

# BOĞAZICI ÜNİVERSİTESİ

## DERGİSİ

Hümaniter Bilimler — Humanities

Vol. 2 - 1974

### THREE ATTITUDES TOWARD FREEDOM IN SARTRE'S *ROADS TO FREEDOM*

Mr. Reşad Kayalı<sup>a</sup>

The subject of the following paper is the discussion of three fundamental attitudes toward freedom in Sartre's *Roads to Freedom* with specific reference to *The Age of Reason* and *Iron in the Soul*.<sup>1</sup> Our major concern will be to examine three characters who represent distinct yet interrelated attitudes toward freedom throughout the trilogy. Mathieu Delarue, Daniel Sereno and Robert Brunet are the three characters whose individual motives and actions can be significant in reflecting the structure of Sartre's treatment of freedom. The common feature that distinguishes these characters from others is the explicit interplay between consciousness and action in the individual life of each. Besides, the members of the trio are situated with respect to each other so as to formulate the concrete realization of the "Other" as consciousnesses.<sup>2</sup> Below we shall attempt to illustrate these two aspects—the interplay between consciousness and action in the individual life of each character and the concrete realization of the "Other" as consciousness—with specific references to the plot as major attributes of these attitudes toward freedom.

Mathieu Delarue is a middle-aged philosophy teacher whose life-for-others is characterized by lack of commitment and his insistence to justify his disengaged attitude :

"... When you look at yourself, you imagine you are not what you see, you imagine you are nothing. That is your ideal: you want to be nothing... Yes you want to be free. Absolutely free. It's your vice.

— 'It's not a vice', said Mathieu. It's-what else can a man do?' (AR, p. 11).

Mathieu's life moves up to a crisis after his mistress Marcelle informs him that she is pregnant. However, the involvement of a second person in the irrevocable nature of his act leads Mathieu toward a mental reevaluation of his existence. He refuses Marcelle's project of going to a local abortionist and decides to find a professional gynecologist to perform the operation. After arrangements are made with a surgeon who demands immediate payment, Mathieu's time is divided between his attempts to find the five thousand francs demanded by the surgeon, his few friends, and his mental struggle to situate himself in the evolving circumstances of his life.

<sup>a</sup> Mr. Reşad Kayalı is an Instructor of Economics. He is a graduate of Harvard School of Business and Economics and Boston College.

Jacques has simpler motives than Daniel in refusing Mathieu the money that he asks for :

"You have attained the age of reason, Mathieu, you have attained the age of reason, or you ought to have done so", he repeated with an abstracted air.

— 'Pah... said Mathieu. 'Your age of reason is the age of resignation, and I have no use for it'.

But Jacques was not listening. His face suddenly cleared and brightened, and he went on briskly :

— 'Listen; as I said, I'm going to make you a proposal; if you refuse, you won't find much difficulty in finding your four thousand francs, so I don't feel any compunction. I am prepared to put ten thousand at your disposal if you marry the girl" (AR, p. 119).

For Jacques the crisis in Mathieu's life is an excellent opportunity to force Mathieu into joining an institution against his will. Thus he would obtain a repudiation of the previous justifications of Mathieu for his uncommitted life as well as a pseudo-justification for his own marriage of convenience with Odette :

". . . Jacques was very proud of his youth; it was his moral guarantee, it permitted him to defend the cause of order with a good conscience : for five years he had assiduously aped all the fashionable dissipations, he had dallied with surrealism, conducted a few agreeable love affairs, and occasionally before making love, he had inhaled ethyl chloride from a handkerchief. One fine day he had reformed : Odette brought him a dowry of six hundred thousand francs. He had written to Mathieu : 'A man must have the courage to act like everybody else in order not to be like everybody'. And he had bought a lawyer's practice" (AR, p. 118).

Although Mathieu claims not having enough reasons for an active struggle against the bourgeoisie, he does not have much trouble in summing up his brother :

"But here is a fellow who makes me sick. When I cease to feel ashamed in his company, I'm ashamed for his sake" (AR, p. 120).

Daniel Sereno has subtler motives than Jacques Delarue in turning Mathieu down. While Jacques is merely the representative of a mass attitude of the bourgeoisie toward the nonconformism of Mathieu, Daniel's attitude toward freedom is radically distinct from that of Mathieu. Jacques can be said to represent the concrete realization of the "Other" as object from Mathieu's point of view by signifying the totality of practical obstacles to the continuance of Mathieu's freedom. Daniel, however, is closer to the concrete realization of the "Other" as consciousness from Mathieu's point of view.

For Daniel the existence of Mathieu is a direct challenge to his own attitude toward freedom. Daniel's attitude toward freedom is characterized by the deliberate break between his motives and his actions. In this respect it is fundamentally opposed to the attitude represented by Mathieu. Mathieu attempts to fulfill his choices in action and considers this the true manifestation of freedom.. For Daniel freedom is the assertion of his unpredictability to others :

Jacques has simpler motives than Daniel in refusing Mathieu the money that he asks for :

"You have attained the age of reason, Mathieu, you have attained the age of reason, or you ought to have done so", he repeated with an abstracted air.

— 'Pah... said Mathieu. 'Your age of reason is the age of resignation, and I have no use for it'.

But Jacques was not listening. His face suddenly cleared and brightened, and he went on briskly :

— 'Listen; as I said, I'm going to make you a proposal; if you refuse, you won't find much difficulty in finding your four thousand francs, so I don't feel any compunction. I am prepared to put ten thousand at your disposal if you marry the girl" (AR, p. 119).

For Jacques the crisis in Mathieu's life is an excellent opportunity to force Mathieu into joining an institution against his will. Thus he would obtain a repudiation of the previous justifications of Mathieu for his uncommitted life as well as a pseudo-justification for his own marriage of convenience with Odette :

". . . Jacques was very proud of his youth; it was his moral guarantee, it permitted him to defend the cause of order with a good conscience : for five years he had assiduously aped all the fashionable dissipations, he had dallied with surrealism, conducted a few agreeable love affairs, and occasionally before making love, he had inhaled ethyl chloride from a handkerchief. One fine day he had reformed : Odette brought him a dowry of six hundred thousand francs. He had written to Mathieu : 'A man must have the courage to act like everybody else in order not to be like everybody'. And he had bought a lawyer's practice" (AR, p. 118).

Although Mathieu claims not having enough reasons for an active struggle against the bourgeoisie, he does not have much trouble in summing up his brother :

"But here is a fellow who makes me sick. When I cease to feel ashamed in his company, I'm ashamed for his sake" (AR, p. 120).

Daniel Sereno has subtler motives than Jacques Delarue in turning Mathieu down. While Jacques is merely the representative of a mass attitude of the bourgeoisie toward the nonconformism of Mathieu, Daniel's attitude toward freedom is radically distinct from that of Mathieu. Jacques can be said to represent the concrete realization of the "Other" as object from Mathieu's point of view by signifying the totality of practical obstacles to the continuance of Mathieu's freedom. Daniel, however, is closer to the concrete realization of the "Other" as consciousness from Mathieu's point of view.

For Daniel the existence of Mathieu is a direct challenge to his own attitude toward freedom. Daniel's attitude toward freedom is characterized by the deliberate break between his motives and his actions. In this respect it is fundamentally opposed to the attitude represented by Mathieu. Mathieu attempts to fulfill his choices in action and considers this the true manifestation of freedom.. For Daniel freedom is the assertion of his unpredictability to others :

"One of these days... Impertinent little beast... He dared to predict what Daniel might do, and lay his petty plans accordingly. 'He thinks he knows me, he thinks he can exploit me'. There was nothing to be done but to crush him like a stug: Daniel's image was embedded in that narrow forehead, and there it would remain forever..." (AR, p. 147).

Similar to Jacques who stands his ground in order to justify his commitment to the bourgeoisie, Daniel is equally antagonized by Mathieu though for different reasons. Daniel's life is dominated by his violent desires and his constant struggle to liberate his actions from the dictates of his desires. Thus the manifestation of freedom for Daniel turns out to be the actions that he does not desire. At first Daniel carries on this struggle with his desires privately. However, every failure increases his frustration with himself:

". . . He thought of Mathieu with a sort of pride. 'It's I who am free', he said to himself. But it was an Impersonal pride, for Daniel was no longer a person. At eleven twenty-nine he got up and felt so weak that he had to lean against the barrel. He got a smear of tar on his tweed jacket and looked at it.

He saw the black smear on the brown material and suddenly he felt that he was one person and no more. One only. A coward. A man who liked his cats and could not chuck them in the river. He picked up his pocket knife, bent down and cut the string. In silence; even within himself there was silence now, he was too ashamed to talk of his own presence. He picked up the basket and climbed the stairway: it was as though he were walking with averted head past someone who regarded him with contempt. Within himself desolation and silence still reigned... But in the depths of him there was an odd little smile because he had saved Poppea" (AR, p. 99).

After Daniel refuses Mathieu the money and throughout the ensuing difficulties which prevent Mathieu from raising the money, Daniel knows that he may have ruined Mathieu's life by this gesture. For a time Daniel exults in his power over Mathieu's life while simultaneously being antagonized by the latter's serenity:

"Here was a man who found it quite natural to exist, he did not ask himself any questions, that light, so Greek and impartial, that uncorrupted sky, were made for him, he was at home, he had never been alone... Take care, train disciples if it amuses you, but not as instruments against me, because I shall get the better of you in the end" (AR, p. 167).

However, Daniel's own life reaches a crisis when he fails to commit suicide by castrating himself with a razor blade after the homosexual encounter with Ralph. He no longer exults in the prospective wreckage of Mathieu's life. He looks for a single gesture that will restore both of them the freedom that each wants to attain. Just as Mathieu realizes the limitations on his freedom imposed by the actions of others which prevent the full conformity between his motives and actions, Daniel has to face the fact that a total, deliberate break between motives and actions is not possible. He has to succumb to needs and desires which render complete transcendence impossible.

Hence Daniel understands that if he has to remain true to himself, his attitude toward freedom cannot legitimately survive the destruction of Mathieu's attitude toward freedom. Then his refusal to help Mathieu cannot have any more significance than a banal gesture of malice. The refusal to lend the money would have been meaningful only if Daniel had been able to demonstrate by this gesture that his attitude toward freedom was more solidly founded than that of Mathieu :

"He began to tremble all over : 'He will give way, he will end by yielding, I have wrecked his life'.

He had relinquished his glass, he was on his feet, staring into vacancy, he cannot despise himself nor yet forget himself. He wishes he were dead and he exists, he obstinately maintains his own existence. He wants to be dead, he thinks he wants to be dead... There is a way" (AR, p. 308).

By marrying Marcelle Daniel transcends his hatred of women and stages his "family life" as a drama contrary to his desires. This act since it involves a deliberate break between Daniel's motives and actions is consistent with Daniel's attitude toward freedom. But Daniel, having failed in demonstrating the ultimate manifestation of his freedom -by not being able to drown his cats in the river and by not being able to mutilate himself-is aware that this is only a minor accomplishment. Daniel's authenticity consists in his capacity to realize that if Mathieu is to marry Marcelle through the force of circumstances, the wreckage of his freedom will not legitimately be survived by any other because Daniel, himself, has failed intrinsically in being capable of it. Thus Daniel cannot see any significance in the prospective destruction of Mathieu's freedom. Daniel's marriage to Marcelle leaves the foundations of Mathieu's ethical resolutions intact while offering Mathieu the consciousness of Daniel's hatred and the contingency of Mathieu's freedom. At the moment of confrontation when Daniel declares his decision to marry Marcelle, each character reevaluates the the validity of his freedom and regards the other freer than himself :

"It is true", thought Mathieu; 'he went right through with it this time'. Suddenly an idea came to him that made his heart turn over. 'he is free' he thought. And the horror with which Daniel inspired him was combined with envy... 'I wish I were in your place', said Mathieu abruptly... Daniel shrugged his shoulders. 'In this affair', he said, 'you' ve been a winner all round'. Mathieu laughed dryly, and Daniel explained : 'You are free" (AR, p. 340).

Just as Daniel ironically envies the restoration of Mathieu's freedom, Mathieu, seeing the circumstances play havoc with his life, considers himself "robbed of the consequences of his acts". His restored freedom no longer has any meaning. He envies Daniel's capacity to be able to make a choice toward the attainment of a freedom meaningful for himself. When Daniel leaves, Mathieu realizes that the resolution of his youth has expired :

"He had said to himself last evening; if only Marcelle did not exist'. But in so saying he had deceived himself. 'Noone has interfered with my freedom; my life has drained it dry'. He shut the window and went back into the room... He yawned: he had finished the day and he had also finished with his youth. Various tried and proved rules of conduct

Hence Daniel understands that if he has to remain true to himself, his attitude toward freedom cannot legitimately survive the destruction of Mathieu's attitude toward freedom. Then his refusal to help Mathieu cannot have any more significance than a banal gesture of malice. The refusal to lend the money would have been meaningful only if Daniel had been able to demonstrate by this gesture that his attitude toward freedom was more solidly founded than that of Mathieu :

"He began to tremble all over : 'He will give way, he will end by yielding, I have wrecked his life'.

He had relinquished his glass, he was on his feet, staring into vacancy, he cannot despise himself nor yet forget himself. He wishes he were dead and he exists, he obstinately maintains his own existence. He wants to be dead, he thinks he wants to be dead... There is a way" (AR, p. 308).

By marrying Marcelle Daniel transcends his hatred of women and stages his "family life" as a drama contrary to his desires. This act since it involves a deliberate break between Daniel's motives and actions is consistent with Daniel's attitude toward freedom. But Daniel, having failed in demonstrating the ultimate manifestation of his freedom -by not being able to drown his cats in the river and by not being able to mutilate himself-is aware that this is only a minor accomplishment. Daniel's authenticity consists in his capacity to realize that if Mathieu is to marry Marcelle through the force of circumstances, the wreckage of his freedom will not legitimately be survived by any other because Daniel, himself, has failed intrinsically in being capable of it. Thus Daniel cannot see any significance in the prospective destruction of Mathieu's freedom. Daniel's marriage to Marcelle leaves the foundations of Mathieu's ethical resolutions intact while offering Mathieu the consciousness of Daniel's hatred and the contingency of Mathieu's freedom. At the moment of confrontation when Daniel declares his decision to marry Marcelle, each character reevaluates the the validity of his freedom and regards the other freer than himself :

"It is true", thought Mathieu; 'he went right through with it this time'. Suddenly an idea came to him that made his heart turn over. 'he is free' he thought. And the horror with which Daniel inspired him was combined with envy... 'I wish I were in your place', said Mathieu abruptly... Daniel shrugged his shoulders. 'In this affair', he said, 'you' ve been a winner all round'. Mathieu laughed dryly, and Daniel explained : 'You are free" (AR, p. 340).

Just as Daniel ironically envies the restoration of Mathieu's freedom, Mathieu, seeing the circumstances play havoc with his life, considers himself "robbed of the consequences of his acts". His restored freedom no longer has any meaning. He envies Daniel's capacity to be able to make a choice toward the attainment of a freedom meaningful for himself. When Daniel leaves, Mathieu realizes that the resolution of his youth has expired :

"He had said to himself last evening; if only Marcelle did not exist'. But in so saying he had deceived himself. 'Noone has interfered with my freedom; my life has drained it dry'. He shut the window and went back into the room... He yawned: he had finished the day and he had also finished with his youth. Various tried and proved rules of conduct

had already discreetly offered him their services : disillusioned Epicureanism, smiling tolerance, resignation, flat seriousness, stoicism-all the aids whereby a man might savor minute by minute, like a connoisseur, the failure of a life. He yawned again and repeated to himself : 'it's true, it's really true: I have attained the age of reason" (AR, p. 342).

The clash of these two diametrically opposed yet interrelated attitudes toward freedom-the conscious conformity between motive and action as represented by Mathieu and consciously imposed, deliberate contradiction between motive and action as represented by Daniel-is synthesized in the abortive marriage of Daniel to Marcelle through which both characters grasp the limitations of their individual freedom while preserving the original distinction between the intellectual foundations of the two attitudes intact. Ironically the significance of each attitude has diminished considerably through the concrete realization of the "Other" as consciousness. Mathieu has come to realize that circumstances beyond his control which threatened toward the destruction of his freedom were thwarted through a supreme gesture of hatred by Daniel who was conscious of Mathieu's helplessness in the claws of circumstance. On the other hand Daniel knows that Mathieu is aware of his irremediable homosexuality and his inability to transcend his condition which has originated Daniel's decision to marry Marcellie as a compensatory gesture of hatred and justice toward Mathieu. Each remains a transcendence-transcended in the eyes of the other. Despite this mutual objectification both remain free in the eyes of others with the realization of the consciousness of each as their chains.

If **The Age of Reason** can be regarded as a dialogue between Mathieu and Daniel with regard to the subject of freedom, the same holds true for **Iron in the Soul** as a dialogue between Mathieu and Brunet. Brunet is a minor character in **The Age of Reason**. He is an old friend of Mathieu, a member of the Communist Party and a columnist of *Humanité*. The structure of the attitude toward freedom as represented by Brunet is identical with that of Mathieu in terms of the conscious conformity between motive and action. Yet Brunet is ready to break this conformity consciously and temporarily in order for the collective attainment of the same freedom in a distant future. Hence for the time being he refuses to evaluate his every action in terms of its conformity with his motives. Brunet disbelieves that there can be an effective exercise of freedom at the present stage of history to the extent that he almost consciously suppresses his individuality :

"True", said Brunet. 'I have almost become a traveling salesman. They keep me so much on the move that there are days when I can scarcely find myself'. He continued sympathetically : 'it's in your company that I find myself most easily. I have a feeling that I must have left myself on deposit with you" (AR, p. 127).

Because of his faith in the inevitability of the course of history, Brunet regards all private reservations with ridicule :

"Suppose you go in your present state of mind. You'll burst like a bubble. You'll have dreamed away your thirty-five years of life, and then one fine day a shell will blow your dreams to bits, and you will die without having

waked up. You have been a hidebound official, you will make a ridiculous hero. and you will fall without having understood anything, solely to help Monsieur Schneider to maintain his interest in the Skoda works" (AR, p. 132).

But when Brunet asks Mathieu to join the Party, Mathieu refuses :

"Well there it is. I can't join, I haven't enough reasons for doing so. I am as angry as you are, and with the same people and the same things, but not violently enough. I can't help it. If I started parading, raising my fist and singing the International, and if I proclaimed I was satisfied with it, I should be telling myself a lie" (AR, p. 135).

From then on Brunet disappears from the stage except to be remembered in Mathieu's thoughts from time to time. The impasse between Mathieu and Brunet remains unresolved throughout **The Age of Reason**.

The atmosphere of **Iron in the Soul** is radically different from the calm summer of 1939 when **The Age of Reason** is staged. France is being invaded by the Germans. It is in this part of the tetralogy that we reach an explicit synthesis of the attitudes toward freedom in **The Age of Reason**. All of the three characters, Daniel, Mathieu and Brunet have maintained their intellectual consistency. The attitudes that they assume toward the invasion are consistent with their previous characterization as well.

As the plot moves away from the realm of private lives to the sphere of political action, Daniel's almost instinctive hatred toward the society surpasses his paradoxical assertions of freedom which we have examined. Once again yielding to his desires, he celebrates the German invasion. He reflects jubilantly as he walks through the deserted streets of Paris :

"All around him stretched a desert... The only gay note in this mineral landscape was struck by a Nazi flag flying over the Hotel Crillon... In the middle of the blood-red rag, a circle white as that of the magic lantern shining on the sheets of childhood : in the middle of the circle a knot of black serpents: the monogram of Evil, my monogram... Let them drop their bombs. That would bring resurrection; the city would reverberate with blacksmith bangings, as in the days when it had laboured, and lovely weeds would sprout on its walls. The aeroplane turned away. All about him was once more swallowed in a planetary silence. He must walk unceasingly over a cooling planet" (IS, p. 145).

After a while Daniel recedes into the background and keeps pursuing his vicious pleasures while history moves on independently of him. Mathieu and Brunet emerge into the foreground.

Faced with the impending invasion, Mathieu finds it impossible to sustain his freedom, the freedom which is still uncommitted to a meaningful purpose :

"He thought : 'I'm going to die for nothing'... Have I any right to die for nothing?... I am through with remorse, with hesitations, with mental reservations... Here and now I have decided that death has all along been the secret of my life, that I have lived with the sole purpose of dying. I will die in order to demonstrate the impossibility of living" (IS, p. 220).

## NOTES

- 1 *Iron in the Soul* is the third volume of the tetralogy, *Roads to Freedom*. Since the fourth volume was partially completed, I have used "trilogy" and "tetralogy" interchangeably.
- 2 In order to prevent a structural breach we have to say that "the concrete realization of the 'Other' as consciousness" is the most significant when examining Mathieu and Daniel. The general emphasis of the paper is on the interplay between consciousness of motives- and action.

## REFERENCES

- SARTE, Jean-Paul: *Being and Nothingness* (Washington Square Press, inc., New York, 1966)  
 SARTRE, Jean-Paul: *The Age of Reason* (Bantam Books, New York, 1964)  
 SARTRE, Jean-Paul: *The Reprieve* (Bantam Books, New York, 1964)  
 SARTRE, Jean-Paul: *Iron in the Soul* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1955)

## ÖZET

Bu makalede Sartre'in *Özgürlüğe Giden Yollar* adlı üç ciltlik eserindeki özgürlük kavramları incelenmektedir. Bu kavramların eserden seçilmiş üç karakterin davranışlarında ve birbirleriyle olan ilişkilerinde dile geldiği savunulmaktadır. Özgürlük kavramı her karakter muvacehesinde felsefi tutum ve davranış arasındaki ilişki yönünden işlenmiştir.

Mathieu Delarue felsefi tutum ve davranış arasındaki tam uyumun simgesi olup kişisel ve tarihsel şartların etkisinde bu uyumu korumak için başarısız bir savaş verir. Cinsel tercihlerini değiştirmenin varoluşsal (existential) açıdan olanaksızlığı ve toplumun bu tercihleri benimsememesi yüzünden Daniel Serono için özgürlük, arzularının tam tersini yapmak, bir tür (negation), olarak biçimlenir. Mathieu'nun kişisel yaşantısındaki ekonomik şartlar bu iki özgürlük kavramını çatıştırır.

Daha sonra Fransa'nın işgaliyle oluşan yeni tarihsel şartlarda Mathieu'nün özgürlük kavramına karşıt olarak Robert Brunet'nin özgürlük kavramı belirlenir. Brunet'ye göre kişisel özgürlük anlamsızdır. Özgürlük ancak bütün toplumun ekonomik şartları değiştirebildiği ölçüde anlamlıdır. Brunet için davranışı biçimlendirilen amaç bu olmalıdır. Alman işgaline karşı takınılan değişik tutumlar Mathieu ve Brunet'nin özgürlük kavramlarının çatışmasını açıklığa kavuşturur.