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Discourse on the Ethical Implications of Freedom and Violence: A Critical Study of Sartre and Camus

Atuiphy Jakoi
PhD Research Scholar at the Centre for Philosophy
School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University,
New Delhi-110067
Email ID: atuiphyjakoi@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper examines the ethical tensions inherent in the notion of freedom and violence, particularly in their exercise in the social and political life of human existence. The notion of freedom and violence has long been a contested concept; the exercise of freedom in everyday life reveals its deeply contested nature, especially when it comes into contact with others' freedom and existence. The act of freedom can either limit or violate another's rights, raising pressing moral questions about the proper way to exercise freedom and, at the same time, inviting curiosity about contrasting perspectives. The paper presents distinct perspectives on freedom and violence from Sartre and Camus. They suggest that the unequal exercise of freedom is often shaped by unequal power structures that gradually give rise to domination, oppression, and multiple forms of violence, ranging from everyday coercion to organised political conflict. The paper examines how Sartre's and Camus's practical conception of freedom is shaped by their foundations of freedom and by the historical and material conditions of their time, which led Sartre to justify revolutionary violence as a response to the systemic injustice of the coloniser and of communist society. In contrast, Camus' philosophy remains strongly critical of such justification. Instead, it advances an idea of rebellion grounded in limits and the ethical responsibility to save a life at all costs. The paper brings Sartre's and Camus' positions into dialogue to examine how freedom is lived, negotiated, and, at times, distorted in concrete situations, and considers what it might mean to respond to these tensions without losing sight of human dignity and autonomy.

Keywords: Freedom, Violence, Practicality, Responsibility, and Ethical

Introduction

An engaged philosophical discussion of the idea of "freedom" inevitably invites understanding the idea of "violence". A metaphysical conception of freedom may be articulated in the minimalist sense, but understanding freedom as experienced and exercised in everyday social and political life shows that the concept is highly contested and deeply problematic. Serious issues arise when the idea of freedom confronts the practical realities of situations where moral questions are at the forefront. To put it simply, my freedom of expression and action may, in turn, impinge on the freedom of others. To violate someone else's freedom is to engage in violence. The nature of violence varies among individuals and social groups. Considering the paramount significance of man's relation to others, engaging with the ethical dimension of freedom to better comprehend individuals and society living meaningful and free lives becomes necessary. As the notions of freedom, responsibility and violence are contested, several questions can be raised: What is freedom in its real sense? To what extent is the act of freedom responsible? What is the nature of freedom comprised of, and what should be the nature of responsibility and violence in the act of freedom? How is one supposed to lead a free, authentic life? Various 20th-century philosophers and thinkers answered the questions of freedom and violence differently.

The paper applies critical, hermeneutical, and comparative methods to examine several issues concerning the notions of freedom and violence, as conceived by Sartre and Camus, to arrive at a more generalised, comprehensive apprehension of the ethical dimension of these notions.

Several contestations of the idea of freedom and violence arise in an ethical realm when it is put into practice in an actual situation. The one-sided exercise of freedom and violence in determining and achieving individual and social goals is the essential cause of the emergence of unequal power relations among men, leading to the oppressor-oppressed dynamic in human relations. At this point, the use of violence and its corollary, terror, became dominant in achieving individual and group projects. In most cases, the unequal practice of freedom and violence is mainly structured by the domineering section of society. The instances of crime, war, massacre, genocide, self-inflicted wounds, terror, torture, and the class struggle's intricacies represent a few instances of the multiple prevalence of violence due to the unequal exercise of

freedom and violence in resolving social conflicts. Considering the complexity of the exercise of freedom in the social domain, the paper attempts to engage in it in the ethical realm. What led to the production of violence? Can the use of violence be a justifiable means to sought-after ends? What is the epistemological and ontological basis for the use of violence? Is violence an inevitable appendix for human relations? The paper sought to answer these questions about the use of violence from the perspectives of the two most prominent and controversial intellectuals of the 20th century: Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Even though the two philosophers are, in their ways, concerned about the value of human dignity and freedom, they had an altogether different take. The paper critically engages with Sartre's and Camus' distinct epistemological and ontological formulations of freedom. The purpose of examining their thoughts on and concept of freedom is to develop and investigate several contesting claims about political freedom and to argue that their different takes on freedom led to distinct forms of political violence. Sartre was a Marxist (as evidenced by 1952) and was involved in several political struggles. Sartre believed that humiliation and oppression, often masked, are orderly constructs of everyday life under capitalism and colonialism. The means to overcome it is through revolution.

In comparison, Camus had a negative outlook on the idea of revolution. For him, a revolution could lead to political tyranny and totalitarianism; in contrast to Sartre's claim, Camus propounded an "authentic" form of rebellion. An attempt will be made to comprehend the importance and practicality of their ideologies by comparing and contrasting their thoughts on one another's notions of political freedom.

Regardless of their different perspectives on freedom and the role of violence in personal and human relations, they have a shared passionate allegiance to man's freedom, authenticity, and detestation towards domination and despotism. They sincerely propounded and engaged in resolving the social conflict of their times. As there are similarities, there are differences. Like most existentialist thinkers, Sartre and Camus believed that no essential human nature exists. They also denied God's existence or higher laws, but their rejection did not lead them to develop a doctrine that everything is possible. They believed only in the values established by reason and denied the a priori values that lie beyond man's reason. A man should reside in terms of what reason can ascertain; he is not qualified to make an illogical leap into some form of conviction.

The paper is divided into three sections: the first discusses their conception and foundation of freedom; the second discusses the practicality of freedom, absolute versus conditional freedom, and the ethical implications of their notion of freedom and violence; and the third discusses their different political alignments to venture broadly into the ethical implications of their notion of freedom and violence. The paper primarily engages with their works, commentaries on their works, and actions. To examine their similarities and differences in freedom, this paper examines Sartre's early conception of freedom in his writings *Transcendence of the Ego* (1936) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943). Further, it outlines his growth, transformation, and the reformulated notion of freedom in his later writing, *Existence is a Humanism* (1946). The paper also examines how Camus understands freedom differently from Sartre. In this regard, Camus's notion of absurdity is critically engaged, as it served as the necessary foundation for his understanding of limited freedom and an authentic life. It engages critically with his book *The Rebel* (1951), in which Camus discusses his conception of limited freedom, and with The Myth of Sisyphus (1942), in which he discusses the absurdity of human life. His other books and novels further engage his understanding of limited freedom and absurdity.

The Conceptions and the Foundations of Freedom

Freedom enables man to redefine his reality and the course of his actions continuously. It highlights the meaning of existence by transforming the given into reality. The meaning of oneself and the world is known not through the givenness but the transformation of the givenness – through existence – as one lives and transforms. Freedom is also awareness, being conscious of the world as it exists. It is through the consciousness of freedom that the world is realised. The co-dependency of freedom and the world enables man to exercise his freedom of choice. Freedom itself will make no sense if it is not exerted in his multi-facet relations with others in an actual situation: there can be no freedom without the world, and the world will be meaningless without it. Freedom remains one of philosophy's most contested concepts, where a commonly agreed-upon conception cannot be developed. The various divergent views on the notion of freedom arise from the paradoxical nature of man's relation: my freedom can restrict others' freedom, and others can restrict my freedom. The tussle for freedom among free subjects opens

up a Pandora's Box on the very nature of freedom. Does others' freedom restrict my freedom? Does my freedom objectify others? If my freedom violates others' freedom, is my act of freedom an act of violence? If this is the case, freedom as an emancipatory act contradicts itself, leading to a paradox.

The ethical dimension of freedom stands in opposition to the common-sense idea of freedom that permits a man to do whatever he wants and desires. In a social context, one's exercise of freedom can have both favourable and adverse reciprocal effects. To sustain a desirable society, freedom should be realistic and practicable to execute in everyday life. The paper discusses two brilliant French philosophers, writers, and activists, Sartre and Camus, and their formulations of freedom to understand its ethical implications better. This section will critically examine their distinct conceptions and foundations of freedom. It will work as a substrate in developing the next section of the paper, where the practical dimension of freedom will be discussed.

Sartre and Camus develop their notion of freedom distinctly. Sartre developed his notion of freedom in opposition to established theories. The purpose of engaging with the foundation of freedom is to comprehend accurately how both of them, although passionately concerned with the "human condition" and "freedom," provide different epistemological groundings in deriving their ideas of human freedom. Sartre employed a unique theoretical approach in developing his notion of freedom by deriving it from the concepts of "consciousness" and "nothingness." He derived the notion of consciousness by discussing two ontological modes of being: *being-for-itself* and *being-in-itself*. He explains the nature of *being-in-itself* simply as it is what it is, devoid of complexity, potentiality, negations and power. It is identified with a specific identity: "The in-itself has no secrets; it is massive…it is entirely positive. It knows no otherness: it never affirms itself as other than any other being; it can have no relation with others. It is itself indefinitely, and it exhausts itself in so being."[1] *Being-in-itself* is what it is in the total fullness of its integrity. On the contrary, it is impossible to give an equally brief account of the *being-for-itself* since it is a being, which is what it is and what is not: a being full of possibilities and powers. Sartre identifies *being-for-itself* with consciousness and nothingness. The *being-in-itself* is organised and made known through the existence of *being-for-itself*. Man's rise amid being "invested"

[1] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 33-34.

leads to the discovery of the world.[2] The term *being-for-itself* is justified as a description of mind or consciousness, as it performs activities in terms of the pre-reflective cogito, which means being mindful of what one is doing. Such awareness cannot occur in the realm of the *being-in-itself*.

Sartre equates his notion of freedom by equating it w ith consciousness. He obtained his notion of consciousness from a phenomenological understanding of consciousness. His notion of consciousness does not consider the concept of "I". Rather, it is defined by intentionality. Intentionality enables an object to transcend to the consciousness that grasps it. With the object, the unity of consciousness and intentionality is found; consciousness consolidates itself by fleeing from itself.[3] The consciousness is always directed towards objects; it by itself is non-substantial because its intentional object is by nature outside it, which consciousness postulates and embraces the object in the same act. Consciousness is a vacancy or an emptiness since all material, psycho-physical, mental objects, all facts, and all worth are outside it, but it is the consciousness of all these objects.[4] Consciousness is understood as nothingness, which means it is devoid of any content and derives its contents from the external world. His notion of consciousness is opposed to the view of some philosophers and psychologists who claim that the "I" is necessary for consciousness, serving as the regulator of our desires and acts in our psychic life.[5] For Sartre, the "I" being an object of consciousness is not the origin of consciousness. As the "I" cannot express "I" in solidarity that exists as absolute, it must contend that "absolute consciousness alone exists as absolute," which Sartre claims to be a truism.[6]

He defines human reality as consciousness and nothingness, equating it with freedom. Equating human reality with freedom enables man to have a spontaneous relationship with the world through questioning and negating the given world. As Sartre regards consciousness as nothingness, it is through nothingness that negation functions. As such, *being-for-itself* has no fixed essence. Its existence precedes essence, meaning that man has no predetermined nature. It continuously defines itself in the existing world: "Human freedom precedes essence in man and

[2] Ibid., p. 48.
[3] Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, p. 38.
[4] Ibid., pp. 40-41, 43.
[5] Ibid., p. 31.
[6] Ibid., p. 48.

makes it conceivable; the essence of the human being as suspended in his freedom."[7] Sartre defines *being-for-itself* as freedom and consciousness that lack an essential base and as nothingness. Sartre considered nothingness as that which isolates freedom from the essence. "I must discover the nothingness which separates me from what I shall be. In so far as freedom is the possible destroyer, in the present and the future, of what I am."[8] The nature of man enables the possibilities of negation through questioning. He can ask questions freed from the chain of causal determinism: "In so far as the questioner must be able to effect concerning the questioned a kind of nihilating withdrawal, he is not subject to the causal order of the world; he detaches himself from being."[9] As the questioner has the endless possibilities of distancing from the causal series, man can annihilate them as free from the world's causal order. Every further explanation designed to allot human beings' position in the universe, their distinctive modes of behaviour in the world and each other, is ultimately based on nothingness, negation and non-being; it enables man's association with the world.[10]

Human reality has a self-detachment in questioning, systematic doubt, sceptical doubt, or any form of annihilating withdrawal. The negation of man's reality can be elucidated through two mediums of nihilations: self-consciousness and temporality. Temporality is an essential aspect through which the being-for-itself relates to the world and can transcend or create it. In the light of Sartre, a being who does not coincide with himself is bound to exist simultaneously in the present, past, and future, spreading itself in these three dimensions. The *for-itself* is temporal from the single fact that it nihilates itself.[11] Thus, the nature of human reality can be understood in terms of consciousness and nothingness, as they are rooted in the human experience of temporality and the dearth of fixed essence.

Sartre's notion of freedom is built on consciousness and nothingness. Nothingness enables us to own ourselves in understanding the world in which we are abandoned, as freedom fills the gap between us and things through free choice and action. It enables us to understand things globally and fill them with our choices, actions, plans and projects. Sartre claims that "through the description of negation and nothingness, it is clear that freedom is not a faculty of

[7] Ibid., p. 49.
[8] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 62.
[9] Ibid., p. 47.
[10] Warnock, *The Philosophy of Sartre*, p. 50.
[11] Ibid., p. 188.

the human soul to be envisaged and described in isolation, the being of man in so far as it conditions the appearance of nothingness, and this being has appeared to us as freedom. As such, freedom is the requisite condition for the nihilation of nothingness and is not a property that belongs among others to the essence of the human being."[12] Thus, Freedom of Sartre is fundamentally nihilating because it comprises the possibility of answering "no" to each proposal of what I should do and dismissing every project for the future I have formed.[13] Sartre's notion of freedom is established from his conception of nothingness and consciousness and constitutes an essential aspect of understanding his conception of absolute freedom.

Unlike Sartre, Camus did not derive his notion of freedom from established theories but from the notion of "absurdity" and "death." Understanding life's absurdity and the certainty of death makes the individual realise that his freedom is found in thought and action. Camus established his freedom through awareness of death and absurdity in one's life, without establishing a general theory or a well-defined meaning of freedom. As he states, "Knowing whether or not a man is free does not interest me. I can only experience my freedom. As to it, I can have no general notions, but merely a few clear insights. The problem of 'freedom as such' has no meaning."[14] In alignment with Camus, the essence of freedom of thought and action is known only after being conscious that life is absurd and death is the only sure thing.

Camus attempts to make sense of the derivation of his limited freedom by discussing the relationship between man and the world. It is essential to examine the undeniable presence of absurdity in man's life found in the relation between man and the world to determine the significance of man's life; beyond this, the notion of the absurd lost its essence. The "absurd is not in man nor the world, but their presence together."[15] It is the only bond that unites man and the world. As for Camus, absurdity constitutes an essential aspect of man's life; it is futile to have the utmost desire to label meaning and purpose in every aspect of life, which is impossible as man is limited in his knowledge to extract meaning from the silent world. It enables man to realise that they clothe the meaning of things. Hence, there are no such things as pre-given or fixed meanings. Through this realisation, the absurdity slipped into man's life; the well-

[12] Ibid., p. 49.
[13] Warnock, *The Philosophy of Sartre*, p. 53.
[14] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 54.
[15] Ibid., p. 29.

constructed world evades him and becomes itself again. Thus, the awareness of absurdity is the birth of consciousness that enables man to reflect on his habituated way of life. After living a reflective life, man becomes conscious of his limited freedom in life's absurdity.

According to Camus, man is not born with an absurd consciousness, and neither can submit the absurd to a higher power, transcendent being, or God: the only thought to free the mind is that which leaves it to itself, sure of its limits and imminent end.[16] Man acquired his absurd consciousness after reflecting on every aspect of his existence. However, man cannot remain forever ignorant of the presence of the absurd. There is no exact instance or situation where and when he will realise the absurdity of life; it can slip into man's consciousness at any state of mind and place. As such, a man who realises the undeniable existence of absurdity is free, and to continue to live a free life, he has to constantly revolt against life's absurdity, which is the gateway for man to realise his freedom of thought and action.

The absurd can never be resolved or overcome. The absurdity will forever remain as an undeniable gap between man's knowledge and the uneducable world – "This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is constructions."[17] Man instinctively desires unity and a clear world vision, but that idea is unachievable. His reason can never fill the gap between his existence and the meaning he tried to give to that assurance. The absurd is a confrontation of a wild man longing for clarity and the irrational that exists in man's heart. Thus, there cannot be absurdity without man; it depends on man as on the world. There is no melting point in them, but it is what links them together.[18] To be a conscious, free being, man must constantly live with the absurd, deprived of ideas, hope, and eternal life. To look for fixed meaning will be an insistence upon familiarity with the world, which runs contrary to man's nature. Unlike trees or animals, a man is a conscious being; thus, he cannot lack the core ability to be conscious of the absurd's apparent existence.

Even though Camus regards life and freedom as devoid of meaning, the awareness of the absurd enables man to carry out his thoughts and actions with profound depth. Camus insisted

[16] Ibid., p. 113.
[17] Ibid., p. 17.
[18] Ibid., p. 94.

that man should be aware of the absurd to live out the most in him: "Belief in the absurd is tantamount to substituting the number of experience for the quality."[19] An absurd man is a person who is aware of and accepts the unquestionable existence of the absurd. He willingly declaims his ultimate desire for absolute unity, for he knows the futility of reducing the world to logical and rational truth. Camus applied the term 'free man' to the absurd man because he lives on what he has without speculating on what he does not have. He is also a genius, for he knows the boundary of his intelligence and does not attempt to derive meaning from the world; instead, he finds happiness in the limit of his reason. The absurd man knows that he needs to be the author of his life and solely responsible for who he is, beyond which everything disappears into nothingness. He ought to negate hope and the tendency to console the absurd beyond his limited reason.

An absurd man is a lucid thinker who consistently struggles to live in harmony despite his experience of weakness and voidness in the universe. It is a persistent revolt against unfeasible clarity in man's desire for certainty and the world that disappoints without giving up in any form of resignation that ought to accompany it.[20] The moment the absurd is settled, life itself vanishes: its logical outcome is a consistent revolt, not suicide, for suicide is no different from leaping; it is an extreme leap from the absurd. As such, suicide is an unacceptable form of death, for it implies giving up life and one's own free will, which settles the absurd. Instead of suicide, an individual must accept it through ceaseless revolt. "Suicide is not a solution to escape from the absurd. For it does not represent the logical outcome of revolt."[21] Giving up one's life by pre-thinking the dreadful future is a form of a leap from the absurd. It does not imply that Camus is against the concept of undeniable death – "it is essential to die unreconciled and not on one's own free will. Suicide is a repudiation."[22] The thought of horror appears in man's life when he contemplates death, as it brings the notion of ultimate destruction: the end of everything. Camus' notion of death does not limit life to horror and anxiety but teaches man to live life to the fullest. The value and meaning of life ought to be realised in the absurd world, and the proper understanding of death insists that man has a thoughtful living – to make the most living out of everything, as death waits for none, irrespective of any effort to justify it before

[19] Ibid., p. 58.
[20] Ibid., p. 52.
[21] Ibid., p. 52.
[22] Ibid., p. 53.

death. Death has a multi-role; it suppresses man's life to its lowest and liberates man from his irresponsible way of life. Thus, Camus's freedom is found amidst absurdity and unavoidable death.

For Camus, the awareness of the certainty of absurdity and death justifies man's false belief in freedom to be, which in reality does not exist: "To return to consciousness, the escape from everyday sleep represents the first steps of absurd freedom."[23] Before man realises the absurd freedom, he is like a mechanical man who lives with fixed purpose, aspirations, hope, and meaning for the future. Through the realisation of absurd freedom, man finds meaning in the absurdity of life. Camus's notion of freedom is not about knowing whether a man is free.[24] Instead, it is the solidarity he maintains by a constant revolt against the irrational world till death settles all contradictions.

Practicality of Freedom: Absolute versus Conditional Freedom

Sartre and Camus's distinct approaches to practical freedom are hugely influenced by their distinct foundations of freedom. Sartre established his notion of freedom from the concepts of consciousness as nothingness, which means consciousness is absolute: free from all forms of determinism, both internal and external. Further, he equates freedom with consciousness and establishes his notion of absolute freedom. Unlike Sartre, Camus discussed his idea of limited freedom in the context of the absurdity of life and the inevitability of death, and criticised Sartre's notion of freedom as impractical and unrealistic to carry out in our everyday lives. Considering Sartre's formulations of his absolute freedom in terms of the autonomy of choice disqualifies the claim of Camus's understanding of Sartre's absolute freedom as the kind of unlimited freedom that morally permits human beings to do whatever they wish.

Sartre discusses his ontological notion of absolute freedom in terms of the autonomy of choice in the existential realm. Sartre's early position on ontological freedom is expressed in *Being and Nothingness*. His views hold that man is abandoned in this world without his consent and should define and create himself by exercising his absolute freedom. We are interested in

[23] Ibid., p. 57.
[24] Ibid., p. 54.

knowing what he meant by absolute freedom in exercising freedom in particular situations. In *Being and Nothingness*, he equates human reality with freedom: "Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of the human being is suspended in its freedom; what we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the being of human reality." Man does not exist first to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the being of a man and his being-free."[25] Sartre equates human reality with freedom and claims that human existence is absolutely free; as he puts it, "man is condemned to be free."[26] It means that no limits to "freedom can be found except freedom itself, or if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free."[27]

In early formulations of his notion of absolute freedom, he discusses it in terms of the autonomy of choice. His autonomy of choice means "the freedom of choosing but not the freedom of not choosing. Not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose. We are a freedom that chooses, but we do not choose to be free."[28] The choice remains absolute since it is free from all kinds of determinism. An evaluation of Sartre's perception of free choice manifests that human freedom is unconditioned. The undeniable fact of choice, which Sartre advocates, is the radical idea of man's absolute freedom.

For Sartre, to be human is to be free and to be free is to have autonomy of choice. From Sartre's position, man is free and proves it by his free choice, by planning and acting upon it. If humans were not free, they would not be capable of initiating, pretending, and evading things. In a way, he considered freedom of choice fundamental, since the autonomy to choose is the primary condition for the possibility of freedom. Sartre's radical notion of absolute freedom as synonymous with the autonomy of choice has been occasionally misunderstood by many thinkers, including Camus, as a kind of freedom synonymous with anarchy, oppression, totalitarianism, and dehumanisation. Such claims are unjustified if we consider what Sartre meant by the autonomy of choice. As for Sartre, every effort of human choices and actions is directed towards one's entire project. No human being will ever reach a state of absolute

[25] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 439-41.
[26] Ibid., pp. 439-85.
[27] Ibid., p. 461.
[28] Ibid., pp 484-85, 481, 509, 529.

contentment or have no future desires; particular aims may be satisfied, but will never reach reliable ease. It shows the logical necessity of the autonomy of choice in man's existence.

Moreover, Sartre's notion of freedom as the autonomy of choice stands against "common sense," an understanding of freedom that asserts to obtain what one wishes or desires.[29] Instead, freedom means "by oneself to determine oneself to wish (in the broad sense of choosing), and Sartre insists that "the technical and philosophical concept of freedom, the only one that he is considering, means only the autonomy of choice."[30] Sartre's notion of freedom is not a property of freedom; to talk of someone as free is only to say that nothing determines his actions.[31] Sartre states that "to speak of man (or all men) as free is dangerous, for it leads us to think of men as possessing the property of freedom."[32] Sartre discusses his notion of ontological freedom as the autonomy of choice, not solely in its abstract sense, but in relation to the world, which means our choices are always situated.

Though Sartre did not explicitly address the ethical implications of exercising freedom, he considered aspects such as commitment, responsibility, anguish, bad faith, authenticity, and the significance of others' intersubjectivity. Each individual must take responsibility for living an authentic life. Any attempt to escape by excuses or determinism is to live in bad faith. It goes against human beings' nature, which is inevitably free. Further, in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, he discusses individual actions in terms of commitment and responsibility, extending them to all humankind.[33] The presence of others is essential to existence and the knowledge of oneself.[34] There is an intersubjectivity in exercising freedom; our freedom depends on others' freedom and vice versa.[35] Sartre's ontology of freedom lies in the undeniable presence of choice in the concrete world rather than mere fantasy, desire, or property that permits man to do whatever they want. The other side of absolute freedom is the freedom that must exist in the given world, which can be termed practical freedom.

[29] Ibid., p. 483.
[30] Ibid., p. 483.
[31] Manser, *Sartre a Philosophic Study,* p. 117.
[32] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 513-14.
[33] Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism,* p. 24.
[34] Ibid., p. 42.
[35] Ibid., p. 48.

Camus's criticism of Sartre's absolute freedom as that morally permits a man to do whatever he desires is, to some extent, a failure to comprehend the practical expectations of his freedom. Santoni and Jeanson also point out two dimensions of Sartre's notion of freedom. Santoni called it "ontological" or "factual" and "practical" or "existential" freedom.[36] Jeanson also distinguishes Sartre's absolute freedom between "factual freedom" and "freedom as valued."[37] Santoni and Jeason argue against Camus's criticism of Sartre's notion of ontological freedom as inadequate to differentiate ontological from existential freedom. They believe Camus is falsely labelling it as a kind of freedom that leads to total consequences, a murderous revolution, destruction of values and freedom, human objectification, dominations, and totalitarianism.

On the other hand, Camus's understanding of freedom through the certainty of death and absurdity does not in any way lead to the allowance of absolute freedom. As for him, absolute freedom runs counter to the constructed social structure. He takes into account man as a product of society. As such, man should exercise his freedom in conformity with the norms of social structure. He states, "The only conception of freedom I can have is that of the prisoner or the individual in the state."[38] Camus argues that man can exercise his freedom of thought and actions to the fullest only when he becomes aware of life's absurdity and can use it in absurd reasoning. Though Sartre and Camus do not explicitly discuss the ethical implications of the act of freedom, the ethical implications embedded in their articulation of the responsibility of exercising freedom in real situations are undeniable.

Different Political Alignment

It is necessary to consider their distinct conceptions and notions of freedom to comprehend their ethical implication in understanding their perception of violence. Considering their complexity and the polarity in their conception and notion of freedom, they developed distinct views on the acts of freedom and the use of violence as a means of achieving freedom of action, as made apparent during the Cold War and the Algerian War (1954-1962). They have a distinct idea of

[36] Santoni, *Camus on Sartre's "Freedom: Another "Misunderstanding*", p. 791.
[37] Jeanson, *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, p. 14.
[38] Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 54.

freedom or truth of freedom and a distinct way of linking the idea of truth with freedom. The differentiation in the formulation of freedom led to different approaches to the ethical justification of using freedom and its corollary acts of violence in the political domain. They link their acts of freedom to goal-directedness in individual actions and group projects distinctly. Their different grounding on violence led them to maintain a distinct approach to using violence as an act of freedom in rebelling against their time's unjust and unequal society.

Sartre and Camus gradually developed different views on political freedom, followed by contested takes on particular situations, places and contexts. The main reasons Camus and Sartre parted ways in 1952 were political violence, communism, and colonialism. They both have different takes on the practicability of violence. Sartre targets the systemic, structured kinds of violence embedded in colonialism and capitalism. Moreover, for Sartre, this target has to be violent.[39] He developed his thoughts and actions on political freedom through a multiplicity of transformations, largely shaped by the complex social and political events of his time. Nonetheless, to understand his firm assertion about the structural and systematic nature of violence embedded in colonialism, it is essential to examine his initial theorisation of the "gaze" in *Being and Nothingness*. The presence of the other becomes the original crisis in exercising one's freedom of action; under those conditions, one experiences the feeling of initial infringement of freedom. For Sartre, since man is a conscious being, he has the ultimate power to "gaze" back and vice versa. Thus, Sartre argues that man can never be reduced to other needs and desires; man's relations can never be reconciled, and they ought to find their meaning in conflict. To limit others' authentic life by force and to merely surrender one's freedom to others is to live an inauthentic life, which he terms bad faith.

Sartre sees the revolutionary not as wanting to objectify and dominate but as wanting to liberate the oppressed from domination by the strongest and, in doing so, minimise – not maximise – their destruction. In the Algerian war context, Sartre distinguishes two distinct kinds of violence: that used by the oppressor and that used by the oppressed. He is against the use of violence by the French coloniser as it is based on the forceful domination over the oppressed class's rightful existence. However, he supports the oppressed class's use of violence as a

[39] Sartre, *Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism*, pp. 37-38, 165-66, 170.

justifiable means of resistance to establish fair power relations in society.[40] Thus, for Sartre, the revolutionary's use of violence is a strategic means to fight against subjugated violence for a good cause. His articulation of the differentiation between systemic violence and the oppressed class's use of violence is developed in his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, in his preface to Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth, and in his preface to Albert Memmi's The Coloniser and the Colonis*ed*.

On the other hand, Camus does not distinguish the variation of violence in human relations; instead, he denies any forms of authorised use of violence to liberate people from the control system, as the outcome of violence leads to the destruction of innocent lives. He sought an alternative path to liberate people by peaceful means rather than resorting to violence. He targets the use of violence in the revolutionary movement against capitalism and colonialism.[41] He maintains that the revolutionary is not a man who fought for rights but a man who shattered the intrinsic idea of rights, treating them as outcomes of convention and force.[42] For Camus, the revolutionary movement sought abstract justice rather than concrete justice, sacrificing individual freedom and present harmony for a future cause. He believes that violence is set up into varied movements that claim to emancipate people from capitalist and colonial domination; he stands against any form of the authorised use of violence and emphasises "authentic rebellion."[43] For Camus, to rebel is to safeguard specific standard values and to protect them regardless of whatever happens. [44] It is not limited to individual revolt against inequality and injustice, but it applies to all humankind. His notion of authentic rebellion is a search for justice and equality for all humankind, without which the world will be run by crime and disorder.

He developed his notion of rebellion from the absurd and the relativity of human nature. As for Camus, since the world is absurd, man can have only relative knowledge of the world and can never opt for the authorised use of violence, particularly the revolutionary kind that destroys present freedom for an uncertain future cause. He stands firm in his belief that an act of rebellion is a demand for lucidity and integrity in the absurd universe.[45] He is opposed to any form of

[40] Sartre, *Colonialism and Neo-Colonialism*, pp. 37-38, 165-66, 170.
[41] Aronson, *Camus versus Sartre: The Unresolved Conflict*, p. 303.
[42] Santoni, *Camus on Sartre's "Freedom": Another "Misunderstanding,"* pp. 801-02.
[43] Camus, The Rebel, p. 196.
[44] Ibid., pp. 2-3.
[45] Ibid., p. 11.

authorised violence to achieve legitimate future goals by compromising the present; overturning an existing society entirely is unattainable.[46] He instead prioritises the present cause and advocates a civilian truce to achieve man's justice and freedom. He considered life the absolute value, and to deny this to man is the greatest crime against humanity.

Aronson argues that the conflict between Sartre and Camus is unresolved; neither one won the debate, for they possess no more than a half-truth, and each was blinded to the other's sight.[47] To some extent, Camus's limited notions of freedom derived from the absurdity of life and death debarred the use of violence for social liberation. As for him, since life itself is absurd, striving for complete social transformation of the unjust society is unreasonable. Instead, man should constantly confront the unjust society in everyday life. On the contrary, Sartre's strong belief in the unequal power relations among men led him to support the possibility of the complete social transformation of the unjust society of his time through revolution as a last resort. Hence, it corroborates the violence used by the oppressed class as a last resort, as their use of violence is based on liberating themselves from their inhuman and oppressed life, different from that of the oppressor class's use of violence to control and dominate their rightful way of life.

Conclusion

The paper studied the epistemological and ontological foundations of freedom. It took up the contested notions of freedom and associated acts of violence to examine the ethical implications inherent in their conceptions of freedom. Primarily, Sartre developed his notion of absolute freedom from "consciousness" and "nothingness." He further defines his notion of absolute freedom as the autonomy of choice. His autonomy of choice does not imply that man should do whatever he desires, but rather that he should make free choices and decisions. He discusses his radical notion of absolute freedom at the practical level: to be born free to choose the essence they desire to acquire or become in a given world, and to take ultimate responsibility for the choices of actions.

[46] Ibid., p . 229.
[47] Ronald, *Camus versus Sartre: The Unresolved Conflict*, pp. 303-07.

In contrast, Camus did not derive his notion of limited freedom from theories and concepts. Instead, he was more or less conventional; his foundations of freedom and responsibility lie in his notion of death and absurdity. The absurdity of life and the undeniable death enable man to realise that his freedom is limited and the want for absolute freedom is unattainable. Even though Camus claims that the world is absurd, he does not regard life and freedom as meaningless. Camus, a free man, is a man who accepts the undeniable existence of absurdity and death and lives it out in constant awareness and revolt against the absurd.

The paper argues that, even though Sartre and Camus did not explicitly discuss right and wrong actions, their notion of freedom is not free of ethical implications. They articulate their notion of freedom in the practical domain; the world and the existence of others are essential to the exercise of free choice and action. For Sartre, his notion of absolute freedom must be exercised freely in a particular situation and entail ultimate responsibility for the chosen acts. While Camus claims that life is absurd, this does not mean that the world is meaningless or that man can do whatever he wants. As such, freedom is found in conformity with social norms. Man has to realise his limited freedom in consistently revolting against the absurd life instead of giving up on life in the form of suicide. Moreover, since life is absurd, it is a fool to believe in attaining absolute clarity, definite meaning, and absolute freedom. Instead, man should find contentment and meaning in the absurd life.

The paper also examines their understanding of freedom in the context of colonialism and capitalism. It affirms that their distinct views on freedom have significantly shaped their divergent outlooks on violence and the practicality of freedom. Sartre accepts the oppressed class's use of violence as a justifiable means to resolve the unequal power relations among men. In contrast, Camus took a decisive stand against the legitimate use of violence. With their different outlook on the ethical implications of violence, they become one-sided on the truth of violence. Sartre becomes a firm believer in the communist party, becomes obsessed with anti-colonialism and communism, and hardly questions or excuses the inherent atrocities committed by the revolutionary movement in the name of establishing a socialist society. On the contrary, Camus became a vehement critic of anti-colonialism, condemning the revolutionary movement's use of legitimising violence and torture.

Through a critical study of their distinct theoretical and practical aspects of freedom, it can be asserted that they both became blinded by the one-sided truth and the practicality of violence. It provides us with a view of the necessity of giving equal importance to the significance and the inherent ethical implications of freedom and violence, as authentically propagated and practised by Sartre and Camus, to have a more in-depth understanding of the complexity of freedom and its corollary act of violence in our times.

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