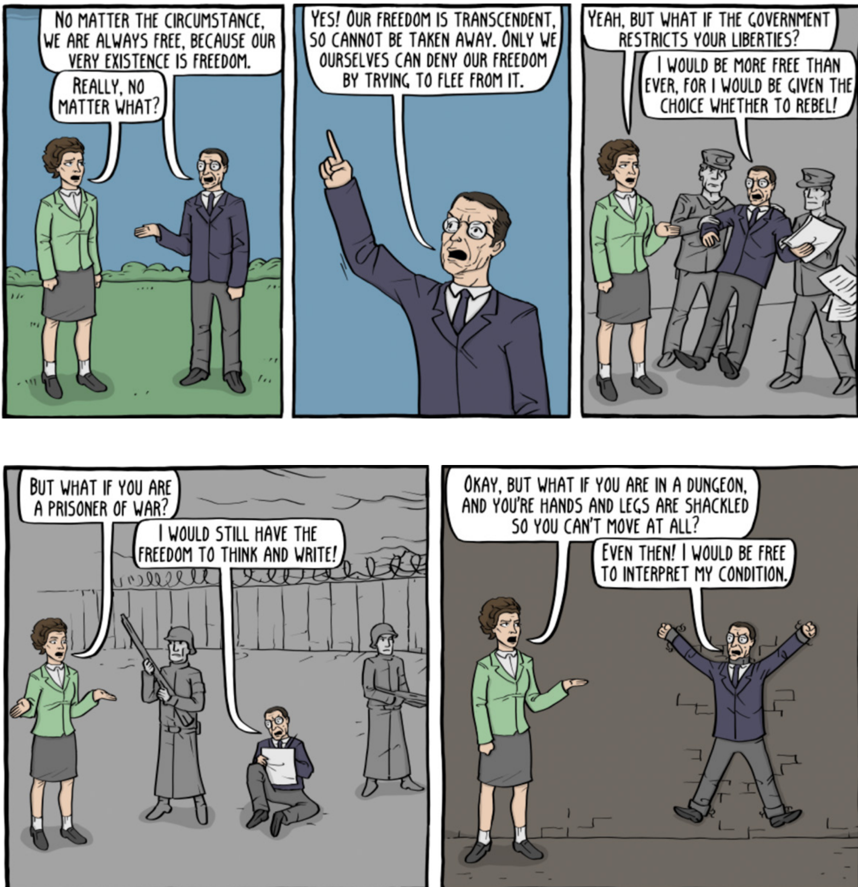
TO LIVE FREE OR TO MAKE EXCUSES

IN DEFENSE OF SARTRE'S (REVISED) CONCEPT OF RADICAL FREEDOM

PALOMA FIGUEROA



Is the slave as free as his master? The prisoner as free as his captor? Before even attempting to answer these questions, one cannot help but imagine how easy it would be to challenge anybody who dared affirm such propositions: not only given the semantic absurdity of trying to equate the freedom of the slave with that of his master when the master-slave relationship is defined by the negation of one individual's freedom by another, but more importantly given the undeniable reality of the physical constraints imposed upon slaves by their masters by virtue of the latter's dominant status and power. Still, Jean-Paul Sartre was one who affirmed that "the slave in chains is as free as his master,"[1] a claim which, along with his overarching concept of freedom, has earned him quite a few objections and caricatures – including the comic above.[2] Here, the same Sartre who unshakably states to Simone de Beauvoir that freedom cannot be taken from us except by ourselves ends up in shackles against the wall of a dungeon, as Beauvoir guides him through a thought experiment to test through how many restrictions of freedom Sartre still considers himself *"totalement libre*."[3]

---

[1] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.

[2] Existential Comics: a philosophy comic about the inevitable anguish of living a brief life in an absurd world. Also jokes. "Sartrean Freedom." (n.d.)

[3] Sartre, *L'être et le néant*, 741. Quoted in FØLLESDAL, Dagfinn, and Henri SARLET. "LA LIBERTÉ CHEZ SARTRE." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 35, no. 135 (1981): 41–59.

Though this comic is caricatural, there is always some truth behind caricature—and indeed it is true that Sartre's initial concept of freedom elaborated in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) was, even from an existentialist perspective, radical. Existentialism is a philosophy centered around human freedom and responsibility within a universe considered devoid of inherent meaning. According to existentialists like Sartre, we are 'thrown' into this universe at birth, left alone to construct our own *existence* through our choices and actions, without any higher being or predetermined *essence* to turn to—hence the fundamental existentialist idea that "existence precedes essence."[4] Beyond this shared idea, what makes Sartre stand out from other existentialists is his conception of freedom as limitless and unconditional. To him, every human agent, regardless of their personal circumstances, is *always* free to choose their course of life in accordance with their freely set projects. Obstacles to one's freedom only arise in light of those projects, not as material constraints. It follows that, by reorienting one's project, one can eliminate those obstacles. Therefore, there is no such thing, from Sartre's perspective, as an *in-itself* limit to my freedom; in fact, to consider myself limited in that regard would be to act inauthentically, in "bad faith", wherein I self-deceptively interpret my given circumstances as being outside of my control, and thus consider myself unable to freely choose otherwise. Hence why the caricatured Sartre in the comic above holds on for dear life to his interpretation of himself as free despite his circumstances—even as a prisoner in shackles. To consider his freedom lost would be to surrender to bad faith, thus becoming more of an object than a conscious human being.

As the comic suggests, Sartre's radical freedom has been subject to many objections—some of which convinced Sartre to revise his thesis. Perhaps most notably, his fellow existentialist thinker and lifelong partner, Beauvoir, insisted against Sartre that people are not all equally free, due to social inequalities and *sedimentation*—a concept that we will explore in detail in section II for its centrality to Beauvoir's existentialist theory and to her philosophical disagreement with Sartre. Though the latter revised his theory in light of Beauvoir's insights, even this less hyperbolic concept of freedom has been directly and indirectly challenged since, namely by contemporary cognitive science. Indeed, countless recent findings reveal that the human brain appears to be determined by various internal processes and external influences,

[4] Gallagher, S., Fuchs, T., Zahavi, D., & Aho, K. *Existentialism (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

upending not just Sartrean freedom, but the very existentialist foundation of free will and lack of pre-given essence. These findings leave Sartreans with a rather *angoissant* existential problem: faced with such serious objections to human freedom, let alone to "radical" freedom, can the latter concept still hold any value, or should we discard it along with our very conception of ourselves as free agents? Further, what contributions, if any, can the canonical version of existentialism[5] make to current thinking and how can it evolve going forward, faced with the scientific advances since these foundational existentialist works were published?

In this paper, I argue that there *is* a way to hold on to our felt freedom as human agents while acknowledging the neurological and social factors that may limit us psychologically and sometimes physically. I argue that, in fact, we *should* hold onto our belief in the possibility we have to transcend those limits imposed on us, rather than considering ourselves determined and powerless, lest we fall into the "bad faith" Sartre warned of. This, as we will see, is one of the valuable contributions that existentialism can still make today. With this in mind, I will start by explaining Sartre's initial form of existentialism–the concept of "radical" freedom—based on passages from *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism is a Humanism*. I will then consider a variety of objections to Sartre's thesis, first at the sociological level with excerpts from Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*, then at the neurological level with excerpts from Robert Sapolsky's *Determined: A Science of Life Without Free Will* and a recent paper by Neil Levy. To the sociological objections I will respond with Sartre's revised theory of freedom inspired by Beauvoir's philosophy and described by Jonathan Webber in *Rethinking Existentialism*. As for the objections from neuroscience, I will respond by arguing that it is of pragmatic importance that we see ourselves as free agents even if the cognitive sciences do not regard us as such. Finally, I will end with Webber's argument in favor of conserving existentialist philosophy for the significant contributions that it can bring to various fields beyond individual existence in today's world.

5 As Jonathan Webber calls it in *Rethinking Existentialism*; more on this idea in section III.

§ I: "NO MATTER THE CIRCUMSTANCE, WE ARE ALWAYS FREE": SARTRE'S INITIAL CONCEPT OF FREEDOM[6]

Though Sartre did revise his version of existentialism later in his philosophical career, the main ideas for which he is remembered—and caricatured—stem from his initial concept of human freedom. In this section, I will attempt to summarize the key elements of this foundational radical theory which I aim to defend later in this paper.

In his essay *Existentialism is a Humanism* published in 1946, based on a lecture he gave the previous year during a conference, Sartre states that there is one idea that unites all existentialists, whether Christian or atheist[7]— namely, that "existence precedes essence."[8] From the perspective of atheist existentialism, which Sartre adheres to, this is the idea that there is no such thing as a shared human nature because "there is no God to conceive it." As such, human beings exist "before they can be defined by any concept." Objects, in contrast, are defined by the concept for which they were produced. The paper cutter, for example, is crafted in a specific way for a predetermined use: the "essence" of the paper cutter, or "the recipes and qualities which allow for its production and definition", precedes its existence insofar as the role of the paper cutter is determined, and the paper cutter cannot be defined beyond that role.[9] Contrary to the paper cutter, Sartre argues, human beings are *essentially* nothing: "man exists first, meets himself, arises in the world,"[10] and defines himself only thereafter, during the course of his *existence*. In other words, man is a blank slate at birth, undefinable because there was no God to define and craft him, and through the years

[6] I will be quoting parts of the comic above in the heading of each of the three sections of this paper, but to be clear, these are not Sartre's own words; the same precision applies to the following headings.

[7] It must be noted that Sartre's strict duality between Christians on the one hand and atheists on the other excludes religious atheists of other faiths than Christianity. Among 20th century existentialists of Jewish faith, for example, we can think of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, namely. In this passage, Sartre only mentions Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel – both Christian – as figures of the non-atheist existentialist school of thought that he opposes. Yet while considering the opposition between religious existentialism and atheist existentialism, Sartre omits the fact that Christians have not been the only ones to make contributions to the former.

[8] Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (Gallimard, 1996), 26.

[9] Sartre, 27.

[10] Sartre, 29.

he defines himself through his actions. "Man is nothing more than what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism."[11]

How does man "make" himself? This is where Sartre's concept of the *project* comes in. To him, man is first and foremost "a project which lives itself subjectively", given that nothing precedes this project, and that the latter arises out of one's subjectivity, the foundation of human existence. As such, we will firstly be what we will have projected ourselves to be through our freely chosen fundamental project.[12] To have this freedom of choice is not just to have the ability to choose between the different possibilities that appear to me; it's the ability to choose our basic *orientation* in the world, which itself creates the possibilities and obstacles to which we are confronted.

Therefore, for Sartre, obstacles are to a certain extent determined by ourselves. As he explains in *Being and Nothingness*, the mountain only appears as "not climbable" to the climber standing at its foot, in light of his projected climbing—a secondary project which finds its meaning in terms of his fundamental project, which might be to become a world-renowned alpinist. In contrast, the mountain appears simply as beautiful or impressive to the traveler passing by, "whose free project is a pure esthetic ordering of the landscape;"[13] it does not appear to him as climbable or unclimbable, since he doesn't have the project of climbing it. In this sense, our obstacles only appear as obstacles in light of our project, not as a material reality. We have the freedom to remove obstacles from our way by choosing to change our project: if the climber decided to change his fundamental project of becoming an alpinist to pursue another career, then the mountain would not appear to him as an obstacle anymore.

We may live our entire lives with a single fundamental project, but it is always subject to change. Indeed, to Sartre, we are always freely choosing our project or orientation, therefore we cannot use it as an excuse for any wrongdoing; in short, "we are alone, without excuses." To be human is to be "condemned to be free"— condemned to choose our own course of life without a guiding essence, God, or a set of objective values that could legitimize our conduct,[14] and condemned to bear the

---

[11] Sartre, 30.
[12] Sartre, 30.
[13] Excerpt from *Being and Nothingness* in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Edited by Robert Denoon Cumming. (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 269.
[14] Sartre, 39.

responsibility for each of our decisions and actions. There is no form of determinism that could alleviate the weight of total responsibility constantly resting on our shoulders; "man is freedom," whether we like it or not.

Any attempt to flee our total freedom and consequent responsibility, to treat perceived obstacles as material constraints that limit my freedom, is what Sartre calls "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*)—a central element of his existentialism. To choose inaction rather than confronting the field of possibilities opened by my freedom, out of the anguish provoked by the thought that I am free to do *anything* at any moment, is a form of bad faith. To use events of my past as an excuse for my present wrongdoings[15] is a form of bad faith insofar as those past events *in themselves* did not determine me to act in any certain way in the present. In other words, fleeing into psychological determinism to escape taking responsibility for my actions when the reality is that nothing is determined and that only I am responsible for my own actions is a form of bad faith.

The opposite of bad faith is *authenticity*, which Sartre presents as our moral imperative.[16] As Neil Levy writes, to act authentically is to face the lack of external meaning and value in the world by embracing our "free choice of values," knowing that "nothing justifies this choice except that we have made it."[17] When we face this choice, we live authentically. Conversely, when we flee this choice by accepting a seemingly constraining situation as our only option, or by adhering to an "overarching metaphysical system that we take to confer justification on our lives,"[18] then we are living *inauthentically*, in bad faith.

[15] Like saying "I cheated on you because my parents cheated on each other when I was younger, so I see infidelity as a normal part of romantic relationships." More on this in section III.

[16] Sartre's concept of authenticity was heavily influenced by Martin Heidegger, particularly his ideas about *Dasein*'s "being-in-the-world" and the importance of confronting one's own existence and choices 'authentically' within an inauthentic world. For more on Heidegger's understanding of 'authenticity,' see Heidegger, Martin. (1927). Being and time. Translated by J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962.

[17] Levy, Neil. "Choices Without Choosers: Toward a Neuropsychologically Plausible Existentialism." Essay. In *Neuroexistentialism: Meaning, Morals, and Purpose in the Age of Neuroscience*, 111–25. (Oxford University Press, 2018), 113.

[18] Levy, 112-113.

No internal or external constraint can justify my denial of my freedom of choice—even the slave or prisoner is free to choose his own *interpretation* of his condition. As such, from a Sartrean perspective, even in situations of oppression our human capacity of meaning-making remains, so that such oppressive processes that aim to turn individuals into freedomless things cannot do so as long as that person has a consciousness. This is why, even tied up against the wall of his dungeon, the comic's Sartre insists that he remains "free to interpret" his condition.[19]

In short, Sartre's initial concept of human freedom can be described as "radical" insofar as it leaves absolutely no room for any form of determinism, or "excuse" in Sartrean terms. No matter our socio-economic background, our psychological baggage, our physical constraints, or any circumstance that we may take to determine or limit us, Sartre urges us to take back control over those perceived constraints which we may take to structure our existence. It is in that sense that Sartre calls his doctrine one of "optimism", one that motivates *action*[20] by placing the human agent as the source and foundation of all values and meaning[21]—hence the idea that existentialism is a "humanism."

§ II: "REALLY, NO MATTER WHAT?": OBJECTIONS TO SARTRE'S RADICAL FREEDOM

The problem is that in practice, Sartre's concept of freedom does not hold as strongly as it may appear convincing on paper. In fact, many would say that it does not hold at all. From the publication of *Being and Nothingness* up until today, Sartre's initial existentialism has been subject to a number of objections so strong that some of them led him to revise his own theory a few years later, while other more recent objections have put into question whether existentialism as a philosophy, even away from an ideal of "radical" freedom, can still hold. In this second section we will explore those different objections, starting with those made to Sartre's radical freedom, then moving on to those made to the broader concept of freedom.

---

[19] Though Camus reaches this conclusion in a different way, we could draw a parallel with his Sisyphus, who can and must *choose* to be happy rather than live in despair, as the only possible rebellion against his condition.

[20] Sartre, 77.

[21] Levy, 113.

§ 1: OBJECTIONS FROM A LESS "RADICAL" EXISTENTIALISM

Though Sartre is often regarded as a symbolic figure of existentialist philosophy, it is important to note that his version of existentialism was only one among several. Indeed, the enduring influence that Sartre has had on existentialism by virtue of his particularly radical ideas on freedom sometimes overshadows the fact that there were other existentialists at his time who contributed to the movement's evolution, namely by putting forward objections to Sartre's radicality, specifically to his overreliance on the concept of bad faith.[22] One of them is Beauvoir, who had a significant influence both on Sartre's philosophical career and personal life.

As Sonia Kruks explains in "Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom," Beauvoir never challenged Sartre's conception of freedom head-on. In fact, she based her own works on the central premises of *Being and Nothingness*—that it is wrong to abdicate one's freedom to a higher principle or power, and that all values emerge from our fundamental project— yet they led her to some "most un-Sartrean conclusions,"[23] namely concerning the question of oppression. Indeed, the fundamental disagreement between the philosophies of Sartre and Beauvoir is summarized in a passage from the latter's autobiography, *La force de l'âge* (1960), where she recalls the following discussion with Sartre back in 1940: while Beauvoir argued that "not every situation is equal: what transcendence is possible for a woman locked up in a harem?",

[22] When I say other existentialists, I am mainly referring to Simone de Beauvoir and Franz Fanon, two other frontrunners of mid-20th century existentialism. In a more comprehensive paper, I would have included a discussion of both of their rich philosophies but given that the focus of this paper is on Sartre's concept of freedom, I will only discuss Beauvoir's ideas given that they directly influenced Sartre to revise his own. As for Fanon, he also interacted with Sartre in response to the latter's essay about the Négritude movement, "Black Orpheus" (1948). Beyond that, Fanon made significant contributions to existentialism—namely by bringing in the perspective of a racialized person's struggle with limitations imposed on their freedom— and should not be placed in the shadow of Sartre and Beauvoir. By not including him in this paper, I do not wish to contribute to giving Fanon that secondary status, but for our present purposes, a discussion of his ideas would make this paper unnecessarily longer than it already is.

[23] Kruks, Sonia. "Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom." *Social Text*, no. 17 (1987), 111.

Sartre maintained that "even such a cloistered existence could be lived in several different ways."[24] In a way, this fundamental disagreement is summarized in the comic above: what united them philosophically was their commitment to human freedom, but what distinguished them was the added "no matter what."

Beauvoir argued that there are situations of oppression in which the radical freedom that Sartre describes is denied and ceases to be possible. This is because freedoms are "not autonomous but interdependent."[25] In other words, my freedom depends on the Other's will: if the Other chooses to deny my freedom and objectify me, then I become the Other's object if I submit. "It is this interdependence [of freedoms] which explains why oppression is possible" and additionally "why it is hateful,"[26] as any attack on the value of human freedom is hateful from an existentialist perspective. In fact, as an existentialist, Beauvoir's conclusion is not that oppression entirely negates the freedom of the oppressed. As she explains in *The Second Sex*, dominant social groups try to make the one they subjugate into the Other, denying them their transcendence as they reduce them to the status of object, yet to fully become an object one has to *submit* to this objectification: "if the Other is not to regain the status of being the One, he must be submissive enough to accept this alien point of view."[27] Thus, as long as the individual does not submit to this "othering," they do not lose their fundamental freedom entirely.

Still, to acknowledge that freedom can be limited, Beauvoir draws a distinction between *formal* freedom and *genuine* freedom. On the one hand, human beings have an ontological freedom that allows us to set our projects and modify them. Yet a freedom that does not actually allow us to fulfill our goals is merely "formal". As such, while a victim of oppression has the formal freedom to revolt against their condition, they have "genuine" or "moral" freedom only insofar as their project of revolt succeeds in emancipation, which, if achieved, would allow them to freely pursue their projects in the world. With this distinction, Beauvoir responds to the criticism made against existentialism that "the precept 'to will freedom' is only a hollow formula and offers no concrete

[24] Kruks, 111. Quoting from Beauvoir, *La force de l'âge,* Volume II, Gallimard (1947), p. 498.
[25] Kruks, 112. Paraphrasing Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas.*
[26] Kruks,112. Paraphrasing Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity.*
[27] Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated and Edited by H. M. Parshley. (London: Vintage Books, 1989), 9-10.

content for action."[28] Beyond this "hollow" freedom—the one implied in Sartre's claim that "the slave in chains is as free as his master"—the reality is that the power to make meaning in the world and freely choose between a range of options is not given to everyone equally: in some extreme cases of oppression, there may be only two options to choose from, one of them involving a high risk of death, which would be the ultimate negation of one's freedom. Beauvoir may agree with Sartre that the slave is as free as his master on the *formal* level, but the slave's *genuine* freedom is limited by a situation in which only submission or revolt is possible.

In this way, Beauvoir adds nuance to Sartre's theory of freedom with her concrete discussion of oppression, largely based on her analysis of the historical oppression of women by men. As Kruks explains, Beauvoir's thesis is that woman is locked into "immanence"[29]—the negation of Sartre's "transcendence"—by the situation that man imposes upon her, a situation which she is not necessarily responsible for. Indeed, although we could say that some women are acting in "bad faith" when they submit to their objectification, bad faith is not always the explanation: in Sartrean terms, women are always responsible for themselves no matter what, while in Beauvoirian terms, "for many there is no 'moral fault' because there is simply no possibility of choice."[30] This disagreement over personal responsibility highlights another aspect of Sartre's initial theory that Beauvoir disagreed with: emphasis on bad faith as the *only* valid explanation for people feeling constrained by circumstances which they experience.

In chapter 7 of *Rethinking Existentialism*, Sartre scholar Jonathan Webber argues that it is in their respective interpretations of the inferiority complex, a phenomenon identified in Freud's psychoanalysis,

[28] Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 2015), 84.

[29] Defined by Beauvoir as the falling back of the for-itself's consciousness into the in-itself (Kruks, 121).

[30] Kruks, "Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom," 114. Quoting from *The Second Sex*.

that we can clearly see how this disagreement plays out.[31] As Webber explains, the idea of an inferiority complex is central to Beauvoir's theory on the construction of gender through socialization: the idea that men are superior to women is instilled in young boys and girls by both male and female adults offering them different opportunities, encouraging them to do different activities, praising them for different actions, which results in so many women feeling a sense of inferiority to men. On the other hand, Sartre interprets the inferiority complex as a "project that some individuals freely choose," an *inferiority project.*[32] In his view, social values can structure one's existence "only through being internalized into the projects one has freely chosen and can abandon". In other words, as a woman I don't *need* to accept being categorized as part of an "inferior group", for I have "absolute freedom" to adopt projects that "attempt to disprove or [...] ignore" this categorization. However, to Sartre, most people are "committed to the project of bad faith", identifying themselves with a fixed set of characteristics as if these formed part of an essence that determined their behavior.[33] It follows, to him, that the only reason why we might feel inferior and limited is due to bad faith.

Beauvoir, on the other hand, finds an alternative explanation for people feeling constrained by their life circumstances: *sedimentation*,

[31] In chapter 5, Webber gives a more extensive account of both Sartre's and Beauvoir's articulations and interpretations of the inferiority complex, among other concepts taken from psychoanalysis. In fact, Webber argues that "existentialism is not fundamentally antagonistic to Freudian psychoanalysis, as is often claimed, but rather aims to provide better articulations and explanations of the phenomena that Freud identified than Freud himself achieved" (76). Webber's analysis reveals how, despite his hostility to Freud, Sartre actually preserved some Freudian insights, such as the inferiority complex, in his own existentialism, with the intention of better explaining them according to his own theory of mind. For more on the relationship between existentialism and psychoanalysis, see chapter 5 of *Rethinking Existentialism*.

[32] Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism,* 86.

[33] Webber, 114-115.

a concept derived from Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.[34] As Webber argues, Beauvoir's reliance on sedimentation rather than bad faith makes her theory of existentialism "preferable" to Sartre's "for a reason that seems to explain why Sartre went on to adopt Beauvoir's conception of sedimentation and revise his existentialism accordingly."[35] Indeed, Sartre's initial reliance on bad faith makes him unable to go beyond the individual to explain why members of certain social groups often have certain characteristics in common, such as an inferiority complex relative to another group. If he tried to use bad faith to explain the origins of those characteristics, he would have to explain why this bad faith is a common feature of people's outlook within one social group—but how?[36] It cannot be the result of a fixed essence, since existence precedes essence; nor can it be the result of some prior project of bad faith, because again we would need to ask why it was freely adopted by each individual within the group. Thus not only is this centrality of bad faith unfounded, it also suggests a sociologically inaccurate account of the origins of shared cultural values.[37]

A more accurate account, as Webber argues, could be built upon Beauvoir's idea of sedimentation. The argument for sedimentation goes as follows: in childhood, each individual experiences specific "opportunities, encouragements and discouragements" based on the values of their surrounding culture, experiences that will direct the individual towards projects that incorporate those values.[38] Those

[34] Merleau-Ponty coined the term 'sedimentation' in his book *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945), where he writes that "the sedimentation of our mental operations [...] allows us to count on our acquired concepts and judgments, just as we count upon the things that are there and that are given as a whole, without our having to repeat their synthesis at each moment." According to him, "building up the layers of meaning through which subjects engage with the world and each other, rests on a 'double moment of sedimentation and spontaneity.'" (Pepper, Ken. "The Phenomenology of Sensorimotor Understanding." In Bishop, J., Martin, A. (eds) Contemporary Sensorimotor Theory. Studies in Applied Philosophy, Epistemology and Rational Ethics, vol 15. Springer, 2014. Quoting from Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes. London: Routledge, 2012, 131-132.)

[35] Webber, 116.

[36] Webber, 116.

[37] The insufficiency of bad faith when it comes to explaining the origins of shared values is explored in more detail by Webber in chapter 7 of *Rethinking Existentialism*, with a critical analysis of Sartre's attempt to ground cultural characteristics common to Jewish people in his essay *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948).

[38] Meanwhile, "childhood plays no special role in the formation of the individual" in Sartre's initial existentialism, according to Webber.

projects and the values within them then become "sedimented," or internalized within the individual's psyche at an age where they adopt projects based on influence. Once they become mature enough to adopt projects on the basis of critical reflection, they will be influenced by those sedimented values. Thereafter, new projects that contradict these values can be adopted in theory, but only after considerable time and "pursuit of these projects" can they become sufficiently sedimented to counteract the older ones. Thus, it is with sedimentation that Beauvoir can explain how "woman" has been constructed as the Other—"the second sex"—through a long history of male domination, conditioning female individuals to be passive and dependent, and rigid gender roles that reinforce those values.[39] Meanwhile, Sartre's initial existentialism cannot account for the empirical social fact of women's secondary status. To avoid this problem without abandoning existentialism altogether, Webber argues, Sartre needed to replace his overreliance on bad faith with Beauvoir's idea of sedimentation—which, as we will see, he eventually did.

As explained above, Beauvoir's idea of sedimentation has the potential to save existentialism from objections made to Sartre's radical freedom. Indeed, "social forces are extremely powerful"[40] and cannot be overlooked by a strictly individualistic account of responsibility. At this point, it is important to insist that Beauvoir's analysis does not conclude that sedimentation and oppression negate freedom: she offers a more nuanced, realistic account of freedom than Sartre, but with no less emphasis on the moral value of embracing one's freedom—for example, through participation in collective revolt against a shared condition.[41]

§ 2: OBJECTIONS FROM NEUROSCIENCE

So far, we have posited human freedom as a central inescapable necessity: without freedom, there can be no existentialism and both Beauvoir's and Sartre's entire philosophies would be rendered obsolete. Yet what if we had reason to posit determinism, specifically incompatibilist determinism, as a central, inescapable necessity? Then

[39] Prinz, Jesse. "Moral Sedimentation." Essay. In *Neuroexistentialism: Meaning, Morals, and Purpose in the Age of Neuroscience* , 87–108 (Oxford University Press, 2018), 91-92.

[40] Prinz, "Moral Sedimentation," 92.

[41] Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* 93.

we would have to accept that all events, including human decisions and actions, are predetermined and causally inevitable, which is incompatible with the idea of free will, and that therefore free will is nothing but an illusion— human beings do not *really* have the capacity to choose freely and independently. We would have to rule out existentialism premise by premise: asserting that *essence* precedes (even determines) existence, that there can be no such thing as "authenticity" since there is no genuine freedom of choice. We would have to rule out, paradoxically, that the only possible form of authenticity is living in what Sartre would call bad faith, which in this case would come down to recognizing the different forms of determinism that make me unfree rather than self-deceptively asserting the illusion that I am free. For Sartreans, this reversal of ideas seems inconceivable and yet, contemporary cognitive science forces us to seriously consider it. In this subsection, we will explore several such objections to human freedom based on findings in neuroscience.

When it comes to "radical" freedom, scientific objections are overwhelmingly obvious: as Levy writes, "Sartre's optimism about agency conflicts with contemporary science."[42] For Sartre, the mind and consciousness are one and the same, and consciousness is "essentially free"[43] from anything that could constrain or even guide it. Yet contemporary findings in cognitive science have revealed that the mind is *not* "essentially free" or "essentially independent" from external influences. Furthermore, unconscious processes—which Sartre rejected[44]—suggest that a large part of our mind is "opaque to introspection": we consider ourselves to be affirming values "that have no foundation beyond our choice," when these values may actually reflect "deep-seated unconscious impulses"[45]—echoing Beauvoir's idea of sedimented values, though with more scientific backing and different conclusions. Indeed, Beauvoir used sedimentation to explain why historically marginalized groups have limited freedom; here, the presence of unconscious processes in the mind suggest that human beings are not free *at all* by showing how little control we really have over our thoughts and actions.

Levy illustrates this with the idea of modularity of mind. Though a popular conception of the mind treats the conscious mind,

42 Levy, "Choices Without Choosers: Toward a Neuropsychologically Plausible Existentialism," 114.
43 Levy, 114.
44 Levy, 114.
45 Levy, 114.

or self, as a kind of "control center"[46]— a "CEO" that delegates tasks to other parts of the brain—while the unconscious is like a rogue force that doesn't report to the "CEO" but doesn't offset the latter's control over the mind either, contemporary cognitive science tells us that there is no such control center: rather, "the mind consists of nothing but such unintelligent mechanisms" as those supposedly directed by a "CEO" that does not exist. In other words, there is no unified self in control, just a collection of automated mechanisms or modules. There is "extensive" evidence in favor of this modularity of mind,[47] an idea that conflicts with our conception of ourselves as a unified self, or "chooser" from an existentialist perspective.

Do the ideas of authenticity and genuine choice still hold in the face of this dissolution of the self into a multiplicity of modules? As Levy explains, if our moment-to-moment decision making is indeed shaped by the multiplicity of modules which constitute us and that are "obscured from consciousness", then under many conditions those modules will shape our choice while causing us to have false views about the reasons behind our choice—a form of unconscious self-deception or "confabulation."[48] Sartre maintained that man is radically free as long as he has a consciousness, but what if the very notion of consciousness becomes hardly accessible or controllable? The existentialist conception of human beings as "unified agents making choices for reasons" that we can justify is thus challenged by empirical findings which we can hardly deny.

If you, naive Sartrean, feel anguished when confronted with this kind of antithesis, wait until you hear what hard determinist Robert Sapolsky has to say about human freedom. The title of his recent book says it all: "*Determined: A Science of Life Without Free Will*." As one of the leading researchers in neuroendocrinology today, his thesis against free will is worryingly strong in that, contrary to Sartre's phenomenological method, it relies on extensive empirical research on the human brain. As such, when he asserts that "there is no free will" or at least that "there is much *less* free will than generally assumed," we are compelled to listen.[49]

[46] Levy, 114.
[47] Levy, 116.
[48] Levy, 119.
[49] Sapolsky, Robert M.. *Determined: A Science of Life Without Free Will.* Penguin Press, 2023, 15.

Sapolsky's thesis rests on the idea that "nothing comes from nothing": when I behave in a particular way, it is due to "the determinism that came before, which was caused by the determinism just before that", and so on. There is no causeless, undetermined behavior that I may want to attribute to my free will, because free will is an illusion: I am as I am as a result of "the biology over which [I] had no control, interacting with the environment over which [I] had no control."[50] Explaining why a certain behavior occurred requires looking at what factors the agent was influenced by during their adolescence, when a key region in their brain was still being shaped by "socialization and acculturation"; it may require looking further back to how childhood experiences shaped the construction of their brain, and even further back to the genes they inherited.[51] Once again, this somewhat echoes Beauvoir's emphasis on the role of early life experiences and circumstances outside of our control—such as an abusive parent—in shaping our adult self, but with more scientific backing and drastically different conclusions, as well as different premises, considering Sapolsky's belief in an "inherited" essence.

As for Sartre, his main ideas can be reformulated in polar opposite form by Sapolsky: man is not "what he makes of himself"[52] rather "nothing more or less than the cumulative biological and environmental luck over which [he] has no control."[53] Existence does not precede essence, rather the other way around, given that we are not born as a blank slate but with a particular genome that, together with environmental influences, "determines" our behavior. The only point on which Sartre would agree with Sapolsky is that "there is nothing but an empty, indifferent universe" which we will eventually fade into, yet their conclusions from that premise are expectedly incompatible: Sartre would say that, for as long as it exists, the self is much more than a collection of atoms, rather the independent source of all meaning in the universe—"uncaused causes who are the foundation of all values" in Levy's terms[54]—while Sapolsky considers the so-called self to be nothing but a temporary arrangement of atoms that we each call "Me".[55] Sartre and Saposky may also agree that people's brains and behaviors

50 Sapolsky, 11.
51 Sapolsky, 12.
52 Sartre, *L'existentialisme est un humanisme,* 30.
53 Sapolsky, 13.
54 Levy, "Choices Without Choosers: Toward a Neuropsychologically Plausible Existentialism," 113.
55 Sapolsky, 360.

can change through life, but while the former would articulate that in terms of freely chosen projects subject to change, the latter maintains that the science of change "doesn't counter this being a deterministic world without free will."[56] In short, the two may have a couple premises in common, but not a single conclusion.

This essentially comes down to a debate between free will and determinism. For Sapolsky, to be human is not to be "condemned to be free" but to be condemned to be determined despite *believing* that we are free. As he observes, belief in free will is extremely prevalent: it is at the root of all social practices and institutions—including the justice system which punishes criminals based on the assumption that they are responsible for their crimes. For Sapolsky, this widespread assumption shows that, faced with harsh truths about existence, humans have developed "a robust capacity for self-deception", which "includes a belief in free will."[57] From this perspective, adhering to existentialism is a ironically a form of self-deception since in Sartrean terms, to adhere not to existentialism but to a form of determinism that does not posit man as a free and responsible agent is a form of bad faith, or self-deception. Conversely, to be "authentic" from Sapolsky's perspective would be to "face our lack of free will,"[58] or to at least begin to question our certitude of ourselves and others as free by attempting to make the "radical changes" in our thinking and feeling that a lack of freedom would imply.

At this point, the case for human freedom, let alone radical freedom, seems like a mere delusion. How can we genuinely see ourselves as free agents considering the empirical facts of social, biological, and neuronal determinism? Faced with sedimentation, modularity of mind and the debunked idea of causeless behavior, should we follow Sapolsky's recommendation to face our lack of free will by reorienting ourselves towards determinism, giving up our conception of ourselves as "choosers" and accepting ourselves as temporary arrangements of atoms determined by various forces over which we have no control?

§ III: "EVEN THEN! I WOULD BE FREE TO INTERPRET MY CONDITION": SARTRE'S REVISED CONCEPT

[56] Sapolsky, 23-24
[57] Sapolsky, 362.
[58] Sapolsky, 365.

OF FREEDOM BASED ON BEAUVOIR'S THEORY OF SEDIMENTATION, AND WHY THIS EXISTENTIALISM CAN AND *SHOULD* BE RETAINED TODAY

Direct confrontation with texts like Sapolsky's might trigger such a felt necessity of reorientation towards "a life without free will", but it doesn't *need* to trigger a fundamental reorientation of our self-perception and behavior—nor do I think it should. In this final section, I will argue that without blindly rejecting what is widely accepted today about the human brain and the extent to which genes and past experiences shape it, it is possible and even morally desirable to hold on to a nuanced version of radical freedom, conserving the moral imperative against bad faith, only without the now outdated conception of ourselves as "*totalement libres*."

§ 1: ON SARTRE'S DERADICALIZED FREEDOM

Before we elaborate on this nuanced version of radical freedom, it is important to insist that Sartre himself came to recognize the limits of his initial concept of freedom. Thereafter, he revised and "deradicalized" it to include the sedimentation of values, which he took from Beauvoir, as a more coherent basis for projects than bad faith. According to Webber, this more "mature" Sartrean existentialism made its first notable appearance in Sartre's biography of vagabond and thief turned writer and political activist Jean Genet, published in 1952.

In *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr*, Sartre analyzes Genet's character, lifestyle and writings as "expressions of a single complex project rooted in childhood"—an explanation he would never have given a few years earlier when his theory implied that childhood plays no fundamental role in the formation of the individual. According to this analysis, Genet's project was born from the social environment and moral values he was exposed to as a child: raised by a family of poor peasants after his mother abandoned him, with the value of property (among others) instilled into him, he finds a way to acquire some property by committing petty thefts early on, for which he is labeled a "thief."[59] Over the years, "he comes to accept that this judgment correctly identities his

[59] Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr,* 17. Quoted in Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism,* 126.

essential nature"[60] (note here Sartre's mention of essence and nature); by internalizing society's moral judgment of him based on actions that his childhood led him towards, society had "penetrated to the very bottom of his heart."[61]

This instance of sedimentation, Sartre argues, partly explains why Genet continued to violate society's moral code throughout his life, accepting this socially attributed "essence" rather than resisting it—a form of submission which former Sartre might have qualified as bad faith. Yet here he treats it as a "conversion" based on a *conscious* decision to embrace society's judgment of him, which becomes sedimented as Genet's outlook is "gradually transformed by his repeatedly deciding to embrace his supposed evil nature"[62] as a thief in the eyes of society. This is the "project" that Genet becomes committed to, and the sedimentation underlying that project makes Sartre qualify it as a "prison without bars": Genet's commitment to being a thief does not make him unable of adopting "new points of view entailing new commitments," but those would not displace "the original attitude" towards himself, so deeply internalized that it "continues to influence thought and action."[63] As such, Sartre's revised concept of freedom recognizes the power of social forces, as Beauvoir did before him, while remaining attached to the imperative of embracing our capacity to "make" ourselves, to a certain extent: "we are not lumps of clay," he writes, "and what is important is not what people make of us but what we ourselves make of what they have made of us."[64]

With sedimentation, Sartre no longer relies on bad faith to explain why we are sometimes unaware of our motivations or why we sometimes feel constrained. He now agrees with Beauvoir that we experience this when our deeply sedimented values conflict with our more recently endorsed values. He also corrects the incoherence of grounding a theory of shared cultural values on bad faith by showing how the values of one's social environment, such as Genet's peasant origins, can become sedimented in one's outlook early on, creating the "prison without bars." For these ideas he credits Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. He does not, however, entirely abandon his own version of existentialism in favor of Beauvoir's: his theory of bad faith and his

---

[60] Webber, 126.
[61] Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr,* 21. Quoted in Webber, 126.
[62] Webber, 127.
[63] Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr,* 69. Quoted in Webber, 127.
[64] Sartre, *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr,* 49. Quoted in Webber, 127.

claim that it is widespread remain, only now he is able to explain that widespread adoption of bad faith "in terms of its sedimentation" as a value.[65]

§ 2: ON THE MORAL VALUE OF HOLDING ON TO OUR BELIEF IN FREE WILL AND APPLYING EXISTENTIALIST INSIGHTS TO TODAY'S WORLD

Despite this "deradicalization", Sartre is still not immune to caricaturesque comics: first, because he remains popularly associated with his earlier "radical" freedom; and second, because other objections can be brought even against his more socially conscious concept of freedom insofar as the very notion of human freedom has become seriously problematic considering contemporary cognitive science, as discussed above.

These objections and the evidence behind them push us towards a most un-existentialist conclusion: that us human beings, supposedly capable of transcendence, are actually nothing more than our *facticity*. As defined by Sartre and explained by Webber, facticity is "the set of one's own physical features and the physical and social features of one's situation" or "the facts that one has to deal with."[66] Hence to say that we are nothing more than our facticity is to say, joining Sapolsky's thesis, that we are nothing more than the biological and environmental *facts* that shaped us and over which we have no control. While the influence of biological and environmental factors, as well as of sedimentation, on our brain cannot be reasonably denied, I would like to further the existentialist idea that we are *more* than our facticity: that no, we are not "determined" to remain stuck with the facts of our current situation unless we convince ourselves that we are, which is where I think Sartre's concept of bad faith can still be of value.

From a Sartrean perspective, human existence is structured by projects, which we choose in the context of our multi-layered facticity. Additionally, as Webber writes, the projects we choose to pursue "can either transform that facticity or simply maintain it."[67] As such, I *can* be

65 Sartre*, Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr,* 33-36. Paraphrased in Webber, 128.
66 Webber, 191.
67 Webber, 191

more than my facticity if I pursue a project that aims to transcend it.[68] My choice of that project may still be influenced by sedimented values,[69] but then again, all projects are, to a certain degree, sedimented. We may become conscious of the effects of that sedimentation—for example, I may become aware of an inferiority complex— and thereafter it is *possible* to pursue a project that aims to overcome those sedimented values woven into my facticity.

Indeed, the "chooser" may be just a collection of automated modules as Levy argues, or determined by a range of factors according to Sapolsky, but the fact is that in practice, I am still the one who does the action of choosing a project based on what I perceive as my reasons, and then acting accordingly. From a consequentialist perspective, it doesn't really matter whether my choice was determined by this or that underlying factor: as long as I *believe* that I have the power to construct my own existence, rather than perceiving myself as determined and powerless due to some negative childhood experience or membership to some social group, I am less likely to turn biological and social factors into obstacles *in themselves* and then partly impose those limits on myself. This is similar to how Beauvoir argued that one can only become fully objectified if one submits to that objectification.

As such, insofar as it is *possible* to choose a project that transcends my facticity, we must recognize that facticity *can* be transformed, and that I am the only one who can make that effort for myself. To a certain extent, I *can* transcend the different forces that some might say "determine" me. This is neither naive nor idealistic when you consider different examples of real individuals who have achieved emancipation from constraining situations. Take Malala Yousafzai: when the Taliban took over and prohibited girls like her from going to school, did she submit? On the contrary, she resisted by speaking out publicly in favor of girls' right to learn – which made her a target. At the age of 15,

[68] Except in certain situations of oppression where one's options are significantly reduced due to physical constraints. I won't go on here about the possibility of emancipation from situations of oppression as my present purpose is to make a more general argument supporting the possibility to transcend one's facticity. For more on the possibility of liberation from oppression, I recommend Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity.*

[69] For example, in *The Second Sex,* Beauvoir argues that only through paid employment can women regain the transcendence that male domination has historically denied them, but in her time and still in some places today most of the options available for paid employment became known as pink collar jobs for requiring more "female" skills.

when the ban on girls' education had just been lifted, she was shot by a masked gunman on her way back from a school exam. Yet despite this near-death experience which she survived, she still chose to continue her activism, eventually becoming the world-renowned advocate she is today. Young Malala could have accepted her facticity by submitting to the ban without pushback – with reason, given the danger of resisting – but instead she *chose* to pursue a project that transformed her facticity. In other words, Malala's ontological transcendence remained within her, despite being "degraded into immanence"[70] by those who tried to take away her fundamental freedom to choose her own course of life.[71]

With this example in support of my argument against Sapolsky's determinism and in favor of defending a nuanced form of radical freedom, my intention is not to reject the empirical fact of social inequalities, or the years of neurological research conducted by neuroscientists like Sapolsky. Rather, it is to warn against the concrete danger of confusing unlikelihood with impossibility. It was *unlikely* for Malala to rise against the Taliban considering the risks involved, yet she did. Therefore, transcending one's facticity is not *impossible*. Similarly, it is not *impossible* to transcend sedimented values, but what is certain is that taking it to be impossible will remove that possibility altogether. Merleau-Ponty once argued that, although we can free ourselves from sediments, their deep "embodiment" in our practices and cultures renders such self-emancipation "unlikely." Going back to the inferiority complex, he argued that after having built his life upon the latter, "continuously reinforced for twenty years, it is not *likely* that I would change," given this "commitment" to inferiority.[72] Of course, if I tell myself that I am "committed" to inferiority, then I will remain as such and act accordingly. Having never considered the *possibility* of working through that sedimented belief, I might live my whole life as a victim of my inferiority complex, with all the missed opportunities that entails: for example, not applying to top universities because I don't believe I could ever be accepted, or never feeling secure in relationships because I don't believe I deserve love. Following this thought pattern further

---

70 Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism,* 191. Citing ideas from Beauvoir, *The Second Sex.*

71 Her father being an education activist and encouraging her to not limit herself certainly influenced her, but in no way did it *determine* her to become an activist herself. In a way, her father's influence gave her (positive) sedimented values that contributed to her project of resistance, but that project was certainly not her only option.

72 Mearleau-Ponty, Maurice. (1945) *The Phenomenology of Perception,* Routledge, 2012, 466-467. bQuoted in Prinz, "Moral Sedimentation," 89.

sediments those beliefs and convinces me that I am forever stuck with my facticity, when in fact it is *possible* to overcome a deeply ingrained inferiority complex; it would certainly be a psychological challenge and it may require years of therapy , but it is not *impossible*.

My fundamental issue with arguments like Sapolsky's and even Merleau-Ponty's is that, by pushing us to reduce ourselves to our facticity and deny ourselves our own *possibility* of transcendence, they encourage us to invoke past experiences as excuses for acting a certain way and refusing to change, as if we were incapable of change. For example, although it has been shown that children who grow up with unfaithful parents are statistically more likely to cheat on their own partners,[73] there is no direct causal link between having unfaithful parents and committing infidelity ourselves. Yet it's an easy form of excuse that allows a cheater to paint themselves as the victim of circumstances outside of their control, thus avoiding responsibility and justifying any future infidelity on the same basis. In Sartrean terms, this is a form of 'bad faith' – convincing oneself that one had no choice but to act in a certain way, that there is a necessary *causal* link between past and present at play, when really, past events *in themselves* do not determine me to commit a wrongdoing in the present. Suppose you learn that your partner had an affair (within an otherwise healthy relationship), and they justify themselves by saying they had no other choice, that they were 'determined' to cheat for whatever reason. I doubt anyone (except for hard determinists like Sapolsky, and even then) would accept this as a valid excuse from their own partner. Yet it is not uncommon for us to use these kinds of excuses for actions that could have been avoided, including but not limited to cheating. In that sense, I join Sartre in arguing that the denial of one's own freedom in 'bad faith' is an unfortunately widespread social phenomenon.

Now there is a way to transcend this phenomenon of which we have all been guilty at times, and this is where I join Webber in arguing that existentialism can still have an important value today, despite scientific and sociological objections made to it. Webber's argument is that the "canonical" version of existentialism, based on *The Second Sex*, *Saint Genet,* as well as Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, has "the potential to make significant contributions to moral thought, philosophy

[73] Weiser, D. A., Weigel, D. J., Lalasz, C. B., & Evans, W. P. (2015). Family Background and Propensity to Engage in Infidelity. *Journal of Family Issues*, *38*(15), 2083-2101.

of mind, social psychology and psychotherapy."[74] This "canonical" existentialism does not treat the individual as *"totalement libre",* nor as the "mere product of social forces," but "combines the freedom to revise the values that shape one's outlook with the sedimentation of one's projects over time."[75] According to Webber, empirical psychology supports this core claim, and indeed existentialist perspectives have the potential to contribute to both the philosophy of mind and procedures of psychotherapy.[76] On a more individual level, I would add that such existentialist perspectives as Beauvoir's argument for the moral imperative of acting authentically can help us confront the values and experiences that make up our facticity and work to transcend those that keep us down (or at least know that it is possible). In this way, we may enlarge our horizon of possibilities, allowing ourselves to dream big and aim high in our projects, and catching ourselves whenever we are tempted to fall into bad faith. As Levy eloquently writes, while "we are all tempted to confuse convention with nature" and "social facts for fixed regularities", the existentialist call to "face up to our freedom" and "recognize that we have options" is "salutary" in that it "can lead us to live more reflectively and more responsibly."[77]

So, is the slave as free as his master? The prisoner as free as his captor? Early Sartre would have argued that, although the slave may not have the same freedom to *obtain* due to physical constraints, he would have the same freedom to *choose* at the very least his interpretation of his situation. In less extreme situations, however, there is no "excuse" for considering oneself unfree: we always have the moral imperative to act authentically. While Beauvoir also believed in this moral imperative, she objected that not every individual is equally capable of turning their *formal* freedom into *genuine* freedom, namely due to sedimentation. We saw how Sartre then revised his radicality considering this objection. Yet he continued to face objections given his existentialist commitment to human freedom, a concept which contemporary cognitive science seriously challenges. Faced with this challenge, this paper has argued in favor of holding on to our conception of ourselves as free agents to

---

[74] Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism,* 188.
[75] Webber, *Rethinking Existentialism,* 192.
[76] For more on this argument that I find quite original and interesting but won't explore in too much detail here, I recommend Chapter 11 of Webber's *Rethinking Existentialism.*
[77] Levy, "Choices Without Choosers: Toward a Neuropsychologically Plausible Existentialism," 119.

give ourselves the *possibility* of transcending the facticity which the objections above reduce us to. This paper has also made the case for conserving Sartre's "bad faith" within a more nuanced version of radical freedom.

At this point, one might find it contradictory for me to still speak of "radical" freedom after so many have objected to it, and Sartre himself later "deradicalized" his concept of human freedom. My response would be that, in an era where more and more scientific findings on the human brain give strong support for the thesis of determinism, any degree of belief in free will may be considered "radical." Yet if being a radical in this context means believing in our individual power to rise above our circumstances like Malala did and give ourselves a chance at living a better life, rather than constantly making excuses that limit our own potential, then we should all be radical existentialists.

REFERENCES

Aho, Kevin. “Existentialism.” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, January 6, 2023. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/existentialism/.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. Translated by Bernard Frechtman. New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 2015.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated and Edited by H. M. Parshley. London: Vintage Books, 1989.

FØLLESDAL, Dagfinn, and Henri SARLET. “LA LIBERTÉ CHEZ SARTRE.” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 35, no. 135 (1981): 41–59. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23945373.

Kruks, Sonia. “Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom.” *Social Text*, no. 17 (1987): 111–22. https://doi.org/10.2307/466482.

Levy, Neil. “Choices Without Choosers: Toward a Neuropsychologically Plausible Existentialism.” Essay. In *Neuroexistentialism: Meaning, Morals, and Purpose in the Age of Neuroscience*, 111–25. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Macomber, Melissa. “If My Parents Cheated, Will I? Myths, Realities and Solutions — Melissa

Macomber | What to do When a Parent is Cheating?” (2021, May 21).

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice (1945). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Donald A. Landes.

London: Routledge, 2012.

Pepper, Ken. The Phenomenology of Sensorimotor Understanding. In Bishop, J., Martin,

A. (eds) Contemporary Sensorimotor Theory. Studies in Applied Philosophy, Epistemology and Rational Ethics, vol 15. Springer, 2014.

Prinz, Jesse. “Moral Sedimentation.” Essay. In *Neuroexistentialism: Meaning, Morals, and Purpose in the Age of Neuroscience* , 87–108. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Sapolsky, Robert M.. *Determined: A Science of Life Without Free Will.* Penguin Press, 2023. https://dokumen.pub/determined-a-science-of-life-without-free-will-9780525560975-9780525560982-9780593656723.html

Existential Comics: a philosophy comic about the inevitable anguish of living a brief life in an absurd world. Also jokes. “Sartrean Freedom.” (n.d.) Accessed January 19, 2025. https://existentialcomics.com/comic/393.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'être et le néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique*. Paris: Gallimard, 1943.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *L'existentialisme est un humanisme*. Gallimard, 1996.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. Edited by Robert Denoon Cumming. New York: Vintage Books, 2003.

Webber, Jonathan. *Rethinking Existentialism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Weiser, D. A., Weigel, D. J., Lalasz, C. B., & Evans, W. P. (2015). Family Background and Propensity to Engage in Infidelity. *Journal of Family Issues*, *38*(15), 2083-2101. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X15581660 (Original work published 2017).