THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE HUMANISTIC ETHICS OF KANT AND SARTRE

AKINYEMI ONIGBINDE

In the logical progression of modern Western ethical thought, it is not difficult for one to discover that the early modern rationalist ethics of Kant and the modern existentialist ethics of Sartre are like two juxtaposed peaks, each with its own characteristics, in the history of the founding of humanistic philosophy-ethics; and like an on-going tradition, they echo one another, even if from afar. The two moralists constructed their theories of a humanistic ethics on the cornerstone of the free subject (man), yet demonstrated different theoretical styles and qualities. The former raised high the banner of rationalism, establishing a set of universal principles of "practical reason" in order to enlighten and liberate humanity's moral spirit; the latter, contemplating the significance of mankind's actual existence, sought an interpretation of the historical conditions necessary to set up a "universal morality" for mankind. Yet when we take a bird's-eye view of this peculiar theoretical phenomenon from the perspective of the overall course of the whole of (at least modern) western ethics, we also cannot but notice that the background of this phenomenon conceals a series of questions both profound and urgently needing solution: Why did these two thinkers in the course of similarly seeking to establish humanistic ethics wind up with such radically dissimilar characteristic ? Why did they choose such different course of theoretical exploration ? Contrariwise, why did these two masters each take different routes and lead humanistic ethics off into different directions ?

In my opinion, these two great masters part company basically because of the features of the different times in which they lived, in part revealing the different features and basic tendencies of the development of Western ethical thought from early modern to modern times. At the same time, this also expressed an increasingly strong tendency in the development of human ethical thought, i.e. subjective

speculation about self-existence and reality. Hence, the goal of this essay is to take the first steps towards finding answers to these important but difficult questions through a comparative study of Kant's and Sartre's ideas on humanistic ethics in order to provide theoretical background and guidance for establishment of a scientific humanistic ethics.

I

Broadly speaking, so-called humanistic ethics can be said to be opposed to naturalistic morals and theological ethics which search outside man for mankind's own existence, meaning, norms of behaviour and ideal values. It means any understanding of human morality must be based on human subjectivity and it does not seek the origin of human morality in such extra-human objects as gods or nature. In this sense it may be said that the earliest intimatation of humanistic ethical thought appeared with Sophists and Socrates in Greece and Confucius in China and its true birth was marked by the onset of early modern humanist ethics in the Renaissance.

Yet humanistic ethics in the strict sense is not only the denial of all religious ethics, but also, quite distinct from naturalist ethical perspectives which reduce human moral phenomena to man's instinctual desires (Aristippus and the Cyrenaic School) or pleasurable satisfaction (Epicurus and Hedonism) and from sensualist ethics whose explanations resort to notions of man's natural genius (Helvetius and rational self-interest) or sympathetic intuitive knowledge (Adam Smith and Rousseau). It bases itself upon the free will of the subject itself (which is the unity of the human individual and collectivity) and its moral relationships to explain the unique phenomenon of human moral life.[1] Thus the period from Socrates up to the early modern humanists is merely a prelude to the true birth of humanistic ethics. Until Kant humanistic ethics were still deterministically structured, and in modern times Sartre's ethics may be seen as another attempt by Western Philosophy to construct a humanistic ethics. Even if these two thinkers did not achieve the heights of a thorough-going scientific ethics, a brief comparison of their ideas on humanistic ethics may still be regarded a very worthwhile effort for perfecting and developing our science of human morality.

As seen above, the first step in the construction of an ethical system for

the human subject is to determine a theoretical point of departure with effective tendentiality, otherwise it will be impossible to reveal the transparency of human moral life. In other words, for the determination for this point of departure one must be able to satisfactorily demonstrate the transcendence (ideals) of moral conscience of humanity as a subject, the self-consciousness (independence) of moral behaviour and the purity (non-utilitarian nature) of moral sentiments, and the point of convergence for all these characteristics is the moral subject's freedom of will (autonomy), which is where the quint I essential characteristics of Humanistic ethics are to be found.

Surveying the ethics of Kant and Sartre, we discover that their starting points were in fact the same, i.e. they both defined the freedom of the subject (man) as the foundation for the establishment of ethic[2], proceeding from which they investigated the innermost recesses of human moral phenomenon, and in the course of justifying this foundation they also expressed their own styles which were not completely identical.

The pre-eminent moralist in the modern West, Kant relied on the tool of reason to clear away the fog which had long enveloped the everyday world of human morality, revealing a new treasure house in the field of human morality. He neither assented to the English materialists, his contemporaries, who took human sensory experience as the starting point of ethics nor agreed with theology that *a priori* divine principles should be seen as the premise of ethics. In his view, ethics had never in the course of its history met the demand for "universal necessity". The empiricists had stopped at the empirical observation and synthesis of human moral realities, and ultimately were only able to achieve a level of *a posteriori* synthesis of human experience and contingent fact but could not present humanity with any universally practical principles. As he said,

> "...necessary law which varies according to the subject (as does natural
> law) once it reaches the object becomes a completely contingent practical
> principle and can and must substantively vary with differences in the
> subject, hence can never provide a norm"[3].

Meanwhile, religious ethics, although it achieves a veneer of universality anterior to experience in seeking the basis of morality in divine will, exceeds the limits of human practical reason. Consequently. Kant advocated the establishment

of "a pure normal philosophy completely cleansed of everything that can only be empirical and appropriate to anthoropoloty".[4]   In fact, Kant here has stipulated for us the two fundamental demands of pure moral philosophy ; one is the principle of transempirical theory and the other is the principle of the primacy of man. On the basis of this critique Kant went on to point out that so-called moral philosophy "gives him (man) laws *a priori* as a rational being." These laws then are the norms of the human moral will. Just as man's everyday world has dual empirical and ontological attributes, he himself is also a dual being. As a sensory being, man belongs to the empirical world and is subject to the empirical and natural laws of cause and effect. As a rational being, man belongs to the ontological world. Reason makes him go beyond the domination of the necessity of natural cause and effect and the contingency of experience, submitting him merely to the rational norms which he himself sets up, detaching him from all relative beings (things which only know submission) and from the objectifying dominance of the non-human (gods which know only lawmaking), and making him into a real subject with genuinely free self-legislation, self-rule and self-control. Consequently, freedom is the basic premise of man's lawmaking for himself and also the true source of humanistic ethics, Kant in the end realized "the will of a rational being can be a will of his own only under the idea of freedom.[6] The supreme ends and sense of duty can exist and man's value as a free subject can be realized only with moral behaviour and relations which arise on the premise of autonomy of the will.

Quite like Kant, Sartre also defined freedom as the starting point for his ethics, and made all principles of human morality without exception emanate from the beacon of freedom. Where they differed was that Sartre adopted a more direct and absolute style. He not only limited his discussion of freedom to the perspective of the purely subjective will but also elevated freedom to the supreme ontological level[7] thus setting humanistic ethics at an ontologized peak. To begin with, as Sartre saw it, human freedom and human existence are ontological matters identical to one another. "Existence is prior to essence" refers to the centrality of the existences of the human subject, which shows that the freedom the the human subject is absolute. Sartre was opposed to all forms of metaphysics and believed that from Plato onwards essence had been given priority over existence.[8] This tradition of metaphysics in philosophy had inverted the

relationship between existence and essence, causing subject man to be equated with natural objects and subjected to determinism while human free subjectivity as a result was lowered into a chain of cause and effect relationships. In fact, man's difference from things does not lie in his qualities of possessing reason, emotion, etc., nor in something produced a priori by divine will, but simply in that he is his own creation. "Man is nothing more than his own creation, this is the first principle of existentialism. This principle is also called subjectivity".[9] Sartre continued :

> ....if existence really is prior to essence, then human action cannot be explained using a fixed prefabricated human nature, in other words, determinism is ruled out. On the other hand, if God does not exist, we cannot find any value or norm to explain our actions as correct. Therefore, within the field of luminescent values, before us there is no guarantee and no excuse.[10]

It is from that stance that Sartre with the aid of the ontological proof of freedom moved from the autological philosophy of being to the ethics of subjective values.

Freedom is the reality of man; as soon as man is thrown into this world he is condemned to freedom.

> "I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the causes and motives of my act. I am condemned to be free. This means that no limit to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or, if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free."

That is to say, man's freedom being mans' destiny is the "facticity" of all subject beings. Hence,

> We said that freedom is not free not to be free and that it is not free not to exist. This is because the fact of not being able not to be free is the facticity of freedom and the fact of not being able not to exist is its contigency.[12]

He continued, man's freedom lies in the fact that he can only ever be a being "who is what he is not" and "is not what he is" and in the capacity which he always has for conscious negation and nothingness. This is the proof of the freedom of the subject and the basic premise of our investigation of the

subject's moral behaviour. Only absolute freedom bestows upon man the dignity of the subject of moral values and the subline ontological significance of existence.

The heart of this "human freedom" is freedom of choice and action. Freedom is the first condition of action; choice is the unique source of life. The significance of human existence lies in the incessant choices, projects and actions which man carries out for himself and in the establishment and realization of standards of value renewed and unceasingly pursued. Therefore, "freedom is simply the fact that this choice is a project for itself of being and value. Hence, Sartre tells us,

> "....my freedom is the unique foundation of values and....nothing, absolutely
> nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that
> particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am
> unjustifiable."[14]

At this point, we can see that Sartre had drawn the boundaries of the freedom of the moral subject to include the following elements (1) man is an absolutely free being ; (2) Human freedom includes free choice, free projects and free action (choice being also a form of action)' (3) Human choice is the basis of all values. In sum, for Sartre here, man's being, freedom, choices and values are all ontological categories on the same level.

The freedom of the subject as defined by Sartre does not emerge from the universal significance of the moral subject. He stressed that the free subject is the solitary human individual, as point which was poles apart from Kant's view of freedom. Sartre sharply criticized the ethics of Kant and his followers:

> In fact, they, preoccupied with establishing the universal laws of subjectivity
> which are the same for all, never dealt with the question of person.[15]

Only the existentialists (Kierkegaard and himself) were truly concerned with individuals existing in reality, the individual I then being the "being upon whose being values depend". This is the cornerstone of Sartre's humanistic ethics. What should be pointed out is that Sartre's position on human freedom did undergo certain changes.[16] If *Being and Nothingness* and *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* may be said to mark two major stages in the development of Sartre's thought, the "ethico-philosophical" and the politico-philosophical", then Sartre's

idea of freedom in the former stage may be said to have been primarlity philosophical, theoretical, ontological, individual; and in the latter stage, political, practical, situational, relational. Specifically, Sartre's later concern was mainly to investigate the practical conditions of the possibility of freedom.[17] In response to the criticisms of others, he more or less attenuated the extremely individualistic notion of freedom which he had earlier proclaimed. He said,

> "What we want is freedom with freedom as its end, where there is freedom in every particular situation. When we want freedom, we discover it always depends upon the freedom of the other. And the other's freedom always depends upon our own."[18]

Of course, in terms of Sartre's overall stand, this defence did not alter the basic thrust of his idea of freedom.

It can be seen from the above that, in the basic standpoints of Kant's and Sartre's ideas on humanistic ethics, the similarities and difference were intermingled and were expressed primarily as follows : (1) Freedom is the common foundation of humanistic ethics for both. This explains the very crucial nature of the question of freedom in establishing a system of humanistic ethics. However, the concrete standards and proofs for freedom which the two offered were not at all alike. Freedom for Kant was a pure autonomy of the will in a strictly ethical sense, while for Sartre it carried the sense of the ultimate ontological meaning of being, which was not merely autonomy of will for the subject but also the basis for the existence and all the activity of the subject itself. For this follows : (2) Though freedom occupied a position of pre-eminent priority in the ethics of both masters, Kant's freedom originated in man's rational essence. Since man is a rational being, man is then made to go beyond the subjective contingency of empirical facts and achieve universal freedom. But with Sartre, the basis of freedom lay in the negative nature and nihilating capacity of man's self-consciousness, which was unrelated to everything essential such as reason, and freedom itself is the subject's being. (3) Kant's freedom was an *a priori* universal condition of the appearance and existence of morality, dealt with in terms of the universal subjectivity of the whole of mankind, and thus holistic, universal and necessary; whereas in Sartre's view, freedom could only be individualistic self-determination with each person having the contingency of free action and choice but not any a priori universalized

standard, for otherwise it would not be freedom. (4) Kant's freedom only touched upon the internal world of the human moral spirit, which is also to say that he restricted the free will of the subject to the good will of "duty for duty's sake" and completely disregarded the results of this will's actions. Consequently, it was only well-meaning, abstract and ideal. Sartre's freedom, contrariwise, was itself the sign of activity and the subject's freedom lay in his self determined activity processes. Hence, Sartre's philosophy of freedom was frequently called a "philosophy of action" and his freedom was active, concrete and actually perceptible. (5) Even though Kant and Sartre both took freedom as the absolute starting point of humanistic ethics, for Kant freedom was the precondition of the subject's actions achieving moral worth, and the form of the moral imperative became universal law as well as the guarantee that duty and good will could be realized the absolutely *a priori* nature of freedom made it no different from an idealistic universal postulate. Yet Sartre argued that freedom's absoluteness lay precisely in its real facticity and individual contingency and it lacked any universal properties.

To be sure, freedom is the source of every individual subject's sense of morality but its consequences are not to be found in the purity and transcendence of responsibility (duty); quite contrary, for it is the brimming vessel of the individual's vexations and worries. For freedom is my destiny, I cannot not choose, and cannot but assume full responsibility for my choices, everything being unreliable and completely absurd.

In essence, Kant's freedom was merely an abstract and idealistic *a priori* moral postulate, while Sartre's freedom was the concrete, active moral facticity of the individual ontologized. The significance of the latter is far more extensive. Lukacs has rationally appraised this. As he said:

> In order to give his concept of freedom universal value, Sartre cannot but vigorously leap from a starting point well beyond that of Kant. It is because he wants to leap so far that he all the more needs to do so. In fact, the demand of all men for freedom is a leap far beyond Kant's simply not allowing man to be seen as a means....

> Hence Sartre summons up his courage and with his mouth intoning the name of Kiorkegaard he vigorously leaps. He leaps from a fully formulated

concept of freedom towards another concept of freedom which is totally opposed to it. [19]

And so, the perspectives on freedom which act as the starting points of Kant's and Sartre's ethics, though ageless, due to their individual biases lacked a concern with the social basis and practical conditions of the subject's freedom and slipped into an abstract *a historical* morass, with tragic consequences for the construction of a compact scientific-humanist ethics.

While it may be said that Kant and Sartre formally shared a certain point of departure in their humanistic ethics, extrapolation from this common starting point reveals the obvious oppositions and diversions between the two.

II

The characteristics of Kant's ethical thought are best reflected in his exposition of the system of the three moral imperatives. For simplicity's sake, we will focus on those aspects relevant to revealing the innermost recesses of his humanistic ethics.

Kant's first moral imperative is the so-called principle of universal moral law. As he says, "The basic law of pure practical reason is the principle that you should act only on that maxim which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. "[20] In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he called this principle a "law (which) has to determine the will"; That is to say, I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law."[21] The real significance of Kant's proposal of this imperative is that as he profoundly perceived, a universal practical law for man as a rational being must have absolutely universal necessity to give "the fundamental law of pure practical reason" objective authority. This necessarily demands that the practical law of the subject possess transempirical objective universality, because only then can " pure reverence for the norms of behaviour",[22] even the realm of duty, thereby make the will of the subject and the behaviour derived from it possess all its outstanding values and dignity and also thereby reveal the transcendent status of the moral subject.

Kant's second moral imperative may be called the rule of universal ends: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end".[23]   In the light of analysis of Kant's overall thought, we should believe that his idea of ends primarily has two aspects, first of which is the subjects' shared teleology. Ends are the meaning of the universal being of the universal subject and not the subjective values of the individual subject; to use Kant's own words, man's existence is an objective end, not a subjective one, for "the subject of all ends is to be found in every rational being as an end in himself"[24]   He stated further ;

> Man,and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will : he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational always be viewed at the same time as an end.[25]

In fact, as Kant saw it, man has a dual existence, natural and ontological, and in terms of his natural being he has no superiority over the values and ends of animal : it is only his rational being that makes him go beyond all other beings and possess absolute ends and values. In *The Critique of Judgement*, Kant pointed out through an analysis of the relationship between man and nature that man is in fact one species within the overall system of being, or, one say, the supreme end within the overall system of ends. In the absolute sense, man is the end, nature is the means. In terms then of the system of ends which man himself constructs, between individuals there should be relationships "which alternate as means and ends" because in any organism "all of the parts within alternate as means and ends".[26]   It can be seen from this that Kant's theory of ends is not only an elevation of the subject status of man but also a moral delimitation of interrelationships between subjects, which is the second aspect : the subjects' alternating teleologies. There is only a monovalent significance to the purposiveness of each rational subject, yet the principle of humanistic ethics demands the subjects shared end, which required that individuals treat one another as ends and not as a means. Seen abstractly, Kant's idea of "man as the end" contains an accurate revelation of the relationships of moral subjects, a point which can be seen in four examples he gave. These were (1) necessary duty to oneself, (2) necessary duty to others, (3) non-necessary (special) duty to oneself

and (4) non-necessary (special) duty to others.[27] These examples can be divided into two larger categories of self-interest and altruism. As Kant saw it, the end of self-interest (including direct, necessary self-interest and indirect, special self-interest) is morally negative and subjective, for although this type of end subjectively exists (Kant did not deny the subjective reality of human sensual desires and self-interest), in the end it lacks absolute moral value. But the end of altruism (including direct, necessary altruism and indirect, special altruism) is positive and objective, possessing universal moral value. Kant's example represented a reconciliation and summation of self-interest and altruism which had existed for a long time in modern Western ethical thought,[28] they also reflected the anti-egotistic stance of Kant's humanistic ethics.

The two moral imperatives above provide the premise and conditions necessary for the self-legislation of the moral subject, while the third moral imperative, based of the synthesis of the previous two, is the core proposition which ultimately justifies the humanistic ethics of "man as self-legislating".[29] "From this there now follows our third practical principle for the will as the supreme condition of the will's conformity with universal practical reason - namely, the idea of the will of every rational being as a will which makes universal law".[30] This is the so-called autonomy of the will, i.e. man's self-legislation. This imperative is the classic expression of Kant's humanistic moral ideas. The moral form of universal law (imperative one) is the theoretical premise ensuring the principle of practical reason; the rule of universal ends (imperative two) is the internal foundation of the human subject as a rational being provides the authority for the subject's self-legislation, which is where the true meaning of the freedom of the human will is to be found. For this reason Kant called the autonomy of the will the "supreme principle of morality" and labelled all other' principles of behaviour "heteronomy". [31] It is through proof of the autonomy of the will that the objective form of moral law was internalized from an external constraint into the positive content of the subject's own norms and became testimony to the exalted autonomy and superior teleology of the moral subject. Because of this, wrote Kant immediately thereafter, the result of the establishment of the autonomy of the will leads to the moral concept of the "kingdom of ends".[32] The human subject's moral idea had finally found commitment to conceptual form.

In short, Kant's three moral imperatives actually constituted the basic

framework of his humanistic moral ideas, with freedom as the pivotal and strong point of this framework; the three imperatives focused on, and develop from, this core and from different angles revealed the supreme theme of Kant's humanistic ethics : free human subjectivity.

Although he likewise started out from freedom, Sartre's thinking on moral ends and relationships headed off in the opposite direction. For Sartre there existed no universal moral principles. The subject's moral behaviour had absolute freedom but not objectivity; the subject's ends enjoyed the highest status but the mutuality of ends was lacking; the moral subject (man) had absolute transcendence but common subjectivity was completely lost; all that was left was the subjectiveness of the individual subject, mutual negativity between subjects and the blindness of subjective activity.

Initially, Sartre, like Kant, argued that being-for-itself as consciousness goes beyond natural rules of cause and effect.[33] Yet he categorically denied that the transemprical nature of the subject's freedom must lead to any moral principles of universal validity, and also maintained that the social development of mankind so far had failed to provide us with the possibility of creating any "universal morality". According to Sartre, what is important is not the theoretical search for abstract moral principles but the creation of social conditions which make a universal morality a real possibility, since " ontologically, moral commands depend on the social structures in which we live.[34] A genuine ethics of human freedom can only be established if social conditions are changed. Said Sartre: " To begin with, everyone must become human by an improvement in their living conditions, only in this way can a universal morality be created:.[35] Constrained by this consideration, Satre's promise made in his early work *Being and Nothingness* to write a special work on ethics was never realized.[36]

As described previously, Sartre's moral subject always exists as an individual; he acknowledged in his final years that :

> "In my early investigations, I was like the majority of moralists in that I looked for morality in a knowledge without interrelationships or without other people (I would rather say other people than interrelationship)."[37]

In fact Sartre, in his later works still firmly maintained that,

> The subject of existentialism - which is lacking Marxism - is the individual person in the field of society, the individual in classes within a situation vis-a-vis many other individuals and collect objects, man alienated, materialined, mystified by the division of labour and exploration but also struggling against alienation by various means and measures - even if progressing slowly. [38]

Obviously what Sartre stressed was not the universalized human subjectivity which concerned Kant but the subjectivity of the human individual for itself. He criticized Kant's failure to deal with "the question of person".[39] he also bitterly ridiculed Hegel for "establishing a conceptual palace while living himself in a mud hut". "But if Hegel has forgotten himself, we cannot forget Hegel".[40] As Sartre saw it, Hegel was given to abstract universal conceptions to the point that he had forgotten the everyday individual, so much so that from him through to Husserl the true significance and relationships of being had not been truly grasped. Hegel equated being with knowledge (the concept), while Husserl reduced the relationships between beings to relationship between knowledge. Although Kant and Heidegger attempt to understand the being of man in ontological terms, both were so intoxicated with man in general that they were content to describe human relationships as those of human "mitsein" (being-together). Only Kierkegaard saw through to the true significant of individual reality. All this led to a reconsideration of the cogito, the start of absolute knowledge, in order to find the actually existing object. As Sartre said,

> "I must establish myself in my being and posit the problem of the other in terms of my being. In a word the sole point of departure is the interiority of the cogito. We must understand by this that each one must be able, by starting out from his own interiority, to rediscover the other's being as a transcendence which conditions the very being of that interiority."[41]

Taking the self of the individual being as the point of departure and positing the being of the other in terms of my being was the basic standpoint of Sartre's humanistic ethics, and also his first inversion of Kant's humanist moral principle.

Since Sartre reduced Kant's moral subject from a universal to an individual, this led to another inversion, this time in Kant's theory of humanistic moral relationships, that is, Kant's shared and alternating teleologies were inverted

into individual teleology and mutual instrumentalization (objectification), with the final end being transcendence, struggle and conflict between subjects and intersubjectivity becoming a hopeless pipe dream. According to Sartre, within the realm of being- for-itself, any being which is for-itself and only has the sense of absolute subjectivity but also has a relativistic side. In terms of the free existences of the self, its subjectivity is absolute for this is its freedom and its creation but, on the other hard, the existence of any subject necessarily places it into a particular situation, encountering the existence of other subjects, and this produces the dual structure of the for-itself and for-others for the subject being, thereby giving rise to non-subjective relationships between subjects. These relationships are as a contigency of our being and are objective facticity; this determines the necessity of the objectification of my subject being (as with "the look"). But as Sartre pointed out, being-for-others cannot be "as ontological structure" for being-for-itself, because I cannot imagine either "deriving being-for-others" but can only reveal through reflective consciousness this one fact : "that our being along with its being-for-itself is also for-others".[42] This is to say,

> the existence of others is not a consequence which can derive from the
> ontological structure of being-for-itself. It is a primary event, to be sure,
> but of a metaphysical order; that is, it results from the contingency of being. [43]

Yet the existence of the other leads to two objective consequences : the first being that I am forced to accept objectivity, i.e. transcendence by the other, while at the same time my being-for-others also causes the other to achieve his own subjectivity; the second being my anti-objectification behaviour, i.e. transcending the transcendence of the other, thereby also constituting the others objectivity. Thus are formed the asymmetrical "subject ===object" relationships between human beings. The result of the exclusion of being-for-others from within the ontological structure of being-for-itself is that relationships between subjects become relation of unequal subject-object exchange, which led Sartre to a negative conclusive : "The constitutive negation of being-for-others is therefore as internal negation is nihilation which the for-itself has to be, just the reflective nihilation".[44] In other words, my being-for-others formally can only constitute a relation of negation with the others : I either act a presence and subject which objectifies the others, or am objectified by the other and make him into the subject. This was Sartre's conclusion.

Subjectivity in common between me and the other is simply an impossibility, expressed concretely as two attitudes in relationships between me and the other. The first attitude is love, language and masochism. "Love" is in fact just an expropriation and possession of the other's freedom. A footnote in the conflict of the relationship between me and other. As he puts it :

> Thus the lover does not desire to possess the beloved as one possesses a
> thing; be demands a special type of appropriation. He wants to possess
> a freedom as freedom.[45]

Language is but" the fact that a subjectivity experiences itself as an object for the others".[46] And Masochism is then,

> An attempt not to fascinate the other by means of my objectivity but to
> cause myself to be fascinated by my objectivity-for others; it is
> characterized as a species of vertigo, vertigo not before a precipice of
> rock and earth but before the abyss of the other's subjectivity. [47]

The second attitude is indifference, desire, hate and sadism. Indifference is the attitude of destroying the other to establish myself ; "I can choose myself as looking at the Other's look and can build my subjectivity upon the collapse of the subjectivity of the Others [48]. Desire (sexual desire) is an "attempt to get hold of the Other's subjectivity through his objectivity-for-me".[49] Hate, simply put, is freely to "determine with full knowledge of the futility of its former attempts, to pursue the death of Others"; it is "the hate of all Others in one Other".[50] I t is the complete negation of being other than me. And sadism " is an effort to incarnate the Other through violence"[51] Both attitudes, Sartre warned people, will lead to "failure" and ultimately be unable to realise the full goal of my relationship with the Other.[52] This failure originates in the eternal inapprehensibility of the Other.

There is no any to know the Other as subject; every subject can spontaneously prove the subjectivity of the self but cannot enter the territory of the subjectivity of the Others. As Sartre pointed out,

> The Other is on principle inapprehensible; he feels me when I seek him
> and possesses me when I flee him. Even if I should want to act according
> to the precepts of Kantian Morality and take the Other's freedom as an

unconditioned and, still this freedom would become a transcended by the mere fact that I make it my goal. On the other hand, I could act for his benefit only by utilizing the Other as object as an instrument in order to realize this freedom....Thus respect for the other's freedom is an empty word; even if we could assume the project of respecting this freedom, each attitude which we adopted with respect to the other would be a violation of that freedom which we claimed to respect".[53]

Thus, on the basis of denying Kant's ethics, Sartre tells us that negative interpersonal subject-object relationship are a contingent fact which is insurmountable; I cannot realize inter-subjective relationships with the Other;

for the assimilation of the for-itself and the Other in a single transcendence would necessarily involve the disappearance of the characteristics of otherness in the Other. Thus the condition on which I project the identification of myself with the Other is that I persist in denying that I am Other. Finally this project of unification is the source of conflict since while I experience myself as an object for the Other and while I project assimilating him in and by means of this experience, the Other apprehends me as an object in the midst of the world and does not project identifying me with himself.[54]

That is to say, intersubjective assimilation is not only impossible but can only lead to conflict; I and the Other lack the necessary agreement, reciprocal apprehension of subjectivity does not exist between people. Hence, according to Sartre, there is no way that the existing structure of the " We-subject" in the human world can become a fact, it can only have a relative reality in the sense of man's relationship with nature. In a word in Sartre's eyes intersubjective relationships can only be mutual objectification.

It is worth noting that in later works Sartre added the concepts of "reciprocity" to attenuate his earlier views. But he also wrote this :

We must not suppose that we have entered the kingdom of the ends and that in reciprocity, everyone recognizes and treats the Other as an absolute end. This would formally be possible only in so far as everyone treated himself, or treated the human person in himself, as an unconditioned end.[55]

Even this only formally possible reciprocity needs four preconditions :

Reciprocity implies, first, that the Other is a means to the extent that I myself am a means, that is to say that the Other is the means of a transcendent end and not my means ; second, that I recognize the Other as paxis, that is to say, as a developing totalization, at the same time as integrating him as an object into my totalizing project; third, that I recognize his movement toward his own ends in the same movement by which I project myself toward mine; and fourth, that I discover myself as an object and instrument of his ends through the same act which constitutes him as an objective instrument of my ends. [56]

It is difficult to see that these four conditions of reciprocity have certain similarities to Kant's four examples. The first two can be categorized as other-oriented, expressing the mode of dealing with the other to gauge the self, while the latter two are self-oriented, expressing the mode of dealing with the self to gauge the Other. A temporary mutuality is formally achieved through the juxtaposed orientation of the self and the Other. Sartre further noted that within these four preconditions mutuality can also give rise to two situations, the first being the affirmation of mutuality. In this situation, I and the Other become means for one another's transcendent ends, but these ends retain their separateness and the ends of the self can only be realized if people can rely on collective effort. The second situation is the negation of mutuality. In this situation, the four preconditions are mutually exclusive and each person refuses to act as the means for the Other's ends; this is struggle. Each person impersonates the Other's object through such means as subterfuge, schemes and lies, actually seeking the negation of the Other's ends. This understanding made it difficult for Sartre's humanistic ethics to ever lose its pessimistic aura, and even led him to insist, for a long time, on the impossibility of a universal human morality. What is puzzling though is that Sartre in his later years also optimistically discussed love relationships between people and even argued that "mine is your, yours is mine...this is the morality of the future".[57] Clearly Sartre's thought was no match for Kant in terms of maintaining theoretical consistency and rigour ; though Kant too was no match for Sartre in terms of the realism and concreteness of his thought.

Having gone through the two master's exposition of the ends and relationships of moral subjects, we have discovered at least the following distinctions:

(1) Different standards for the moral subject. Kant's moral subject is whole, abstract and universal, while Sartre's is individual, concrete and isolated. (2) Different proofs for the moral subject. The common goal of the two is to confirm the moral subject's superiority and dignity but the results of their efforts are widely divergent. For Kant, the teleology of the subject lay in its nature as a rational being, "man is the end" refers to the shared and alternating teleologies between subjects. Though Sartre also stressed the supreme teleology of the subject, his division of the subject into individuals rejecting one another led to negative conclusions about intersubjective moral relations which held that the reality of inter-personal relations is mutual objectivication, and even to the conclusion that "hell is Others"[58] (3) Different conclusions about the moral relationships of subjects. In Kant's theory, moral relationships between subjects are positive, mutual, unified and idealized. But with Sartre these relationships can only be antagonistically termed unequal relationships of "subject==object" and are negative, incommensurable, exclusive and inapprehensible.

Although Kant's and Sartre's theories about the ends and relationships of moral subjects aimed at elevating the status of the moral subject, they led to different theoretical tendencies because of the difference in their standards and proofs of the subject. Kant's humanistic ethics tended towards holism and what was elevated was a civilized stage of reason, while Sartre's tended toward an individualistic ethical view so that was what the empirical individual set in modern Western society. Consequently, Kant appears to have come close the the truth of human ethical relationships in general theoretical terms, while Sartre appears to have been the more honest of the two about the contemporory social backgrounds into which he was placed.

III

The preliminary comparative analysis of the humanistic ethical ideas of Kant and Sartre has provided the necessary suggestions of their different features and endpoints which we shall now summarise briefly from the vantage point of methodology, and then scan the changing course of modern Western ethical thought to discover the path of establishing and perfecting a scientific humanistic ethics.

1. *Rationalism and Irrationalism*

Rationalism and Irrationalism are one set of features which fundamentally distinguish the humanistic ethics of Kant and Sartre, but also methodological reasons which led the two head off in different directions in the course of constructing humanistic ethics. As a pioneer of German Enlightenment Philosophy Kant hoisted high the philosophical banner of rationalism. To be sure, Kant was more indebted to the inspiration of Rousseau's liberal ideas in creating his ethics, but Kant's perspective on freedom was not based on naturalism or individual freedom; rather, he used reason to supplant Rousseau's category "Nature". Reason, by making the subject a being whose essence went beyond the realm of nature, freed it from the restraints of natural physical desires so that it enjoyed the superior moral dignity of an autonomous will and obtained its own teleology, and also set up moral relationships of shared ends and alternating subjectivity. This innovative rationalist feature in fact took the modern Western rationalist ethical tradition which began with Descartes to a new height and undoubtedly represented more thoroughgoing rationalist leap beyond those earlier moralists who were content with simply elevating reason to the detriment of sensation, as well as being one of the important reasons why Kant was capable of completing the construction of his humanistic ethics. It should also be recognised that the ethical characteristics of such rationalism were a complex theoretical reflection of Kant's time and social background. The stress on rationalism in particular was a theoretical reflex of the intellectual enlightenment and moral ideals of the weak late eightieth counterary German petty bourgeoisie which was subject to the rule of the stronger feudal monarchy of Prussia.

In contrast to Kant, Sartre opted for a typical irrationalist course, which as the ontological basis of his ethics of the free subject led him into ethical opposition to Kant. On the one hand, Sartre reduced human existence and action to the level of unreasoning psychological behaviour, eliminating the introspective guiding role of human reason in moral conduct. Although Sartre took this position to eradicate " determinism", he simultaneously also removed the positive meaning of reason vis-a-vis human morality and completely reduced ethics to the empirical observation and psychological description of man's being and activity. In fact Sartre explicitly equated the science of human ethics to "existential psychoanalysis".[59] On the other hand, Sartre firmly denied the use of reason

(knowledge) to explain the interrelationships between subjects. Having sharply criticised those such as Hegel and Husserl who use rational concepts or knowledge to explain relationships between things (men), he argued :

> My relation to the other is first and fundamentally a relation of being to being, not of knowledge to knowledge. We have seem Husserl's failure when on this particular level he measures being by knowledge, and Hegel's when he identifies knowledge and being.[60]

To reduce my relationship with others to a relationship between being is in fact to eliminate the factor or reason in human relationships. And this Relation of being to being" becomes the naked collision and convergency of interpersonal psychological feelings and actions, exposing interpersonal relations and exchange to a psychic realm of being. This approach which unilaterally rejected reason led Sartre to a constricted understanding between peoples. To be sure, such a view for Sartre living in the capitalist epoch of the twentieth century was really a courageous exposure of the life and society before him, and to a certain degree, it authentically portrayed contemporary Western society, especially the general psychology of French Civil Society which has experienced the depredations of two World Wars. If Kant's ethics can be seen as the embodiment of the moral ideals of the eigthteenth century German bourgeoisie, then it is probably not unreasonable to concur with the formulation of the Western commentators who suggested that Sartre's existentialist ethics is "psychologically understandable in terms of the social and political upheavals of the twentieth century"[61]

However, it must be pointed out that Sartre stopped at the direct experience of the real life of Modern Western Society and the psychological description of the phenomena of interpersonal relations. Thus he was perplexed by the malignant development of human relations under capitalism and people's (abnormal) psychological expressions. Still, he would not be said to have transcended his time and class in order to get a scientific understanding of the phenomenon of moral life, except that he was able to theorize and universalize some psychological states of human society. And this, perhaps, was the most stumbling block to what commentators have referred to as his own "monograph on ethics".

As can be seen from the comparative analysis above, the common intent but differing results of the ethical thought from Kant to Sartre has brought into

prominence a fundamental tendency and law of the evolution of Western ethics from early modern to modern times, viz. the turn from rationalism toward irrationalism. If we extend the field of vision just a trifle, we soon discover two major turning points in the history of modern Western ethics: (1) The change from the rationalist ethics which went from Desecrates to Kant and Hegel to irrationalist ethics which began with Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and affected Bergson, Sartre, Freud and others; and (2) The change from the Western traditional normative ethics toward modern metaethics, which began early this century when the Anglo-American trend of analytic ethics (pioneered by G.E. Moore) transformed ethics into a type of purely linguistic logical analysis, the so-called metaethics. The two changes constitute two fundamental threads in the development of modern Western ethics. And the correspondences of Kant's and Sartre's ideas on humanistic ethics typically reflect the former tendency of change.

2.   *Idealism and Realism*

While rationalism and irrationalism represent one way to grasp the fundamental approaches and characteristics of the humanistic ethical ideas of Kant and Sartre, idealism and realism offer another difference in style which one finds for assessing their humanistic ethical ideas in terms of (the history of) ethics.

We are persuaded by the position that rationalism need not lead to idealistic characteristics for ethics; but it also cannot be denied that the rationalist tradition in Western ethical thought has usually led ethical thinkers to incline toward idealistic portrayals of human morality, imbuing their ethics with idealism. Such was the case from Plato to Kant. Conversely, empirical (perceptual or psychological) principles caused these thinkers' moral theories to display more of realistic quality, as has been the case, apparently without exception from the early modern British empiricists to the modern day existentialists.

Kant's humanistic ethics was without doubt redolent with the spirit of idealism. He made freedom the starting point of his entire thinking on humanistic ethics, yet the idealisation of this starting point grounded the moral subject simplified into a rational being in this *a priori* postulate. Contrariwise, Kant's free subject was the embodiment of a moral ideal which had lost all the elements of perceptual

experience through *a priori* philosophical shifting; this subject transcended natural desires and calculation of interest, understood and supported universal moral principles, had a conscious knowledge of the subject's shared goals and alternating subjectivity, grasped the principle of the autonomy of the will - in a word, Kant's moral person was a rationalized, idealized pure subject.

Consequent on this Kant stressed the autonomy of the subject's will, yet the results of actions were excluded from moral values, "autonomy" being understood solely as an internal motivation; the subject's freedom was no more than a purely intellectual freedom and spiritual independence. This truly give a hint of the politically idealistic ethics of eighteenth century Germany. [62] Kant's kingdom of ends" which followed from this could not but reflect this quality of idealistic ethics. In general, it reflected to some degree a moral prospect and model for the self-development mankind, as well as the ideal and transcendent nature which morality alone possessed. However, Kant seriously disregarded the objective empirical factors in the moral life of mankind and denied the objectively necessary connections between human moral phenomena and the material life (economic interests) of society, transforming this idealized humanistic ethics into an abstract postulate beyond reality, time and class.

In contrast to Kant, Sartre always stood on the ground of real life, seeking an understanding of the subject's morality in the concrete individual's "design" and actions, and brought out ethics' realistic qualities. However, what concerned him was simply the psychoanalysis of the harsh reality for the individual in the terrible circumstances of Western society. As a Scholar has cogently pointed out,

> ....a deeply prejudiced moralist, Sartre rejected the transtructural status of conscious formations interlinked with prefabricated ' moral systems'... his was an ethics interlinked with individual praxis.[63]

That is to say, Sartre's humanistic ethics was not a Kantian style assumption about "ought" but was direct reflection on the individual's real existences and actions.

And yet the sense of realism in Sartre's ethical ideas was extremely narrow, representing as it did an experience and iteration of people's lives in the postwar West rather than expressing strong qualities of realism. What should give one

food for thought is that these different qualities of Kant and Sartre seem to similarly represent the two polar tendencies of idealism and realism in the development of Western ethical thought. Considered more broadly, these divergent tendencies' biases reflect the epochal qualities and social demands of the two different historical stages of the bourgeoisie's initial and current development. Nevertheless, both Kant and Sartre were unable to avoid the divergences of the polar movements' specifically, they like all bourgeois moralists, were unable to understand, or show in a more explicit term, the contradiction between the ideal and the real. While Kant's ethics may be said to have resembled a patch of blue sky which people could see but not touch, Sartre's ethical ideas were like a turbid stream from which people recoiled and did not dare enter; neither was able to offer us a real path to the ideal.

3.   *Holism and Individualism*

Holism and individualism are yet another set of qualities which mark the dividing line between the humanistic ethical ideas of Kant and Sartre. Since Kant set out to construct his humanistic ethics starting from universal human freedom he cast his eyes even more on the whole rational being. Superficially, the underlying reality of Kant's ethics was nothing but a moral enlightenment for individual liberation; actually, what Kant focused on was a holistic, classiest and socially civilized freedom for the moral subject. His kingdom of reason and system of alternating ends were, in fact, german Burgertum in the initial stage of capitalist civilization. Therefore, when he spoke of the different starting points for his own and Rousseau's ethics, he said that Roussean began with "natural man" while he started out from "civilized man".[64]   On this matter the founders of Marxism incisively pointed out that Kant's ethics remained an abstract, universalized good will, which expressed the common aspirations of the German bourgeoise of his time.

Although the "composition of an alternating subjectivity" was also a professed goal of Sartre's humanistic ethics. [65] Sartre never recognized the real possibilities of alternating human subjectivity. He had an excessive faith in the individual's absolute freedom and denied that there existed any common essence between individuals or intersubjective links. Each person was a sacred world of potentialities, mutually incomprehensible and impenetrable. Even in his later

years when discussing the relationship between the self and other, Sartre firmly maintained : "I would rather say others than interreleationships".[66] To be sure, Sartre also frequently proclaimed that he conceived the individual as a "totality" and even said :

> our goal is to form a genuine whole, within which each component will
> be an individual person and collectives will be collectives of people. [67]

However, Sartre's totalistic conception was no more than an existentialist interpretation of the "transiency" of individual existence (by yardstick of past, present and future) and of the structures of multiple existences (the in-itself, for-itself and for-others), whose basic point was still the individual; " the other", the "collective" and "society "were all satellites orbiting around the sun and the self.

IV

It can be seen from the foregoing that these two outstanding ethical thinkers, though living in different times, shared the common goal of wanting to construct a humanistic ethics and actually did contribute a number of valid insights. But basically, their work fell short of the boundaries of science. We say this because their different positions lack a scientific methodological foundation; hence they were unable to resolve such basic theoretical questions in ethics as freedom and necessity, ends and means, and the self and the other, nor were they able to overcome correctly the antinomies which have persisted for so long in Western ethical-philosophical investigation. This shortcoming confirms that in the establishment of a scientifically-derived humanistic ethics neither abstract freedom (Kant) nor concrete individual freedom (Sartre) can resolve the dialectical relationship between the subject's own teleology and instrumentality or subjectivity and objectivity. So while the foundation of authentic humanistic ethics really should be the freedom of the subject, the rules of this subject must have recourse to the concrete historical unity of the human individual and society (the collective), and freedom must be founded on and awareness of the objectively necessary nature of human society and human society and human moral relationship. Only in this way can humanity's subjective goals, behaviour and their moral relationships be finally understood and all of humanity's moral phenomena be fully explained and understood.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The reason for the uniqueness of moral phenomena (including) those that are Psychological, emotional, conscious, relational, behaviour, and theoretical is that they posses peculiar properties differentiating them from other everyday phenomena, and theoretical study of vantage point of human subjectivity. With reference to this point it should be noted that even today it appears that insufficient attention has been paid to the many important insights offered by Kant, Sartre and others who have labouriously studied the matter, with the result that our intellectual vision has been restricted to the palace of narrow empiricism or even common sense, with no way out.

2. See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism Is a Humanism" in *Existentialist Philosophy*, (Beijing, Shangwun Yinshuguan, 1963). p. 356

3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, (Beijing : Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1960), p. 24

4. Immanuel Kant : *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, (tr. by H. J. Paton). (London : Hutchinson's University Library, 1948, p. 57.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 57

6. *Ibid.*, p. 116

7. See Norman N. Greene Jean-Paul Sartre. *The Existentialist Ethics* (Ann Arbor : University of Michigan Press, 1960) p.7.

8. See S.E. Stumpf, *Socrates to Sartre : A History of Philosophy*, 2nd Ed., (New York : McGraw Hill, 1975).p. 23

9. *Existentialist Philosophy.*, p. 337.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

11. Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nathingness* (Tr. By H. Barmes), London, Menthuen, 1958), p. 439.

12.   *Ibid.*, p. 486.

13.   *Ibid.*, p. 479.

14.   *Ibid.*, p. 38. Emphasis added

15.   *Ibid.*, p. 225, Emphasis added.

16.   A number of Western Commentators have noticed his point and have made a distinction between " ontological freedom" and situational freedom". See Margart Whitford, Merleau-ponty's *Critique of Sartre's Philosophy,* (French Forum Publishers, 1982), ch. 3

17.   See *A Collection of Contemporary Western Philosophy*, Beijing Sanlian Shudian, 1981), p. 264

18.   *Existentialist Philosophy* p . 479.

19.   G Lukacs, *Existentialism or Marxism ?* (Beijing : Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1962), p. 85.

20.   Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 30

21.   *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.*, p. 70.

22.   *Ibid.*, 71.

23.   *Ibid.*, 96

24.   *Ibid.*, p. 98

25.   *Ibid.*, p. 95

26.   Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Beijing, Shangwu Yinshugaun, 1962), pp. 89-94.

27.   *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, PP. 96-98

28.   This refers primarly to the debates over ethics between Hobbes and his followers vs the Cambridge Platonists and those English moralists in the 17th and 18th centuries who, like Hume, based ethics on the emotions, the central point of controversy was whether self-interest or altruism was primary or superior. In Zbang, Haishan, *A History of Western Ethical Thought*, rev. (Beijing, Renimin Chubanshe, 1984), pp. 261-73.

29. Cg. Li. Zebou *Critique of Critical Philosophy,* rev., ed., (Beijing : Renmin Chubanshe, 1984, pp. 291-292.

30. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.* p. 98.

31. *Ibid.,*p. 100

32 *Ibid.,*

33. See George, Stack, *Sartre's Philosophy of Social Existence,* (New York :1977, p. 9

34. Quoted in P.A. Schilpp (ed), *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Lasalle Ilinois, 1982) p. 38.

35. *Ibid.,* p. 371.

36. See the concluding chapter of *Being and Nothingness,* pp. 617-628.

37. Quoted in *A Collection of Contemporary Western Philosophy,* p. 263.

38. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectial Reason* (tr. by Alan S. Sheridan-Smith, London,, New Brooks, 1976, p. 98.

39. *Being and Nothingness,* p. 225

40. *Ibid.,* p.243.

41. *Ibid.,* p. 244

42. *Ibid.,* p. 282.

43. *Ibid.,* p.297.

44. *Ibid.,* p.299.

45. *Ibid.,* p.367.

46. *Ibid.,* p. 372.

47. *Ibid.,* p. 378.

48. *Ibid.,* p. 380.

49. *Ibid.,* p. 382.

50. *Ibid.,* p. 400-411

51.   *Ibid.*, p. 399.

52.   *Ibid.*, p. 363.

53.   *Ibid.*, pp. 408-409

54.   *Ibid.*, pp. 365-66

55.   Alan Sheridan-Smith, *op. cit.* p. 112.

56.   *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

57.   Quoted in *A Collection of Contemporary* Western Philosophy, p. 271.

58.   Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit* (Huis Clos), New York : Knopf, 1947).

59.   See *Being and Nothingness.* pp. 568-575.

60.   Fredrick Coplestone, *Contemporary Philosophy,* rev. ed, (London Search Press, 1972), p. 203.

62.   See *Marx and Engels* (Collected Works : Progress Publishers, 1976), Vol. V. p. 195.

63.   Schilpp, *Op. cit.* p. 364.

64.   See *A Biography of Kant,* (Beijing : Shagwau Yinshuguan, 1981), p. 46.

65.   See Miches Theuissen, *The Other,* (tr. by C. Mccann), (Machester : 1984), p. 230.

66.   *A Collection of Contemporary Philosophy,* p. 263.

67.   *Ibid.*, p. 260.