

# FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY IN JEAN-PAUL SARTRE'S EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHY: A CHRISTIAN PERSONALIST CRITIQUE

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*"It is important for a person to find himself and be convinced  
that nothing can save him from himself."*

*This paper embarks on a substantive intellectual journey to dissect the philosophical underpinnings of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, with a particular focus on the symbiotic relationship between freedom and responsibility. The paper utilizes a multi-faceted analytical framework to scrutinize the ontological and ethical dimensions of Sartre's conceptualization of freedom, its inherent connection to human responsibility, and the resultant ethical quandaries. By expanding the scope of discourse, the paper introduces a meticulous critique from the vantage point of Christian Personalism. This counter-perspective serves not only as a critique but also as a platform for dialogue, elucidating points of convergence and divergence between existentialist and personalist philosophies. Beyond mere theoretical examination, the paper illuminates the contemporary relevance and application of these philosophical traditions, especially in grappling with pressing ethical, social, and political issues. Concluding with a richly textured comparative analysis, the paper aims to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing scholarly discourse on existentialism and personalism, thereby enriching our collective understanding of complex philosophical constructs like freedom, responsibility, and human dignity.*

*Keywords: Christian Personalism, Existentialism, freedom, Jean-Paul Sartre, radical choice, responsibility*

## INTRODUCTION

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), a French philosopher, playwright, novelist, and political activist, stands as a towering figure in the annals of existentialist philosophy.

His intellectual oeuvre transcended the realm of abstract thought to manifest in concrete political activism. Sartre's commitment to left-wing causes—most notably the Algerian independence movement and the protests against the Vietnam War—was not merely peripheral to his philosophy but was, in fact, an ethical corollary to his existentialist convictions. These socio-political engagements demanded not only intellectual acumen but profound courage, a quality that can be traced back to his existentialist emphasis on freedom as both a boon and a burden. In a radical act that encapsulated his existentialist ideals, Sartre declined the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1964, asserting his desire to remain unencumbered by institutional affiliations and to preserve the integrity of his intellectual freedom.

In an era marked by increasing skepticism about absolute truths and an unprecedented focus on individual liberties, the philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre takes on renewed relevance. His existentialism, with its emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility, has long been a subject of both admiration and critique. Yet existentialism does not exist in intellectual isolation; it dialogues, consciously or otherwise, with other ideologies and belief systems. This paper aims to delve into this rich tapestry of ideas by juxtaposing Sartrean existentialism with Christian Personalism. The latter, developed by luminaries like Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain, and Pope John Paul II, posits that freedom is not merely the ability to choose but also encompasses the capacity to love and to give oneself to others. Unlike Sartre's view of freedom, which is often interpreted as absolute and unbounded, Personalism asserts that freedom is intrinsically linked to responsibility and is oriented toward the common good.

Of particular interest in this exploration is Sartre's later work, "Notebooks for an Ethics," where he transitions from viewing interpersonal relationships as inherently conflictual to exploring the potential for ethical relations grounded in the concept of the gift. This pivotal shift in Sartre's thought, as analyzed by Ruud Welten (2015), reveals a nuanced perspective that considers the phenomenological implications of giving and receiving. Here, Sartre extends his existentialist framework into the realm of ethical decision-making, opening a dialogical space with Christian Personalism. This integration of Sartre's later views offers a unique opportunity for a comparative analysis, where the focus shifts from the isolation and freedom of the individual to the relational and communal aspects of human existence, thereby enriching our collective understanding of complex philosophical constructs like freedom, responsibility, and human dignity.

## **Methodology, Objectives, and Structure**

Our study adopts a comparative methodology to juxtapose Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism with Christian Personalism. This approach not only highlights the contrasts and parallels between these two philosophical perspectives but also provides a richer understanding of their respective stances on human freedom, responsibility, and ethical considerations.

In our comparative analysis, we focus on two key criteria: explanatory power and coherence. Explanatory power refers to how well each philosophy explains and addresses fundamental existential and ethical questions. Coherence assesses the

internal consistency and logical soundness of each philosophical framework. These criteria are chosen for their ability to offer a balanced and objective evaluation of both Sartre's existentialism and Christian Personalism.

To ensure a fair comparison, we will first outline the core tenets of Sartre's existentialism, focusing on his notions of freedom, authenticity, and the existential dilemma. Following this, we will present the foundational principles of Christian Personalism, emphasizing its focus on the dignity of the person, relational ethics, and the communal aspect of human existence. This section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of each philosophy before delving into the comparative analysis. Our analysis will systematically compare how Sartre and Personalist thinkers address key philosophical issues. For instance, we will examine their differing views on what constitutes true freedom and how responsibility is conceptualized within each framework. This side-by-side analysis will illuminate the unique contributions and limitations of each perspective. Through critical evaluation, we will assess the explanatory power and coherence of Sartre's existentialism and Christian Personalism. This critique will not only highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each philosophy but also explore how insights from one could potentially inform or challenge the other. The aim is to synthesize these findings to provide a nuanced understanding of both philosophies. Overall, our study aims to contribute to the broader philosophical discourse by offering a unique perspective on how existentialism and Personalism can inform our understanding of human nature and ethical behavior. The insights gained from this analysis may also suggest new avenues for research and practical application.

## **SARTREAN EXISTENTIALISM AND CHRISTIAN PERSONALISM**

### **Sartre and Existentialism: A Scholarly Landscape**

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy, emphasizing individual freedom and responsibility, has been extensively analyzed and interpreted in scholarly discourse. Webber (2009) posits that each person's character is defined by the projects they choose to pursue, a core idea that is further underpinned in his (2018) later work, arguing that human freedom forms the foundation of all other values. In his (2011; 2019) other works on Sartre, Webber examines the relationship between phenomenology and existentialism as well as Sartre's critique of Husserl.

As we move further across this landscape, theological dimensions emerge, notably in the works of Kirkpatrick (2017a, 2017b), Charmé (2000), and Briedis (2009). Their perspectives, ripe for a Christian Personalist critique, illuminate existentialism's theological facets and invite a deeper phenomenological inquiry. The journey takes a turn with Popa (2019) and Arp (2001), highlighting the divergence between Sartre and Beauvoir and emphasizing existentialism's multi-faceted nature. Maruyama (1996) further accentuates the existentialist ethos of personal responsibility.

O'Byrn (2022) introduces a unique perspective by examining Angela Davis's critique of Sartre, offering a lens that blends existential philosophy with socio-political contexts. The educational implications of Sartre's thoughts are not left untouched;

Enaya and Villaroya (2021) bridge existentialism to educational paradigms, demonstrating the practicality of Sartrean concepts.

The narrative deepens with Min (2022) and Kaya (2019), who respectively analyze and compare Sartre's philosophy, unearthing recurrent existential themes such as angst and the absurdity of existence. Gardner (2006, 2010) elevates Sartre to a transcendental perspective, arguing for a reevaluation of his philosophical stance.

The reception and interpretation of Sartre's works relevant to freedom and responsibility are diverse and too extensive to summarize here. We have selected only a few relevant and fairly recent studies that can offer us a glimpse into how others receive Sartre's ideas. The exploration of these works provides a helpful foundation for a Christian Personalist critique of Sartre's existentialist philosophy. The next section in our Literature Review will focus on personalism and a corresponding selection of existing interactions, comparisons, or contrasts between Personalism and Sartre's ideas on freedom and responsibility.

### **Christian Personalism: An Emergent Discourse**

Christian Personalism, with its rich intellectual heritage, offers a distinctive perspective on human existence, one that juxtaposes sharply with Sartre's existentialist views. The movement, initially spearheaded by Emmanuel Mounier (1952), emphasized the person as a relational being, countering the existential focus on isolated individualism. Mounier's critique of both individualism and collectivism laid the groundwork for a philosophy that values the individual within the community context.

Following Mounier, Jacques Maritain (1946, 1947, 1951, 2002) brought a Thomistic lens to Personalism, advocating for a balance between individual rights and the common good. His work highlighted the ethical dimensions of personhood, emphasizing the importance of societal welfare alongside individual freedom.

Karol Wojtyła (1979), known as Pope John Paul II, further enriched the personalist thought by integrating a theological perspective. His contributions underscored the inherent dignity of the human person, a theme that resonates deeply with Christian theology.

Max Scheler (1954, 2017) and Martin Buber (1970) brought additional layers to Personalism, focusing on sympathy, empathy, and interpersonal relationships. Their work underscored the relational aspect of personhood, advocating for an 'I-Thou' relationship that values the other as a subject rather than an object.

Maurice Nédoncelle (1963) and John Macmurray (1961) contributed to the development of Personalism by exploring its implications for Christian theology and the nature of personhood, respectively. Their work, along with that of Jove Jim S. Aguas (2009a, 2009b), Thomas D. Williams (2005), and Jan Olof Bengtsson (2022), has enriched the philosophical landscape, offering a counterpoint to Sartre's existentialist notions of freedom and responsibility.

Jove Jim S. Aguas (2009a) compares the notions of the human person and human dignity in the works of Aquinas and Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II). He argues that both philosophers emphasize the inherent dignity and worth of the human person, although they approach this topic from different philosophical traditions. Aguas'

comparative study underscores the diversity within personalist philosophy and its capacity to engage in fruitful dialogue with other philosophical traditions. His (2009b) other important work focuses on understanding the nature of the person and subjectivity, according to Karol Wojtyła. Aguas' rigorous scholarship provides a useful framework for understanding the philosophical richness and ethical imperatives embedded in Wojtyła's Christian Personalism, thereby enriching our comparative study with existentialism.

Thomas D. Williams and Jan Olof Bengtsson (2022) provide a comprehensive overview of personalism, a philosophical tradition that emphasizes the centrality of the person. Personalism, like existentialism, affirms the dignity and worth of the individual. However, it differs from existentialism in its emphasis on relationality and community. Williams and Bengtsson's overview provides a valuable entry point into the rich and diverse landscape of personalist philosophy, highlighting its relevance for contemporary philosophical and ethical debates. Williams (2005) also explores Personalism in relation to a search for the foundations of human rights. The rich tapestry of personalist thought, marked by its emphasis on the relational, ethical, and communal dimensions of human existence, provides a contrasting perspective to Sartre's existentialism, setting the stage for our comparative analysis.

### **Points of Debate and Controversy**

The rise of Sartrean existentialism in the mid-20th century was deeply intertwined with the turbulent political and social landscape of the time. The aftermath of World War I, the rise of totalitarian regimes, and the existential dread of the nuclear age fueled a sense of alienation and disillusionment with traditional values, creating a fertile ground for existentialist thought. Sartre's emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility resonated with those seeking to navigate the uncertainties of a rapidly changing world.

Christian Personalism, on the other hand, emerged from the philosophical and theological milieu of the early 20th century, influenced by existentialist thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard and the neo-Thomism of thinkers like Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel. Personalists sought to reconcile existential concerns with the Christian faith, emphasizing the inherent dignity of the person and the relational nature of ethics grounded in love and compassion. Their philosophy offered a spiritual anchor in a world grappling with moral relativism and existential angst.

Sartrean existentialism and Christian Personalism engage in dialogues with other prominent schools of thought, offering unique perspectives on ethical and philosophical issues. For example, Sartre's emphasis on individual choice and responsibility aligns with Kant's emphasis on moral autonomy and the categorical imperative. However, Sartre's rejection of objective moral principles contrasts with Kant's belief in universal moral truths. Personalism's emphasis on relationships and community aligns with utilitarianism's focus on maximizing happiness and minimizing harm. However, Personalism's emphasis on individual dignity and the intrinsic value of the person distinguishes it from utilitarianism's tendency to prioritize collective well-being over individual rights.

The intersection of Sartrean existentialism and Christian Personalism has ignited a lively discourse marked by both profound insights and contentious debates. Sartre's existentialism, often criticized for its potential to degenerate into ethical nihilism (Arp 2001), champions radical freedom in a universe stripped of inherent essence. This stance raises questions about the foundation of morality and ethical responsibility, a debate that becomes particularly poignant when contrasted with Christian Personalism. Personalism, criticized for its perceived idealism and lack of practical applicability (Loemker 2021), offers a counter-narrative grounded in the inherent dignity of the person and the relational nature of ethics. This contrast sets the stage for a comparative analysis that not only highlights philosophical differences but also explores the convergence and divergence in responses to these critiques.

A closer examination of the criticisms leveled at both philosophies reveals a fundamental divergence between Sartre's individualistic approach to freedom and ethics and Personalism's emphasis on embedding the individual within a web of communal responsibilities. Sartre's existentialism places the burden of moral determination squarely on the individual, granting them the unencumbered freedom to choose their own values and path. This emphasis on individual autonomy, however, has been criticized for potentially leading to ethical relativism and a disregard for universally held moral principles (Arp 2001). In contrast, Christian Personalism anchors the individual within a network of relationships, asserting that the self's moral identity is inextricably intertwined with the moral fabric of the community. This relational perspective shifts the focus from individual rights to communal responsibilities, emphasizing the interconnectedness of individual actions and their impact on the broader society.

These philosophical tensions between existential freedom and communal ethics extend far beyond the realm of abstract thought, resonating with contemporary ethical, social, and political debates. In an era grappling with the delicate balance between individual rights and community welfare, understanding the implications of existential nihilism and idealistic personalism becomes paramount (Loemker 2021). This discussion sheds light on current debates concerning personal freedom, responsibility, and the role of individuals in society, offering philosophical perspectives that challenge and enrich our contemporary discourse. By engaging with these criticisms, this paper aims to transcend a mere juxtaposition of existentialism and Personalism. Instead, it seeks to synthesize the debates into a comprehensive understanding that respects the merits and acknowledges the limitations of both philosophies. This dialogic critique not only contributes to a richer philosophical discourse but also offers a nuanced understanding that is relevant to both academic inquiry and practical ethical considerations.

## **SARTRE'S PHILOSOPHY OF FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY**

### **Existential Foundations and the Primacy of Freedom**

Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy of freedom is complex and nuanced. It serves as both a burden and a source of empowerment, a cause of existential nausea and a

catalyst for action. Through this complex interplay, individuals confront the absurdity of existence and forge their own meaning and purpose. What follows in this section is an attempt to provide a concise summary of Sartre's main emphases, not to delve deeply into the intricate nuances of his thought.

Sartre's existentialist philosophy emerges as a profound exploration of the concept of freedom, deeply rooted in the assertion that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 1956, 568; 630). This ontological claim signifies that human beings first exist, encounter themselves, and then, through a continuous process, define their essence over a lifetime (Sartre 2007). In other words, humans are thrust into existence without a predefined nature or essence. It is through their actions, choices, and engagements with the world that they construct their essence. This notion radically departs from traditional philosophical and theological accounts, which often argue that essence precedes existence, meaning that individuals have innate qualities or are born with a specific purpose.

In his (1956) magnum opus, "Being and Nothingness," Sartre explicates his ontology by identifying two discrete realms of reality that transcend ordinary consciousness. The book is a complex exploration of human existence that delves into the intricacies of ontology, freedom, responsibility, and the nature of 'being' itself. The first is the 'being of the object,' which exists 'in-itself,' independent and non-relational. The second is consciousness, which exists as 'for-itself' and is inherently relational, always being 'consciousness of something.' One of the seminal quotes encapsulating this is: "The being by which Nothingness comes to the world must be its own Nothingness" (Sartre 1956, 22). This 'for-itself' possesses a 'negative power,' enabling it to experience 'nothingness,' a disorienting force that imposes an intrinsic instability on self-identity. As a result, the unity of the self is not a given but an ongoing existential task. This underlines the unique ability of consciousness to negate, to introduce 'nothingness' into the world, differentiating it from the inert 'being-in-itself' (Sartre 1956, 13).

Interestingly, in his later work, 'Notebooks for an Ethics,' Sartre transitions from viewing interpersonal relationships as inherently conflictual to exploring the potential for ethical relations grounded in the concept of the gift. This gift, phenomenologically considered, transcends material exchange, emphasizing recognition and affirmation of the other's freedom. Sartre's nuanced discussion of alienation and oppression and the role of ethical actions in overcoming these conditions offers a compelling lens to re-examine existentialist ethics.

At the heart of Sartre's existentialism is an intricate ontological schema that seeks to encapsulate the human condition. This ontology is characterized by a 'groundlessness,' a profound lack of pre-determined essence, and 'radical freedom,' the unsettling yet empowering capacity for autonomous choice. These human traits stand in stark contrast to the 'unproblematic being' of the material world, which exists without such existential quandaries. Sartre's prolific literary output serves as a narrative theater where he dramatizes the existential tensions inherent in human life. Through his works, he vividly portrays the uneasy co-existence of deterministic facts and existential freedom within an indifferent universe.

Sartre's existential phenomenology, although initially influenced by classic phenomenology, notably diverges from Husserl's methodology, the conception of the self, and ethical concerns. These divergences become the cornerstones of Sartre's unique existential phenomenology (Catalano 1980). Catalano (1980) elucidates that Sartre's methodology is deeply rooted in the existential condition, making it a philosophy that is intrinsically concerned with human freedom and responsibility.

Sartre's concept of freedom is not one of unbridled liberty or the absence of constraints, but rather, it is a freedom characterized by responsibility and the inevitability of choice. Sartre's philosophy is one of radical freedom. As Sartre states, "Man is condemned to be free because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre 2007, 29). Sartre posits a freedom characterized by the inevitability of choice and an encompassing responsibility. This is a condition of "radical freedom," which, although burdensome, is inescapable and forms the basis of all human actions and decisions (Sartre 2007). The existential implications of such freedom are profound. Sartrean freedom leads to a state of existential angst, or what Sartre (1964) famously terms as "nausea." As Sartre explains, "Nausea is not an illness; it is a kind of metaphysical alarm-clock" (Sartre 1964, 172). It is a reminder of the absurdity of existence and the responsibility of freedom.

The implications of Sartre's concept of freedom are vast. It means that every action we take is a representation of how we think all humans should act, leading to a sense of responsibility that can feel overwhelming. Barnard (2015) highlights that this angst is not merely an intellectual curiosity but a lived experience that has serious implications for ethical and political responsibility. Despite the existential nausea, Sartre argues that it acts as a catalyst for action. As Sartre states, "Nausea is not a veil that separates us from action. On the contrary, it is a phenomenon that connects us with action and drives us towards it" (Sartre 1964, 35). This suggests that freedom, despite its burdens, is also the source of human agency and the ability to shape one's own destiny. However, this freedom is not without its paradoxes. The very act of exercising freedom, of making choices and taking action, can also lead to a sense of unease and discomfort. This is because every action and decision carries with it a sense of responsibility and the potential for regret or guilt. As Sartre (1985, 2) explains, "every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity." This suggests that the exercise of freedom is a constant negotiation between action and reflection, between the desire to act and the awareness of the consequences of those actions.

Sartre's concept of freedom is not without its critics. Some argue that his notion of radical freedom is too extreme and overlooks the social, economic, and personal constraints that can limit our choices (Flynn 2006). Others contend that Sartre's emphasis on individual freedom neglects the importance of interpersonal relationships and community (Detmer 1988). Despite these criticisms, Sartre's philosophy of freedom remains a significant contribution to existentialist thought and continues to influence contemporary discussions on freedom and responsibility. It is a freedom that is both a burden and a source of empowerment, a cause of existential nausea and a catalyst for action. It is through this freedom that individuals confront the absurdity of

existence and seek to create their own meaning and purpose. As Sartre states, "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (Sartre 2007, 5).

### **Bad Faith as Self-Deception and Ethical Folly**

Sartre's philosophy hinges on the concept of "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*), a form of self-deception that leads one away from authentic existence. Interestingly, Sartre likens bad faith to being a "liar to oneself" (Reynolds and Renaudie 2022). The concept refers to the human tendency to deceive oneself about the nature of one's own existence, freedom, and responsibility (Sartre 1956). Sartre explains that bad faith is the rejection of freedom and the nothingness that undergirds reality. This self-deception can manifest in various forms, such as denying one's freedom, blaming circumstances or others for one's actions, or assuming fixed identities or roles (Sartre 1956). Therefore, to act ethically is to act authentically, to exercise one's freedom. To act in 'bad faith,' to serve as a being for others, is to act unethically (Sartre 1956, 35). This notion extends beyond mere psychological states into the realm of ethics. In bad faith, individuals lie to themselves about their own freedom, thereby eluding the ethical responsibility that accompanies this freedom (Sartre 1956).

While Sartre posits radical freedom as a cornerstone of human existence, this freedom is twinned with an equally radical responsibility. He posits that since individuals are free to shape their own lives, values, and identities, they are wholly responsible for their actions and choices. This responsibility is inescapable, as even the decision to ignore or deny one's freedom is a free choice (Sartre 2007). Sartre argues that individuals often experience this responsibility as a burden, leading to feelings of anguish, forlornness, and despair (Sartre 2007). He famously stated, "Man is condemned to be free because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre 2007, 29). For Sartre, freedom is not a static attribute but a dynamic reality, one that demands active engagement. This is a responsibility from which there is no escape; even abdicating this freedom is a form of choice for which one is responsible. Notably, Sartre's philosophy challenges deterministic viewpoints that negate human freedom, emphasizing instead that individuals actualize their freedom by making radical choices (Sartre 2007, 29). This ethical responsibility extends to the other, as Sartre posits that in choosing for oneself, one also chooses for all of humanity (Sartre 2007, 24). He further elaborates, "I am obliged to will the freedom of others at the same time as mine. I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my aim" (Sartre 2007, 21). In other words, the pursuit of authenticity is never ethical if it impairs the ability of others likewise to practice an authentic existence (Sartre 2007, 49).

According to Sartre, ethics is not a branch of philosophy separate from ontology; rather, it is deeply rooted in existentialist precepts. This ethical responsibility extends not just towards oneself but also towards the 'Other.' In choosing for oneself, one is also choosing a certain kind of world and thus has a responsibility toward humanity at large (Reynolds and Renaudie 2022). Sartre (1944, 47) famously said, "Hell is other people," but it's crucial to understand this in its full context. For Sartre, the 'Other' is

not just a source of potential conflict but also the avenue through which ethical responsibilities are realized.

### **The Inescapable Nexus of Choice and Decision-Making in Human Existence**

As we have seen, Sartre's philosophy is profoundly rooted in the notion of radical freedom, an existential prerogative that compels individuals to confront their ability to make choices and decisions autonomously, independent of any pre-existing essence or moral blueprint (Sartre 1956). This is not merely an abstract academic speculation but a vivid existential reality. Every action, every decision, is an existential assertion, a concrete manifestation of an individual's freedom, and, by extension, a delineation of their unique human essence.

The concept of anxiety—or "anguish," as Sartre prefers to term it—is an integral part of this philosophical landscape. This existential anxiety emanates from the profound realization of one's unbounded freedom and the consequent burden of responsibility (Sartre 1956, 15). It symbolizes the human struggle with the staggering multiplicity of choices that one's freedom unfolds. However, Sartre (2007, 54) contends that this anxiety should not be shunned as a psychological malaise but acknowledged and even embraced as an authentic emotional response to the human condition.

The symbiosis between freedom and responsibility in Sartre's existentialism is not merely an ontological postulate but carries far-reaching ethical connotations. The very act of choosing implicitly involves an ethical commitment, not just to oneself but to humanity at large. Sartre (2007, 24) clarifies this ethical dimension in "Existentialism is a Humanism" (originally published in 1946), asserting, "In choosing for myself, I choose for all humanity." This perspective elevates the ethical stakes of each choice and action we undertake, rendering them both empowering and daunting. It imposes a formidable moral obligation on individuals but also unfurls the horizon for meaningful ethical engagement.

All of this seems to amount to the existential challenge of authentic living. The intricate relationship between freedom and responsibility in Sartre's philosophy is a dynamic and multi-faceted one. It compels an acknowledgment of one's radical freedom, a confrontation with the existential anxiety that accompanies this freedom, and a profound commitment to ethical responsibility. We may see it as an existential invitation to seize control over one's destiny while navigating the ethical complexities of human interaction and societal commitments.

### **The Gift in Ethical Relations: A Phenomenological Reorientation**

We should also acknowledge that Sartre's journey is marked by a profound evolution, a transition that sees him moving from the stark assertions of inherent conflict in human relationships, as portrayed in "Being and Nothingness (1943)," to a more nuanced exploration of the possibilities for ethical connections in "Notebooks for an Ethics (1983)." Welten (2015, 3-15) deftly captures this shift, highlighting how Sartre, once firmly rooted in the notion of the 'other' as a source of conflict and

alienation, begins to contemplate the ethical dimensions of human interactions. Sartre notes the existential condition of alienation, inherent in the structure of consciousness, and contrasts it with oppression, a political condition that can be overcome (Sartre, Notebooks, 367; 370). This change in perspective signals a significant departure from his earlier existentialist stance, where freedom was often viewed in isolation, and the presence of the other was seen as a limiting factor on personal autonomy.

Central to this philosophical reorientation is Sartre's concept of the gift, which emerges as a pivotal theme in "Notebooks for an Ethics." Sartre transcends the materialistic confines traditionally associated with the act of giving, reimagining the gift through a phenomenological lens. Here, the gift is no longer a mere transactional object but becomes an expression of freedom and a means of recognizing the other as a free subject. This perspective underscores a significant shift from Sartre's earlier works, framing the gift not as a tool for control or entrapment but as a potential conduit for genuine, free recognition of the other. We concur here with Welten's (2015) observation of how this reimagined concept of the gift challenges and transforms the existential narrative, interweaving themes of freedom, recognition, and ethical action. Sartre describes the gift as a way to overcome the oppression of the other that comes with being-for-itself, asking whether co-existing free being-for-itself is possible, thus presenting the gift as an ethical and phenomenological construct (Sartre, Notebooks, 368; 370).

In fact, Sartre's exploration leads to an innovative ontology of the gift, where the act of giving transcends its material embodiment to become an affirmation of mutual freedom. This ontology showcases the nuanced interplay between alienation as an existential condition and oppression as a political reality. Of course, Sartre still critiques the material aspect of the gift as a form of control, contrasting with its potential for genuine, free recognition of the other. This happens when the gift becomes a reciprocal phenomenon, where the material gift may lead to a social institution of counter-giving, thereby transforming the gift into an obligation and a form of oppression (Sartre, Notebooks, 368; 371). But Sartre's exploration leads to an ontology where the gift transcends material exchange to become a recognition and affirmation of freedom. He envisions the gift not just as an object, but as a gesture of phenomenological significance, recognizing the other as a free being, distinct from the essence of the world. This redefined concept of the gift changes the role of the other from a controller of freedom to a participant in mutual liberation (Sartre, Notebooks, 369; 372). Furthermore, Sartre posits that ethical actions, epitomized by the act of giving, have the potential to mitigate the effects of oppression, thereby fostering a space where freedom is not just an individual pursuit but a shared experience. In this light, the gift emerges not only as an act of individual liberation but also as a vehicle for affirming the freedom and dignity of others, thus reframing the existential dialogue to encompass a more relational and ethically grounded approach to human existence.

## **Overview of Criticisms of Sartre's Understanding of Freedom and Responsibility**

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, with its hallmark concepts of freedom and responsibility, has stimulated a broad spectrum of scholarly debate. Particularly, his

concepts of freedom and responsibility have been subject to extensive scholarly critique, ranging from epistemological challenges to ethical implications. Critics like Murphy (2012) argue that Sartre's radical freedom, while philosophically compelling, oversimplifies the multi-faceted nature of human existence by underplaying the impact of societal, biological, and environmental determinants. This criticism intersects with Gardner's (2006) theological perspective, positing that Sartre's ontology is incomplete without considering metaphysical elements traditionally associated with theological principles. In other words, Sartre's ontology, lacking an onto-theology, fails to account for a metaphysical foundation historically provided by the concept of God (Porubec, 2021).

Central to the debate is Sartre's concept of "absolute responsibility," which has been critically examined by thinkers like Catalano (2010). The argument here is that Sartre places an unrealistic burden on individuals by attributing total responsibility for their actions, overlooking the nuanced interplay of personal choice and external influences. Liu (2019) further critiques Sartre's foundation in "solipsist consciousness," highlighting inherent contradictions and a limited grounding. Detmer (1988) echoes this sentiment, suggesting Sartre's philosophy, while emphasizing individual freedom, may inadvertently sideline the crucial role of socio-cultural contexts in shaping human actions. In contrast, Personalism, emphasizing relational ethics, offers a more integrated approach, acknowledging that individual choices are influenced by and contribute to the broader social fabric.

The ethical implications of Sartre's philosophy have also come under scrutiny. Flynn (2006) and Leung (2020) critique Sartre for what they perceive as ethical relativism. They argue that his focus on individual freedom and subjective choice leads to a lack of a substantive moral framework, potentially enabling the justification of immoral actions. Leung (2020) specifically addresses this concern by interpreting Sartre's concept of the 'not' ("predicate of the 'not'") as an atheistic transcendental, opening the door to moral subjectivism, which raises significant ethical questions in the application of his philosophy. This can be contrasted with the more grounded ethical perspectives of Christian Personalism, which emphasizes a moral framework rooted in communal relationships and inherent human dignity.

Despite these critiques, Sartre's existentialism finds robust defenses in academic circles. Catalano (1996), for instance, argues that Sartre's notion of radical freedom, far from negating the impact of societal, biological, and environmental factors, actually highlights the importance of individual agency within these contexts. According to Catalano, Sartre's philosophy does not dismiss external influences but rather underlines the individual's capacity to make choices in spite of these influences. This interpretation suggests a more nuanced understanding of freedom, one that acknowledges constraints but still upholds the primacy of personal agency.

Detmer (2008), revisiting his earlier criticisms, offers a reevaluation of Sartre's concept of 'absolute responsibility.' He suggests that this notion should not be interpreted as an unrealistic burden but rather as an empowering aspect of human existence. In Detmer's view, Sartre's emphasis on responsibility serves to remind individuals of their inherent ability to shape their lives and make meaningful choices, even within the bounds of their circumstances.

Furthermore, Crowell (2010) addresses the ethical concerns associated with Sartre's philosophy, arguing that existentialism does not lead to moral anarchy but to a form of ethical individualism. Crowell contends that Sartre's existentialism fosters a personalized ethical framework, where moral values are not dictated by external norms but are constructed and evaluated by the individual. This perspective suggests that Sartre's existentialism, rather than promoting ethical relativism, actually encourages a deep, personal engagement with ethical questions, compelling individuals to actively define and adhere to their moral principles.

In synthesizing these defenses, it becomes clear that Sartre's existentialism, while open to critique, also offers a compelling framework for understanding human freedom and responsibility. Its defenders highlight the philosophy's capacity to empower individuals, encouraging them to navigate and shape their existence within the complex web of societal structures. This ongoing dialogue between critics and proponents of Sartre's existentialism adds depth to our understanding of his philosophical contributions, illustrating the enduring relevance and influence of his thought in contemporary philosophical discourse.

It also becomes evident that Sartre's existentialism and Christian Personalism offer distinct yet valuable insights into the nature of freedom, responsibility, and ethics. While Sartre emphasizes the individual's autonomy and the existential burden of choice, Personalism underscores the interconnectedness of individuals within a moral community. The ongoing dialogue between these perspectives enriches the philosophical discourse, offering a richer understanding of human existence and moral responsibility. This comparative analysis invites further exploration into how these philosophies can inform contemporary ethical, social, and political discussions, especially in an era increasingly defined by complex moral dilemmas and the search for meaning.

## **CHRISTIAN PERSONALISM: AN INTRICATE PARADIGM FOR UNDERSTANDING HUMAN EXISTENCE**

Christian Personalism is a 20th-century philosophical school that has garnered considerable attention across philosophical, theological, and humanistic studies. This section of our paper aims to furnish a comprehensive overview of the key figures shaping this intellectual tradition, namely Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain, Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II), and Max Scheler. It will further elucidate the personalist articulations of freedom and responsibility, contrasting them with Sartrean existentialism.

### **The Intellectual Landscape: Introduction to Key Personalist Thinkers**

Christian Personalism's robust intellectual heritage is characterized by the contributions of several groundbreaking thinkers. Emmanuel Mounier, a pivotal figure in French philosophy, insisted on the centrality of the 'person' as the linchpin around which philosophical discourse should revolve. His philosophy serves as a cogent critique against both individualism and collectivism, opting for a relational ontology

(Williams, 2005; Williams and Bengtsson, 2022). Mounier's (1952) primary work, "Personalism," published in 1949, served as a manifesto for this philosophical movement. Mounier's personalism emerged in a context of intellectual, social, and political upheaval and aimed to offer a holistic vision of the human person that would address both individual and communal needs.

At the core of Mounier's philosophy is the notion that the human person is primarily a spiritual reality. While he acknowledges the material and biological aspects of human existence, he insists that these are secondary to the spiritual dimension. For Mounier, it is in the realm of the spirit that the person finds the essence of their being, characterized by freedom, self-awareness, and the capacity for self-transcendence. One of the major contributions of Mounier is his critique of individualism. He argues that individualism isolates human beings, reducing them to a mere unit in a competitive society. Unlike individualism, which focuses on the isolated self, personalism emphasizes the relational nature of human existence. In this sense, Mounier's philosophy is inherently communitarian, positing that the person can only fully exist in a community of persons.

Mounier extends his discussion of the human person into the realm of social and political philosophy by introducing the notion of "communion." For him, communion is not merely social interaction but a deeper form of fellowship that is rooted in shared values and a commitment to the common good. Such communion transcends mere social contract theories by adding a moral and spiritual dimension to social relations. Mounier was deeply concerned with the ethical implications of personalism. For him, recognizing the spiritual nature of the human person entails a set of ethical responsibilities, both to oneself and to others. This leads to an active engagement with the world, aimed at transforming it in the light of personalist principles. Mounier's personalism is thus not just a theoretical construct but a call to social action, advocating for social justice, human dignity, and solidarity.

Mounier's philosophy also serves as a critique of materialism and totalitarian ideologies. He argues that both these perspectives dehumanize the individual by subsuming them into economic or political systems that neglect the spiritual and ethical dimensions of personhood. His work stands as a philosophical defense of human dignity against the encroachments of dehumanizing systems. While Mounier's personalism is primarily philosophical, it is deeply influenced by his Catholic faith. He views the person as a reflection of the divine image, which adds a transcendent dimension to his philosophy. This theological backdrop enhances the ethical imperatives of personalism, grounding them in a broader cosmic and metaphysical framework.

Jacques Maritain, another stalwart in the realm of French Catholic philosophy, carved a distinct niche in Thomistic Personalism. His (1946) work is deeply rooted in the anthropological constructs of Thomas Aquinas, placing persons as unique entities within the ontological spectrum (Fuller and Hittinger 2001). One of his most influential texts on the subject is "The Person and the Common Good," published in 1946. The book serves as an intellectual odyssey into the nature of personhood and its implications for society, all rooted in Thomistic metaphysics and ethics. Maritain (1946, 431) initiates the discussion by investigating the ontological structure of the

person. For him, a person is not just an isolated entity but a complex unity of body and soul, capable of self-awareness and self-determination. This understanding has significant implications: it challenges materialistic perspectives that reduce human existence to mere biological processes and highlights the transcendent quality that makes a person unique. One of the intriguing distinctions Maritain (1946, 419) makes is between "individuality" and "personality." While individuality pertains to the material, biological aspects of human existence, personality refers to the spiritual, rational dimensions. For Maritain (1946, 431-434), the person transcends mere individuality through acts of intellect and will, which are inherently spiritual and free. Thus, human dignity is rooted not in individuality but in personality, which is capable of ethical and spiritual growth.

Maritain eloquently articulates that the person is not an isolated monad but inherently social. Humans find their ultimate fulfillment not in isolation but in communion with others. Importantly, Maritain does not view society as a mere aggregation of individuals but as a community of persons bound by ethical and social responsibilities. In this context, he (1946, 421) introduces the concept of the "common good," which goes beyond individual interests to encompass the well-being of the community. The relationship between the person and the common good is central to Maritain's philosophy. He argues that the common good is not just the sum of individual goods but something qualitatively different, rooted in justice and social harmony. The person, while pursuing personal fulfillment, has an ethical obligation to contribute to the common good. This creates a dynamic interplay between personal freedom and social responsibility.

Maritain's personalism also extends into the realm of political philosophy. He (1951, 6) posits that a just society should be founded on the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. Subsidiarity means that larger social units should not usurp the functions that smaller units can perform adequately. Solidarity, on the other hand, entails a shared commitment to the common good. In this way, Maritain's philosophy serves as a critique of both extreme individualism and collectivism. Much like Wojtyła, Maritain's philosophy is imbued with theological undertones. He draws on the Thomistic understanding of the person as created in the image of God, which adds a transcendent dimension to his philosophy. This theological perspective elevates the ethical and spiritual aspects of personhood and ties them to a divine purpose.

Max Scheler, a German philosopher, significantly influenced phenomenological personalism. His philosophy attends to the axiological dimensions of human existence, focusing on the importance of values and unique individual experiences (Scheler 1970). His (1970; 2017) seminal work "The Nature of Sympathy" (first published in 1954) and the posthumously published "On the Eternal in Man" are rich texts that explore the depths of human emotion, ethics, and spirituality. Scheler's personalism is both a response to and an extension of the phenomenological methods initiated by Edmund Husserl, but with a distinctive focus on ethics and the nature of the person.

Central to Scheler's personalism is the notion that the human person is primarily a moral agent. Unlike other phenomenologists who focused largely on consciousness and perception, Scheler delved into the ethical dimensions of human experience. For

him, it is our moral acts that distinguish us as persons. Morality is not just a societal construct but an essential aspect of personhood, intimately tied to our capacities for love, empathy, and value perception (Scheler 1970, 18). Scheler's work is foundational in axiology, the study of values. He posits that values are not subjective but objective realities that can be perceived and understood. Unlike utilitarian or relativistic views that see value as a byproduct of individual or collective preferences, Scheler argues that values have an ontological status. The human person is endowed with the ability to perceive these values and act in accordance with them.

In "The Nature of Sympathy," Scheler critically examines the role of emotions in human life. He challenges the conventional view that emotions are mere irrational impulses, arguing that they have a cognitive function. Emotions, for Scheler (1970, 49), are ways of perceiving values. This makes his approach phenomenological, as he is concerned with the structures of emotional experience. In this context, he explores the concept of sympathy not as a mere emotional contagion but as a complex intersubjective process that can lead to genuine understanding and ethical action. Much like Mounier and Maritain, Scheler does not see the person as an isolated entity but as inherently relational. While he does celebrate individual uniqueness, he also acknowledges the essential interconnectedness of human persons. For Scheler, community is not just a social contract but a moral and spiritual reality, constituted by shared values and ethical commitments. Scheler also incorporates a spiritual dimension into his personalism. While he was critical of institutional religion, he was deeply concerned with issues of transcendence, spirituality, and the divine. In "On the Eternal in Man," he explores the idea that the human person is not just a material or psychological entity but has a spiritual core that seeks the eternal. Scheler's personalism stands as a critique of both materialistic and overly rationalistic philosophies. He argues that a focus on material or rational aspects alone reduces the human person to a mere object or concept, neglecting the richness of emotional and spiritual life.

Karol Wojtyła, globally recognized as Pope John Paul II, stands as a colossus in the realm of Christian Personalism. His scholarly output emphasizes the intrinsic dignity and inalienable value of the human person, warning against any forms of instrumentalization (Weigel 1999). Wojtyła's (1979) "The Acting Person" is a complex, multi-layered exploration of human personhood that places action at its core. Wojtyła goes beyond traditional dualities of subject-object or freedom-determinism to offer a nuanced understanding of the human person as a dynamic, transcendent, and relational being. His work serves as a bridge between different philosophical traditions and offers a rich tapestry of insights that are not just theoretically stimulating but deeply relevant to the ethical and existential questions that confront humanity.

Wojtyła embarks on his philosophical journey by examining the dual aspect of the human person as both subject and object. As subjects, individuals are the locus of experience, action, and consciousness. However, they can also be treated as objects of study, whether sociological, psychological, or biological. Wojtyła (1979, 33) emphasizes that a reductionist approach that treats humans merely as objects misses the quintessential qualities that make us truly human. He (1979, 31) argues that the person is not just an object but a unique subject endowed with self-awareness and the

ability to act intentionally. One of the pivotal themes in "The Acting Person" is the primacy of action in human existence. Wojtyła (1979, 181) does not merely consider action as a display of external behavior but as a manifestation of the inner workings of the human spirit. Action is not just doing but "acting," a complex process that involves cognition, volition, and emotion. It is through acting that one realizes one's potential and attains self-fulfillment.

Wojtyła (1979, 20) introduces the concept of 'transcendence' in human action. Transcendence here refers to the ability to go beyond oneself, to act not just in accordance with instinct or societal norms but based on a higher moral or spiritual plane. This transcendent nature enables the individual to attain self-mastery and move toward self-gift, where the person becomes a gift to others. In this way, Wojtyła interweaves the ethical dimension into his anthropology. The dialogue between freedom and determinism is another intricate layer in Wojtyła's philosophical framework. While acknowledging the constraints of biology and environment, he argues for a robust understanding of human freedom. For Wojtyła, freedom is not just the absence of coercion but the positive ability to act in accordance with one's rational nature. This understanding of freedom is closely tied to responsibility (Wojtyła 1979, 169). The freedom to act brings with it the responsibility for one's actions, which ultimately shapes one's character and destiny.

Wojtyła does not limit his inquiry to individualistic considerations but extends it to the social and ethical realms. He contends that the person exists in a network of relationships that influence and are influenced by his or her actions. The ethical dimension of action, thus, cannot be divorced from its social implications. Acting in accordance with one's nature involves a commitment to the common good, to justice, and to the ethical norms that govern human interaction. Although "The Acting Person" is primarily a philosophical work, it is impossible to overlook the theological underpinnings that are subtly woven into its fabric. Drawing from his Catholic background and Thomistic philosophy, Wojtyła hints at the idea that the ultimate end of human action is union with the Divine. The person, as a rational and free being, is called to participate in the divine life through morally good actions and a commitment to love and justice.

We can summarize this section by highlighting five central emphases of Personalism that might help us comprehend its contribution to a wider discourse on freedom and responsibility:

***The Primacy of the Person:*** Personalism's fundamental principle is the centrality of the 'person.' Mounier (1952) critiques both individualism and collectivism, advocating for a relational ontology where the person exists in a dynamic interplay with society (Williams 2005; Williams and Bengtsson 2022). He posits that the person is primarily a spiritual reality, with material and biological aspects being secondary. This spiritual dimension is characterized by freedom, self-awareness, and the capacity for self-transcendence, forming the essence of personhood.

***Dignity and Relational Ethics:*** Maritain (1946) builds on the Thomistic tradition, viewing persons as unique entities with an ontological status that transcends materiality. His concept of 'personality' emphasizes the spiritual, rational dimensions of human existence, making human dignity rooted in personality, not mere

individuality. This perspective frames personal freedom within the context of ethical and social responsibilities, aligning with the concept of the "common good."

***Communion and Community:*** Scheler (1970) and Mounier both underscore the importance of community in personalist thought. They envision a deeper form of fellowship rooted in shared values and a commitment to the common good, transcending mere social contracts. This communitarian aspect of Personalism posits that the person finds fulfillment and ethical responsibility within a community of persons.

***Transcendence and Ethical Action:*** Wojtyła (1979) emphasizes the transcendent nature of human action, where individuals act not only in accordance with personal desires or societal norms, but also guided by higher moral and spiritual principles. This transcendent aspect of action enables individuals to achieve self-mastery and pursue self-gift, where the person becomes a gift to others, harmonizing personal freedom with responsibility and ethical engagement.

***Integration of the Individual and the Community:*** The personalist framework as articulated by these thinkers, underscores the interplay between individual autonomy and community well-being. Personalism does not isolate the person but embeds them within a relational network, where each individual's dignity and freedom are inextricably linked to the welfare of the community.

## CHRISTIAN PERSONALISM AS A CRITIQUE OF SARTRE'S PHILOSOPHY

### The Personalist Critique: Reassessing Sartrean Existentialism

Drawing upon the abundant intellectual resources we have examined, we shall now delve deeper into the contrasts between personalism and Sartre's existentialism. The critiques advanced by Christian Personalists are not merely academic exercises but represent significant moral and philosophical contentions. Christian Personalism, as a philosophical and ethical framework, serves as a critical lens through which to scrutinize Sartre's existentialism. The cornerstone of the personalist critique lies in its conceptualization of the human person. Unlike Sartre's existentialism, which often portrays the individual as entangled in an intricate web of freedom, isolation, and existential dread, personalism elevates the person as a subject imbued with intrinsic dignity and value (Mounier, 1952; Wojtyła, 1979), stemming from one's constitutive relationships: to the transcendent 'Other' as well as the immanent 'other.' Personalists argue that the existentialist landscape, with its unrestrained celebration of individual freedom and autonomy, is markedly deficient in acknowledging the relational and communal dimensions of human existence—a criticism succinctly articulated by Mounier (Mounier, 1952).

Mounier takes issue with the existentialist ethos that champions radical freedom. For Mounier, this exaggerated focus on individual freedom not only marginalizes the social and relational aspects of human existence but also engenders a sense of alienation and existential despair (Mounier, 1952). His critique crystallizes the ideological schism between the two philosophies: while Sartrean existentialism is

preoccupied with the individual's subjective freedom, it is often myopic to the objective realities that confer human life with a broader sense of meaning and relationality.

Furthermore, Mounier contends that the existentialist framework eschews the notion of inherent human dignity, resulting in a rather reductionist, even dehumanizing, perspective of individual existence (Mounier, 1952). In contrast, personalism—through its grounding in moral philosophy and metaphysics—invokes a richer, more nuanced understanding of human identity, one that is intrinsically connected to social, ethical, and even transcendent realms.

Likewise, Jacques Maritain, another titan in the personalist arena, confronts Sartre's existentialism for its atheistic foundations and the subsequent negation of any objective moral order. Maritain posits that the Sartrean landscape, shaped by a form of radical freedom, inevitably culminates in moral nihilism, a universe where all values are not just subjective but disturbingly relative (Maritain, 1951). Maritain critiques Sartre for promulgating a concept of freedom that is not only isolated but also devoid of any intrinsic human dignity or value. Instead, Maritain's personalism asserts that individuals are not mere existential blips in an indifferent universe but rather subjects vested with inalienable dignity and worth (Maritain, 1947).

To find new impulses, we now turn to Scheler. We will notice the overlaps with and slight differences from Mounier, Maritain, and Wojtyła, and we will pitch his ideas in contrast to those of Sartre. Scheler emphasizes the centrality of ethics in understanding the human person. Both Scheler and Wojtyła suggest that actions are not just behavior but also moral and value-laden choices. However, Scheler delves more deeply into the phenomenological structures of value perception, making his approach more psychological in nature.

Scheler's focus on sympathy and emotional life resonates well with Mounier's emphasis on the relational aspects of personhood. Both philosophers reject individualism and instead advocate for a relational, interconnected view of human beings. However, Mounier tends to focus more on the community and social aspects, while Scheler is more concerned with interpersonal relationships and emotions. Furthermore, Scheler shares with Maritain and Wojtyła a commitment to the transcendent aspects of personhood. All three thinkers incorporate a spiritual dimension into their philosophies, although Scheler's spirituality is less explicitly tied to religious doctrine compared to Maritain and Wojtyła, who both draw heavily from Thomistic thought. When it comes to political and social implications, Maritain and Mounier extend their personalism into the realm of social and political philosophy, discussing concepts like the common good, social justice, and political structures. Scheler, while not as overtly political, nonetheless provides the ethical and emotional groundwork that could be applied to societal issues.

We will notice five main contrasts between Scheler's personalism and Sartre's Existentialism:

*1. Freedom and Determinism:* Sartre's existentialism posits a kind of radical freedom unmoored from any pre-determined essence or moral values. Scheler, however, sees freedom as intrinsically tied to moral responsibility and the perception

of objective values. Unlike Sartre's more nihilistic view of freedom, Scheler's is laden with ethical implications.

2. *Emotions and Rationality*: Sartre often downplays the role of emotions, seeing them as strategies of "bad faith" or self-deception. Scheler, on the other hand, elevates emotions to the status of cognitive phenomena capable of perceiving values. This is a striking departure from Sartre's rationalist tendencies and offers a more holistic view of human psychology.

3. *Ethics and Values*: Sartre's existentialism, especially in its early phase, has been criticized for its lack of a robust ethical framework. Scheler's entire philosophy, by contrast, is deeply embedded in ethical considerations. His notion of objective values stands in sharp contrast to Sartre's more subjectivist approach to ethics.

4. *Individual vs. Community*: While Sartre focuses largely on individual existential freedom, often at the expense of communal considerations, Scheler explicitly incorporates the community into his understanding of personhood. For Scheler, ethical and emotional engagements with others are essential for the full realization of personal identity.

5. *Spiritual Dimension*: Sartre, an avowed atheist, rejects any form of transcendence or spirituality. Scheler, however, integrates a spiritual dimension into his personalism, suggesting that humans have a natural inclination towards the eternal and the divine.

Our analysis has shown that Max Scheler's phenomenological personalism offers both complementary and contrasting perspectives to those of Wojtyła, Maritain, and Mounier. While they all share an emphasis on the ethical, relational, and spiritual dimensions of personhood, they approach these themes from different philosophical traditions and orientations. When pitted against Sartre's existentialism, Scheler's personalism appears as a robust alternative that provides a more integrated and holistic understanding of human nature, incorporating ethical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions often neglected or underdeveloped in Sartre's philosophy.

Finally, our attention turns to the work of Karol Wojtyła, whose personalist philosophy serves as an incisive counterpoint to Sartre's existentialism. Aguas (2009b, 413-14; 2009a) astutely identifies the leitmotif that pervades Wojtyła's multi-faceted contributions: the insistent focus on the human person and their inherent dignity (Coughlin 2003). This focus is not merely an academic preoccupation for Wojtyła; it is a philosophical exigency that informed his papal encyclicals, addresses, and sermons. An exploration of Wojtyła's personal history and the sociopolitical milieu that shaped his philosophical outlook might provide us with a credible answer to the question 'Why is Wojtyła so engrossed with the question of the human person?'. This line of inquiry is invaluable for understanding not just the nuances of Wojtyła's Personalism but also how it dialogues with, critiques, and diverges from existentialist perspectives, especially in matters of freedom, responsibility, and human dignity.

Wojtyła's philosophy, steeped in Thomistic theological personalism and Schelerian phenomenology, offers a rich counterpoint to Sartrean existentialism. Unlike Sartre, whose existentialist outlook often skirts the edges of despair, Wojtyła's personalism exudes a fundamental optimism. It is rooted in a practical and ethical orientation that celebrates the human person as both an active subject and an object of

moral and spiritual import (Aguas 2009b, 428-430). This focus on the dignity and relationality of the individual sets Wojtyła's personalism distinctly apart and challenges the existentialist notion—specifically, that of Sartre—that external circumstances predominantly dictate human behavior (Wojtyła, 1979).

Building upon the empirical human experience, specifically the observation that "a human acts," Wojtyła critiques a purely phenomenal empiricism that limits human experience to sense data. Rather than following Sartre's existentialist framework, which tends to subsume the individual under broad, often deterministic, social and psychological constructs, Wojtyła posits each human person as a unique, irreducible, and unrepeatable entity (Aguas 2009b, 421-22). His emphasis on personal experience adds a layer of complexity to our understanding of human nature.

One of the most salient aspects of Wojtyła's personalism is the role of human action. It is through action that the facets of human subjectivity are revealed and can be comprehended. This is not merely a theoretical assertion but serves as an ethical imperative for how individuals should interact with the world and with others (Wojtyła 1979, 34-35). In this sense, Wojtyła shifts the philosophical focus from a mere cognitive or theoretical comprehension of humans to a dynamic, existential understanding that encompasses the totality of human existence. His philosophy, therefore, moves beyond the false dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism that often vexes existentialist discourse.

Wojtyła's intellect-based approach to understanding the human person is another critical divergence from Sartrean existentialism. For Wojtyła, the intellect is not a passive constructor of reality but is actively engaged in the very experience of observing action. It makes direct contact with the observed, leading to a fuller comprehension of the person (Aguas, 2009b). This stands in sharp contrast to Sartre's existentialist idea, where consciousness, imbued with a kind of "nihility," separates us from the world.

If we were to sum up Wojtyła's contribution, his personalism provides a sophisticated, multi-layered critique of Sartre's existentialism. While it does not discard the existentialist emphasis on individual freedom and responsibility, it enriches it by adding elements of inherent human dignity, relationality, and moral agency. Through this nuanced dialectic, Wojtyła's personalism brings to the fore a more balanced, integrated understanding of the human person—one that can serve as a touchstone for future philosophical and ethical inquiries.

More broadly speaking, Christian Personalism serves not merely as a critique but also as a nuanced counterpoint to Sartrean existentialism. While acknowledging the existentialist insights into human freedom and responsibility, personalism provides a broader, more relational understanding of human existence, thereby enriching the philosophical discourse on freedom, dignity, and human nature. Personalists challenge Sartre's hyper-focus on individualism by highlighting the innate relationality and communal nature of human beings (Wojtyła 1979). The personalist critique extends to Sartre's understanding of the self as a "self-creating" entity. Wojtyła and others contend that human beings are not "self-creating" but rather "self-realizing," shaped not merely by autonomous actions but also by interactions with others and broader societal structures (Wojtyła 1979; Macmurray 1961). Furthermore, the absence of a

transcendent dimension in Sartre's philosophy is seen by personalists as a lacuna that leads to existential nihilism. Mounier (1952) and Maritain (1946) both critique Sartre for this absence, positing that a belief in a transcendent reality or deity provides a moral and existential anchor, imbuing life with a sense of ultimate meaning and purpose.

## **CONCLUSION: ANALYSIS OF THE POTENTIAL FOR DIALOGUE AND CONTRAST BETWEEN EXISTENTIALISM AND PERSONALISM**

The dialogue between existentialism, as espoused by Jean-Paul Sartre, and Christian Personalism represents not only a theoretical exchange but also a fertile ground for resolving pressing moral and social issues. By recognizing both the individual's quest for authentic existence and the inalienable value of interpersonal relationships, this dialogue forges a path toward a comprehensive understanding of personhood.

Sartre's existentialism illuminates the human condition marked by freedom and isolation. It posits individual freedom as the starting point of human existence, with Sartre proclaiming "existence precedes essence." From this vantage, every person is wholly responsible for their actions, a radical freedom that is at once liberating and burdensome. Personalism, in comparison, insists on the primacy of relationships in fulfilling human essence. Emphasized by thinkers such as Emmanuel Mounier, Max Scheler, and Karol Wojtyła, Personalism underscores the relational matrix as essential in defining the self, where personal development is actualized through communion with others.

In the arena of social and moral dilemmas, existentialism exposes the stark nature of individual choice, while Christian Personalism introduces a communal perspective to ethical decisions. Personalism's stress on the inherent dignity of each individual thus complements existentialism's focus on personal responsibility, suggesting that truly human choices are those made in light of the other's value.

Revisiting the later works of Sartre, especially his ontology of the gift, opens a rich vein of discourse with Personalism. While Sartre explored the ethical implications of individual freedom in giving—arguably a nascent form of sociality—Personalism offers a fuller vision of giving as an expression of communal ties and mutual recognition. In Sartre's framework, a gift is an act of freedom, but also a form of acknowledgment of the other as a free being. In contrast, Personalism views gifting as an embodiment of the interconnected nature of human essence—not merely a transaction between isolated beings, but a sincere affirmation of the shared human journey.

The dialogue thus foregrounds two philosophical paths that intertwine at the crossroads of freedom and responsibility: Sartre urges an honest recognition of solitary freedom, whereas Personalism advocates for a freedom realized in and through relationships. The tensions and harmonies between these perspectives reveal that while our choices are our own, their ethical weight is measured in the currency of our shared humanity.

This recognition of the shared journey of human existence naturally leads us into the heart of our modern ethical challenges. The current era, textured with cutting-edge technology and intricate moral quandaries, beckons for a profound dialogue

between the respective tenets of existentialism and personalism. Both philosophies, though stemming from different roots, cast light on key debates within realms such as digital innovation, privacy rights, and the moral dimensions of artificial intelligence (to name just a few examples).

In the digital domain, the existential emphasis on personal freedom and the definition of self posits individual autonomy as a quintessential aspect of digital personhood. Sartre's endorsement of perennial self-determination could extend to advocating for digital privacy as a natural continuation of one's liberty and identity within the virtual world. In contrast, personalism, with its commitment to the dignity inherent in human connection, would stress the moral obligation of tech entities and users to preserve the personal dignity of others within the context of online interactions.

The discussions revolving around social justice and community roles further reflect the distinct but potentially harmonious perspectives of both philosophies. While existentialism underlines personal resolve in defining oneself against societal injustices, personalism accentuates the transformative power of community bonds and shared values in prompting social reforms. Personalism, with its ideals centered upon the common good, brings forth a concept of societal justice that is inseparable from our communal obligations (Popovič, 2020), where every individual's choices affect the welfare of the community as a whole.

In addition, we may argue that environmental concerns summon a critical arena for merging existential and personalist views. Through an existential lens, one is impelled to confront the looming threat of ecological crisis as a matter of individual choice and a testament to human responsibility. Conversely, personalism appeals to a collective ethos, urging cooperative strategies and systemic reforms to tackle the environmental crisis, emphasizing our intricate interdependence.

By delving into these contemporary issues with both existential and personalist philosophies in mind, we forge a more comprehensive ethical framework. This synthesis advocates for the necessity of personal autonomy and moral freedom, as propounded by existentialism, whilst simultaneous recognition of interpersonal ethics and societal duties, as vaunted by personalism. The ongoing dialogue between these philosophical traditions is not a purely scholastic pursuit but a pragmatic initiative, offering guidance in navigating the diverse challenges of our era. The dialogue thus foregrounds two philosophical paths that intertwine at the crossroads of freedom and responsibility. Sartre urges an honest recognition of solitary freedom, whereas Personalism advocates for a freedom realized in and through relationship. The tensions and harmonies between these perspectives reveal that while our choices are our own, their ethical weight is measured in the currency of our shared humanity. The synthesized dialogue encourages recognition of the primacy of individual responsibility and the imperative connection with others, advancing an ethical framework that is as pertinent to addressing the solitary existential quest as it is in guiding communal moral actions in the modern world. This collaborative discourse is not an end but a means—a means to enrich academic inquiry and wield philosophical insights to inform responses to the evolving moral landscapes of our times.

We are thus inclined to believe that the proposed dialogue between existentialism and Christian Personalism offers a more complex view on the perennial concerns of freedom, responsibility, and the nature of being. Each philosophy illumines aspects of human existence that the other leaves in shadow, articulating a richer portrait of what it means to live authentically as a person among persons.

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