

BEING AND HUMAN FREEDOM IN JEAN-PAUL SARTRE'S *BEING AND NOTHINGNESS*

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ABSTRACT: *Being and Human Freedom in Jean-Paul Sartre’s Being and Nothingness.*

This article explores Jean-Paul Sartre’s conception of being and freedom in *Being and Nothingness*, highlighting the ontological foundations of human existence. It examines Sartre’s distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself, showing how consciousness emerges as a dynamic process rather than a fixed substance. The analysis continues with the role of nothingness in structuring consciousness, grounding the possibility of freedom. Freedom is presented not as a psychological state, but as the ontological condition of existence, inevitably linked to anguish and responsibility. Further, the paper investigates authenticity and bad faith as existential attitudes, and addresses the ontological problem of the Other, emphasizing how intersubjective relations shape human selfhood.

Keywords: *being-in-itself, being-for-itself, nothingness, freedom, bad faith, consciousness*

Introduction

Jean-Paul Sartre, one of the central figures of French existentialism, formulates in his fundamental work *Being and Nothingness* (1943) a phenomenological ontology distinguished by its amplitude and radicalism. Inspired by Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology and Martin Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, yet surpassing them through his own perspective, Sartre develops a theory of consciousness and freedom that makes the individual an irredeemably responsible subject for his own existence. The work is not only a philosophical treatise but also a manifesto of radical freedom, one that influenced not only contemporary philosophy but also literature, psychology, and even the political thought of the twentieth century.

The distinctions proposed by Sartre, between being-in-itself (*l'être-en-soi*), being-for-itself (*l'être-pour-soi*), and being-for-others (*l'être-pour-autrui*), constitute the starting point of an ontology of rupture and tension, in which freedom does not appear as a mere possibility but as an ontological condition of consciousness. In this sense, Sartre's famous formula, "man is condemned to be free," acquires a critical relevance: freedom is not a privilege but a burden that excludes any excuse and abolishes all metaphysical determinism. This position, radical in relation to the preceding philosophical tradition, has been interpreted both as a liberation of the subject from the constraints of classical essentialism and as a source of existential anguish and alienation.

Moreover, the relation to the Other, conceptualized through the notion of the "gaze" (*le regard*), introduces the dimension of conflict and reciprocal objectification. Sartre shows that alterity cannot be understood merely as a complement to the subject, but as a presence that permanently destabilizes its autonomy. From this perspective, being-for-others does not designate only an ontological category, but also an inevitable condition of social and interhuman experience. In contrast to Heidegger, who emphasizes being-in-the-world as the original mode of existence, Sartre highlights the conflictual and fragile nature of the relation with oneself and with others.

Thus, *Being and Nothingness* is not reduced to a mere descriptive analysis but proposes a critical framework for understanding individual responsibility and authenticity. The problem of freedom, as formulated by Sartre, opens a debate that transcends the boundaries of theoretical philosophy and extends into ethics, psychology, and even politics. In this essay, we aim to analyze the way in which Sartrean concepts of being ground a vision of human freedom that remains both relevant and challenging. We will focus on the tension between absolute freedom and social constraints, as well as on the ethical implications of radical responsibility, seeking to highlight both the explanatory power and the limitations of Sartre's existentialist project.

1. Differentiated Ontology: Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself

Being is that which appears, and appearance has its own being. It relates to consciousness but exists independently of it and, for this reason, cannot penetrate consciousness. Thus, the being under discussion refers to

the being of appearance, that is, to an entity that manifests itself only before consciousness. Consciousness is an abstract notion¹, since it carries within itself an ontological origin oriented toward its own self; similarly, the phenomenon is also an abstraction, insofar as its existence presupposes that it “appears” to consciousness. The phenomenon of being is, according to the philosopher, a call to the transphenomenality of being, that is, to its existence insofar as it is disclosed and not merely reduced to the knowledge we have of it. In this way, Sartre perceives reality as composed of two distinct ontological dimensions: being-in-itself and being-for-itself. These concepts constitute the foundation of his ontological thought and define the relation between existence and consciousness.

Being-in-itself (*l'être-en-soi*) is full, brute being, which has no reason for being, characterized by identity with itself and by the absence of any negation. It is the being of things, of objects, of that which is given without being questioned. It is opaque precisely because it is full of itself - something that can be expressed by saying that “being is what it is” - and it contains within itself no principle of change or self-transcendence. It is inert and devoid of intentionality. Being-in-itself can derive neither from the possible nor be reduced to the necessary. It does not result from anything; rather, it is superfluous. It is nothing other than itself. Consciousness never deals directly with being-in-itself but is instead a *thetic consciousness* (= the consciousness that posits, affirms, and confers existence upon an object) of the various phenomena that appear before it and are revealed only on the basis of being-in-itself.

In contrast, being-for-itself (*l'être-pour-soi*) is “the being which is not what it is and which is what it is not.”² Bearing this gap, it cannot have its foundation in an absolute ontological sense, something perceived in the essence of every “*cogito*.” (=an act of reflective consciousness through which the subject affirms itself as existing) In other words, once we become aware of ourselves, we realize that we exist and that our existence was not necessary. This brings with it feelings of profound anxiety, generated by the confrontation with transcendence, as well as an ontological guilt due to the lack of foundation, what Heidegger regards as the pas-

1 Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, “Key aspects of the Freedom of Conscience”, în *Jurnalul Libertății de Conștiință - Supliment (Journal for Freedom of Conscience)*, Editions IARSIC, Les Arsc, France, 2016, pp. 30-37.

2 Jean Paul Sartre, *Ființa și neantul*, Paralela 45, Pitești, 2004, p. 135.

sage from the inauthentic to the authentic.³ Being-for-itself designates human consciousness, caught in a continuous and unsuccessful process of attaining its own self. Consequently, it possesses the capacity to transform itself, becoming other than what it was or is, through nothingness (= the act of consciousness through which negation (nothingness) appears in the world, opening the space of freedom and transcendence), facticity (=everything that is already given about us, but which cannot be reduced to a fixed essence), and ipseity (=one's own identity, the character of being 'oneself').⁴ The for-itself is, in essence, the prior presence of the in-itself, situated in the past, where the for-itself once was in-itself.

This dualism between being-in-itself and being-for-itself has at its center the human being as "a being of distances,"⁵ always set apart from what it is by the vast whole of being that it is not. Thus, Sartre's perspective takes shape: the human being as a transcendent and fragile being, condemned to assume its own freedom in the face of a world that offers no stable ontological reference points. Existence is the phenomenon through which something reveals itself as an organized ensemble of qualities. What is disclosed is this "itself," and not being as such. Being, in the ontological sense, is not the object of manifestation but the possible condition of any disclosure.

Ontologically and in a differentiated sense, according to Sartre, being-in-itself is pure plenitude, opaque to itself, while being-for-itself (consciousness) is that which, in contact with the phenomenon, brings it into appearance. Thus, existence as phenomenon belongs to the horizon of being-for-itself, but finds its ultimate ground in being-in-itself.⁶ "Being is the ever-present foundation of the existent; it is everywhere within it and nowhere; there is no being that is not the being of a mode of being, and which we do not grasp through the mode of being that both reveals and conceals it at the same time."⁷ This quotation suggests that being is the unseen background of all existing things, present everywhere yet directly inaccessible. It has two roles: it reveals being and, at the same time, conceals it.

3 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 136.

4 Adriana Neacșu, *Ontologia lui Jean Paul Sartre*, Editura Academiei Române, București, 2009, pp. 8-9.

5 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 58.

6 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 14.

7 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 31.

Husserl does not explicitly make this division but instead proposes an ontological and phenomenological framework that Sartre will later develop and radicalize. When he speaks of consciousness as intentionality, Husserl affirms that “every consciousness is consciousness of something.”⁸ This idea becomes the foundation of Sartre’s conception of being-for-itself: consciousness is not a fixed substance but a relation, it is defined precisely by the fact that it is always directed toward something other than itself. Thus, being-for-itself is, by its very nature, relational, oriented toward the world and existing only insofar as it relates to something outside itself. In its essence, it is intentionality: an active and constant relation to something other than the self.

2. Nothingness and the Structure of Consciousness

An essential aspect of Sartre’s analysis is the idea of introducing nothingness into the very structure of being. Inspired by Husserl’s phenomenology, he maintains that consciousness is always consciousness of something, that is, it has an intentional character. What fundamentally distinguishes it, however, is its power to negate, to insert nothingness into the very fabric of reality. When the human being acts, its consciousness is prereflective, that is, directed immediately toward objects and situations without analyzing itself. The object (the transcendent) that is disclosed in this state has a special nature: it appears as part of a necessary structure of the world, within which consciousness simultaneously discovers a network of functional and utilitarian relations. Thus, at the moment when the human being positions itself in relation to a particular thing, beyond an ontological distance, nihilation occurs.

Nothingness is the basis of every negation, for in its very essence lies negation itself; it is a form of “not-being”, a mode of existence. For nothingness to exist, conscious being (the human being) must relate to its own past as separated from it by a rupture, that is, a “gap” of being. Consciousness is therefore not merely the victim of the passage of time but is actively involved in this separation, since nothingness is part of its very structure of functioning, as Hegel also observes.⁹ Non-being is the result, while nothingness is the process by which consciousness brings it

8 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 16.

9 G.W.F. Hegel, *Fenomenologia spiritului*, Editura IRI, București, 2000, p. 15.

into appearance. For Simone de Beauvoir, the fact that we are never fully what we are is precisely what allows us to become.¹⁰ This perspective supports Sartre's idea that nothingness is the condition of becoming: the human being is free because it is never completely defined. Its identity is always in the making, always in project. This negative function of consciousness is what makes freedom possible.

Human freedom is precisely this power to create a rupture between itself and the world, to refuse and to negate what already exists; through it, nothingness enters existence. Thus, consciousness and nothingness are inseparable: consciousness brings nothingness into the world, and nothingness makes the freedom of consciousness possible. Yet the human being becomes aware of freedom only in anguish. Anguish is the recognition of a possibility as one's own possibility. It arises when consciousness perceives itself as separated from its essence by nothingness, or even from its own freedom. In other words, a "nothing" that nihilates removes any motive, and what the human being projects as its future being is always reduced to a mere possibility. In this way, the future remains inaccessible.¹¹ There is also a form of anguish related to the past: a decision once made, which seems to determine the present and the future, even though in reality it no longer has any influence over them. Nihilation, in this case, means depriving the past of its apparent power over the present and the future, recognizing that it exists only as a "nothing" outside our current consciousness. This experiential pattern brings to light the inner void, the nothingness that separates the human being from its own being. "In anguish, freedom anguishes about itself insofar as it is never either provoked or hindered by anything."¹² Anguish effectively breaks the link between the human being's past and present. According to Sartre, however numerous the reasons a human being may have for acting in a certain way, they are never sufficient to determine its behavior. In the end, it is compelled to choose one among all possible actions.

10 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of ambiguity*, Citadel Press, Secaucus N.J., 1948. Tema rezonează cu filosofia existențialistă. În acest spectru, ideea ambiguității și a libertății de a deveni sinele, dincolo de condițiile date, este centrală în gândirea ei. În *The Ethics of Ambiguity* Beauvoir explorează tendința de a ne vedea fie ca subiecți complet liberi, fie ca simple obiecte determinate. În final, adevărul este o tensiune permanentă între libertate și condiționările existenței

11 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 80.

12 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 80.

Sartre discusses Bergson's idea of the "deep self," a constant core of consciousness that organizes human experiences and from which a person's actions flow, in the way a parent generates children. This "self," Bergson maintains, preserves a certain identity even when the human being changes, with changes being perceived as harmonious rather than as radical ruptures. Sartre criticizes this model, arguing that Bergson, through this conception, masks the anguish tied to freedom and nothingness: instead of confronting pure, nihilation-bearing freedom, we project it onto an already constituted "self," which makes what we take to be our freedom, in fact, the freedom of the Other.¹³ The source of all negation lies not in the world but in the very pure consciousness of the human being. There, in the original act of freedom, the human being can constitute itself as nothingness in relation to what it is, thereby becoming capable of transcending itself.

3. Freedom as the Ontological Structure of Consciousness

In Sartre's conception, freedom does not represent a psychological state or a mere moral choice but is an integral part of the very existential condition of the human being. According to him, we are "condemned to freedom"¹⁴ because we have no fixed, pre-given essence; each individual is compelled to construct their own life through the choices they make. The human being, as a conscious being, never fully coincides with what it is at any given moment. Between itself and any attempt to define its identity there opens a nothingness, a void that makes possible continuous change and transformation. This inner rupture grants the human being the freedom to become, at any moment, other than what it presently is. Thus, its freedom rests on a permanent openness toward the future and toward infinite possibilities. Yet this absolute freedom also brings with it profound anguish, since it constantly exposes the individual to uncertainty, responsibility, and the absence of any absolute foundation.

For Sartre, freedom is neither optional nor negotiable. Even when someone appears constrained by rules, social norms, or authorities, they make the choice to submit to these constraints. Passivity, resignation, or conformity are, in essence, still conscious choices. Therefore, Sartre denies the existence of metaphysical excuses: the human being is radically responsible for what it becomes through its own actions. This total free-

13 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 89.

14 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 655.

dom is more than a privilege it is a burden, for, lacking a predetermined essence, the human being remains alone in the face of its own becoming. Each decision and each gesture defines it and commits it not only before its own consciousness but also before all of humanity.

Jean-Paul Sartre's perspective on freedom has been deeply nuanced and contested by other thinkers. Martin Heidegger does not reduce freedom to mere choice but links it to the way the human being (Dasein) relates to its own being-in-the-world. For him, the human being, insofar as it is human, is always in the process of understanding itself in one way or another.¹⁵ Freedom is not an act of absolute creation but an opening toward being, a form of ontological attunement through which the human being understands its presence. From another perspective, Immanuel Kant grounds freedom in the autonomy of the will and in moral responsibility.¹⁶ Freedom thus becomes a condition of practical reason and the foundation of morality, not a rupture from being. While Sartre emphasizes the individual's absolute responsibility, Kant provides a more stable normative framework in which freedom is exercised within the limits of a rational and moral universe.

In direct opposition to Sartre, Sigmund Freud challenges the idea of the freedom of consciousness, placing decisive causality in the unconscious. Consciousness becomes only the tip of a psychic iceberg, while the human being's radical freedom is nothing but an illusion that conceals unconscious determinations. "The most painful blow to human pride is about to be inflicted by present-day psychological research, which seeks to show the Ego that it is not even master in its own house."¹⁷ Yet, "even if effort does not guarantee success, it nonetheless builds the human being and shows them to be fully alive."¹⁸ This is because, "the human being has always been and remains preoccupied with itself, with its own good, with

15 Martin Heidegger, *Ființă și timp*, Gabriel Liiceanu (trad.), Humanitas, București, 1994, p. 67.

16 Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii practice*, Editura Paideia, București, 2003, pp. 60-67.

17 Sigmund Freud, *Vorlesung zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse*, Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, Wien, 1926, p. 295. „Die dritte und empfindlichste Kränkung aber. soll die menschliche Größensucht durch die heutige psychologische Forschung erfahren, welche dem Ich nachweisen will, daß es nicht einmal Herr ist im eigenen Hause.”

18 Monica Broșteanu & Francesca Băltăceanu, *Cele mai frumoase pagini de înțelepciune biblică*, Humanitas, București, 2015, p. 149.

personal comfort, with the desire to live in safety. But whether or not these have been fulfilled, the human being experiences profound emotions, questions, struggles, and searches concerning its origin and destiny.”¹⁹

By contrast, Simone de Beauvoir, close to Sartre, develops his vision by applying it to the feminine condition. For her, freedom is not a simple ontological given but a struggle against social, cultural, and historical limits. The statement “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”²⁰ expresses the idea that freedom is an act of self-projection constantly confronting oppression and constraints.

Thus, if Sartre radicalizes freedom to the point of total responsibility and the absence of any foundation, Heidegger anchors it in being, Kant in reason, Freud in the unconscious, and Beauvoir in the historical and political dimension of existence. Within this contrast, Sartre’s contribution remains distinct through his uncompromising insistence: the human being has no predetermined essence but is what it makes of itself, without excuses and without a metaphysical alibi.

4. Authenticity and Bad Faith

Another central concept in Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialist philosophy is the phenomenon of bad faith (*mauvaise foi*). Sartre describes it as a form of self-deception, through which the human being refuses to accept the truth about itself and about the situations of life. The human being carries within itself nothingness, that is, the permanent possibility of transcending itself and of never being identical with itself. This structure makes it radically free: it has no given essence but continually creates its own essence through its choices. Yet absolute freedom cannot be avoided and becomes a burden, experienced in the form of anguish, the awareness that we are responsible for our own future. To flee from this anguish, the human being attempts to perceive itself as a fixed “thing”, determined by roles, by the past, or by a stable “self”. This flight is precisely bad faith: the self-deception through which consciousness denies its freedom and hides behind predetermined justifications or identities. In reality, however, it is precisely the attempt to escape freedom that confirms that the human being is “condemned” to it.

19 Emanuel Dobrin, „Originea omului și drepturile lui”, în *Jurnalul libertății de conștiință*, Vol 9, Nr 3, Editions IARSIC, Les Arcs, France, 2021, pp. 48-61, aici p. 49.

20 Simone de Beauvoir, *Al doilea sex*, Ed. Humanitas, București, 2022, vol. II, p. 13.

Bad faith involves the unity of consciousness and arises when a person lies to their own consciousness. At first sight, it appears in the form of a lie, yet what makes the difference is the human being's attempt to deceive itself, avoiding unpleasant truths. Consciousness knows the truth but hides it from itself. Sartre offers the example of the waiter who plays his role with excessive zeal, attempting to identify completely with his profession. In reality, consciousness cannot become an object: being-for-itself cannot be transformed into being-in-itself. Nevertheless, the human being often prefers this illusion in order to escape the burden of responsibility.

Bad faith is not a fixed state but an active process. It involves an intention - sometimes unconscious - to conceal the truth. Consciousness becomes double: on the one hand, it knows reality, and on the other, it hides it from itself. This leads to the question Sartre formulates: "What must the human being be in its being, if it must be able to be in bad faith?"²¹ The human being must be a free being, capable of relating reflexively to itself and of transcending itself; in other words, a being of possibility, not a fixed essence.

By contrast, authenticity, although Sartre does not define it as rigorously as Heidegger, takes shape as a lucid acceptance of freedom. It presupposes the recognition that the human being has no given essence, that it is an open project and the sole being responsible for what it becomes. Authenticity thus becomes the moment when consciousness confronts itself without a mask. The human being can be "its own authenticity" only if, under the call of conscience (*Ruf des Gewissens*), it projects itself toward death as its ownmost possibility. And authentic resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) means the assumption of its own finitude (= the condition of being finite, limited, or bounded). When I disclose myself to myself in authenticity, I also lift others with me toward the authentic; it is an experience that also engages my relation with the Other.²²

Sartre notes that bad faith insinuates itself into the very origin of the projects of consciousness. Nevertheless, there remains the possibility of a recovery of being corrupted by itself, namely authenticity, which does not completely eliminate bad faith but generates a confrontation between freedom and the human condition. Authenticity entails radical responsibility. It is a way of living in which the human being does not

21 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 103.

22 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 348.

hide behind roles, conventions, or the they²³ (German: das Man), but instead assumes its freedom, its individuality, and the fact that there are no external excuses for its existence. These ideas can be set in parallel with Nietzsche's observation that people prefer the certainty of bondage to the responsibility of freedom.²⁴ In Nietzsche's view, freedom is a burden, and the human being, in order to avoid it, constructs mechanisms of self-deception and takes refuge in forms of submission. In a similar way, Kierkegaard captures the phenomenon of evading authenticity when he asserts that the human being despairs not because of what it is, but because of what it does not want to be.²⁵ Despair is the expression of the refusal to assume one's own becoming, while authenticity entails precisely this radical confrontation with freedom. Thus, authenticity is the act by which the human being recognizes its condition as a free being and assumes the total responsibility of its existence, whereas bad faith is the mechanism by which the human being flees from its own freedom, taking refuge in illusions and predetermined roles. "By virtue of being a free being, human beings are inclined towards relationships, culture, knowledge, aesthetics and much more, which makes them unique among all creatures"²⁶ and this transforms the "burden of freedom" into the fascination of living freely.

5. The Ontological Problem of the Existence of the Other and of the Relation to the Being of the Other

If up to this point the human being has been described, in Sartre's view, as being-for-itself, concrete experience shows that it cannot be reduced to this dimension. Its existence inevitably unfolds also as being-for-the-Other, since the relation to others essentially structures the way in which it relates to itself. Experiences such as shame or pride cannot be explained by the simple relation to one's own consciousness, but only through the

23 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 348.

24 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Random House, New York, 1995, p. 19.

25 Søren Kierkegaard, *Boala de moarte*, George Popescu (trad.) Editura Omniscope, Craiova, 1998, pp. 14, 49.

26 Emanuel Dobrin, „Human Dignity, First-Order Factor of Human Personality” in RAIS Conference Proceedings, August 8-9, 2024, pp. 109-117, aici 114, DOI:10.5281/zenodo.13712784

presence of the Other, who looks at the human being and, through that gaze, transforms it into an object for itself. In shame, for instance, the human being discovers that it is as it appears to the Other, and this experience is neither illusory nor external but reveals an autonomous mode of being of consciousness. Thus, the existence of the Other is not merely a psychological or social problem but a profoundly ontological one, which redefines the human condition and the relation of the human being to its own being.

The Other is not merely one phenomenon among others but a unity that organizes its own experience. It has a will and a passion that cannot be confused with the internal phenomena of being-for-itself. The Other is radically distinct from all other things. Moreover, it appears as a being that constitutes its own world, beyond what the human being can directly access or conceive. The experiences and emotions of the Other are not reducible to internal phenomena within me but are “radically distinct from all others.”²⁷

Along the way, Sartre shows that the existence of the Other cannot be reduced to a mere phenomenal appearance within the field of my consciousness. Objects and phenomena in the world appear to me passively, as data of perception, but the Other does not manifest in the same way. I encounter the Other through gestures, expressions, and actions that point to an irreducible interiority, to a living consciousness. For this reason, the relation to the Other cannot be explained by simple causality or by empirical connections, as I explain objective phenomena. The Other is not an object subject to my perception but a living subject, irreducible to my field of consciousness. It brings with it a radical alterity: another experience, another temporality, another world that confronts my own.

Thus, the being of the Other appears at the same time within my experience and beyond it: a reality that affects me but never allows itself to be reduced to mere concepts or causal explanations. In this sense, Sartre emphasizes that the Other is present as a subject and cannot be conceived as an object, and its presence forms part of the fundamental conditions of my experience. Sartre seeks to clarify the problem of the existence of the Other by confronting realism (= The conception that reality exists independently of consciousness) and idealism (= The conception that reality depends on consciousness and is constituted by it). He

27 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 321.

rejects both the reduction of the Other to a mere image or effect (as idealism would do) and its reduction to an object among objects (as realism would tend to do). The Other is neither a purely external phenomenon nor a construction of my mind, but appears in an original relation with me: as constitutive negativity, as a present absence in relation to me. Its presence is affirmed by the fact that it appears to me as another subject, separate from me yet nonetheless in direct relation with me.

This separation is not merely corporeal (another body distinct from my own) but expresses an ontological distance between consciousnesses, between the freedoms of both consciousnesses. Between myself and the Other there exists a “nothingness of separation,”²⁸ a fundamental rupture that makes it impossible to reduce one to the other. For this reason, my relation to the Other is not one of causality but of negativity and absolute exteriority.

Sartre also proposes another perspective on how to regard the Other: it cannot be deduced but reveals itself directly through an original relation of alterity. The Other thus appears as pure exteriority, which affects me intimately because it limits my freedom and makes me see myself from the outside. I thereby begin to become aware of my state and behavior in relation to others: “thus, the Other not only revealed to me what I was; it constituted me as a new type of being, which must bear new qualifications.”²⁹ My experience never unfolds in isolation, for the appearance of the Other in the world essentially changes my way of being.

The fundamental experience is not that of perceiving the Other as an object but of encountering the Other as a living presence who gazes at me. The gaze of the Other draws me out of my solitude and makes me discover myself in a new way: I see myself through its eyes, as an object for another consciousness. Thus, my being is no longer only my inner freedom but is always in relation to the freedom of the Other, who can judge me, limit me, or confirm me. In this way, the bond between my consciousness and the consciousness of the Other is original and constitutive. I cannot be for myself without at the same time being for the Other.³⁰ The appearance of the Other decenters my world, reorganizes

28 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 327.

29 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 316.

30 Sartre, *Ființa*, p. 710.

space and time, and shows me that my existence always has a dimension that escapes me but is fulfilled in relation to the Other. The self is not born from myself but from the gaze of the Other, which fixes me as a being in the world. Thus, I am for the Other what it perceives me to be, even if this image eludes me and limits me. In this sense, the self becomes a form of alienation, for it depends on the freedom and interpretation of the Other, not on my own will.

Conclusion

In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre proposes a radical and challenging vision of being and freedom. Through the distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself, he shows that the human being is not a fixed substance but a continuous process of becoming, animated by nothingness and structured by project. Freedom is the essence of this process: not one choice among others, but the very condition of consciousness. To be human means to be free, but a freedom that is neither easy nor comforting. It is a freedom that brings anguish, that demands assumption, and that excludes any metaphysical justification.

Therefore, the human being is a living tension between what it is and what it is not yet, a being thrown into the world, without excuses and with no foundation other than its own responsibility. From this perspective, freedom is not merely a right but an ontological duty: the duty to become what we are through our choices, without guarantees and without refuges. In this sense, the existentialist project does not offer recipes for life but calls the human being to lucidity and authenticity. Choice becomes the ground upon which identity is built, and every decision is an act of self-creation. The confrontation with anguish must not be avoided but assumed as the sign of true freedom. Thus, human existence is not defined by a predetermined essence but by an unceasing process of self-transcendence. In spite of its fragility, the human being is called to affirm its freedom as the only real foundation of its own being. This perspective remains relevant, challenging us to reflect on the responsibility each of us bears before our own existence and the world we build together.

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