

The Existential Manipulation of Freedom in Sartre's *No Exit*

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Abstract: *Sartre's belief that God is dead does not imply that God has never existed or is not there now. It indicates that God does not have roles to play in people's lives, which generates and inspires humans' freedom and the consequent sense of responsibility. This unique association between the death of God, on the one hand, and freedom and responsibility, on the other, constitutes the spine of Sartre's No Exit (1989). Thus, this paper examines Sartre's No Exit (1989) in terms of his Being and Nothingness (1969) and Existentialism Is a Humanism (2007). The paper deciphers several scenes through which Sartre's freedom-oriented viewpoints are articulated, concluding that Sartre's characters in this play are entirely free due to their belief in the death of God. Yet, they are not ready to acknowledge their freedom due to its inevitable association with anguishing responsibility.*

Keywords: death of God, existentialism, freedom, *No Exit*, responsibility, Sartre

1. Introduction

Existentialists claim that individuals have the complete freedom in concern with their existence, as evident in Sartre's belief that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre 2007:5). This viewpoint indicates that humans first exist then choose what to be and what to do, unlike objects whose essences are determined before they are manufactured. Therefore, it is not an option for humans not to choose, not to make a choice, or decide what to or not to do because not choosing is by itself a choice. Sartre says, "choice is possible, but what is not possible is not to choose. I can always choose, but I must know that if I do not choose, that is still a choice" (Sartre 2007:17). While this seems a privilege for many people, it is a misery for those aware that absolute freedom cannot be experienced or practiced without bearing the responsibility, which makes individuals anxious and causes them to view their existence pessimistically. When making and avoiding making decisions become equivalents, individuals become desperate and frustrated, and life becomes very pessimistic.

This viewpoint potentially suggests that Sartre's Existentialism, which emphasizes the association of freedom and responsibility, is pessimistic and that life is made of exasperating components and conditions. Regardless of the rationale of such a perspective, the association of freedom and responsibility is a puzzle to resolve rather than to take as unquestionable. To this end, it is necessary to point out that Sartre's existential belief in the death of God denotes the absence of the role

and value of God in humans' life, which entails that "humans become able to create their own rules and values out of nothing" (Zuraikat & Mashreqi 2020:3). This suggests that a holistic understanding of Sartre's viewpoint of freedom and responsibility demands decoding the association between these two concepts, on the one hand, and the existential belief in the death of God, on the other. Relying on Sartre's viewpoint of freedom as well as the death of God as articulated in his *Being and Nothingness* (1969), this paper reads *No Exit* (1989), emphasizing how the belief in the death of God may lead to freedom. Also, it explains how that freedom inevitably involves responsibility, which sometimes causes humans to rely on "bad faith" as a defense mechanism to escape the burden associated with responsibility and consequently justify their (mis-)deeds. To better contextualize this reading, the following section provides an overview of the related literature. The third section of the paper examines Sartre's definition of freedom in terms of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. The fourth section discusses the organism of freedom and responsibility in *No Exit* and its association with the death of God.

2. Review of related literature

Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* "is centrally important both as a crucial text applying the philosophical precepts that dominated the post-World War II era and as a formulation of a new kind of drama that significantly influenced the theater in the second half of the 20th century" (Mambrol 2020:para.2). As Sartre remarks, "Relations with other people, encrustation, and freedom...are the three themes of the play. I should like you to remember this when you hear that hell is other people" (Burt 2007:411). Thus, readers of Sartre usually view this play as an articulation of several existential concepts and precepts, such as existence, essence, freedom, responsibility, and bad faith. Akram Amiri Senejani (2013), for instance, contends that "The play's central themes of freedom and responsibility come from Sartre's doctrine that 'existence precedes essence'" (p.22). Explaining how humans' consciousness defines their existence and consequently provides them with "the ability to choose and define their individual characteristics, or essence" (p.22), Senejani (2013) states that the three main characters of *No Exit* are ironically responsible for restricting each other's freedom and responsibility, thus constituting the defining factors of their essence. He writes,

Garcin is unable to leave the room when the door opens. He can't handle the responsibility of confronting his decision to flee his country, and thus leaves it up to Ines to judge him and define his essence. Similarly, Estelle does not think that she exists unless she looks in a mirror, seeing herself as others do. When Ines pretends to be her mirror and says Estelle has a pimple on her face, Estelle's bad faith causes her to accept someone else literally creating her essence (p.23).

Concluding his argument, Senejani (2013) says, "*No Exit*, as an intense and compressed dramatic parable, presents the core existential truth that each individual must ultimately face self-truth and consequence, forced to an inescapable encounter with others who provide the measure for moral judgment" (p.23).

Similarly, Hilal Kaya (2019) examines Sartre's existential concepts found in

No Exit, such as "existence, essence, freedom, angst, and absurd ...'being-for-itself', 'being-for-other', 'isolation and claustrophobic existence'" (pp.577-578). He explains that *No Exit* contends "that although we are ultimately in charge of defining our essence, this right is compromised when in the company of another being-for-itself" (2019:583). This suggests that having three characters trapped in the same room inevitably "compromises an individual's notion of inherent freedom by unavoidably becoming objectified by that person or persons, for better or for worse" (p.583). Consequently, instead of enjoying the pleasure of being accessible and act accordingly, each character in *No Exit* suffers anguish. The three main characters realize that "they are forced to freely walk the Earth and only make decisions for themselves. Anguish acts as the concern upon realizing that individuals are forced to act upon this notion of free will" (Kaya 2019:585).

In the same vein, Gary Cox (2009) states that *No Exit* is all about the impact of the existence of other people on the essence of one's existence. Cox (2009) writes,

The existence of other people and the profound and often disturbing impact that their existence has on the nature and value of our own personal existence. In short, he [Sartre] wants to examine the phenomenon of being-for-others... A person is his being-for-others, but he is it over there for the Other. The Other only has to look at him to take possession of at least a part of what he is. Under the Gaze of the Other he is made to be responsible for what the Other sees (p. 137).

This viewpoint suggests that *No Exit* displays the concepts of freedom and responsibility considering "the power of the gaze", which is "the definition of eternal damnation ... these three individuals will never again fully be able to develop their functions due to the influence of the watchful eye of the additional inhabitants of the room" (Kaya 2019:583).

Obviously, the various viewpoints of Mambrol (2020), Kaya (2019), Senejani (2013), and Cox (2009) agree that freedom and responsibility in *No Exit* reflect an extension of the Sartre's existential principle of "existence precedes essence" and "the power of the gaze". They all confirm that *No Exit* is to show how freedom is the backbone of humans who are aware of their freedom and the consequent responsibility. Thus, they view others as the main threat against their freedom, which may influence their decisions and turn them into objects. Whether this constitutes a state of "positive" or "negative" freedom, in Isaiah Berlin's words (1969), the many readings of freedom and responsibility in *No Exit* do not pay considerable attention to the association of the death of God, on the one hand, and the concepts of freedom and responsibility, on the other. Thus, this paper contends that *No Exit* views the concepts of freedom and responsibility as an extension of Sartre's notion of the death of God. To better understand this, the following section concisely addresses Sartre's concept of freedom.

3. Sartre's concept of freedom

Sartre views freedom as a necessity for the existence of man. He argues that no man is not free and that man and freedom cannot be defined separately. He writes,

"freedom is not a faculty of the human soul to be envisaged and described in isolation" (Sartre 1969:25). For Sartre, all people's acts are the results of the decisions made by people themselves rather than by God. People do what they like or what they think they like, and no entity or power can decide what they should do or decide. In other words, a human's existence inevitably involves freedom; therefore, humans are always free, and there is no such thing called a slave, for instance.

In his *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1969) states that "Man cannot be sometimes slave and sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all" (p.441). While this statement may suggest that there are two categories of people regarding freedom (i.e., free and slaves), it is noteworthy that Sartre believes that every slave is a slave due to his own will and decisions. This indicates that by saying an individual is either "wholly and forever free or he is not free at all" (Sartre 1969:441), Sartre contends that man is always free and that being "not free" opposes man's existence and therefore is not an option at all. In his "Preface to the Deutsche Gramaphon recording of *No Exit*", Sartre says, "Whatever the circle of hell in which we live, I think we are free to break out of it. And if people do not break out, they stay there of their own free will. In this way they choose to live in hell" (qtd. in Contat & Rybalka 1976:199).

An individual born as a slave is free, as his essence does not precede his existence. It is he who chooses slavery by accepting to live as a slave. Sartre writes, "the slave in chains is as free as his master" (1969:550). While this does not mean that a slave and his master have the same level of freedom that enables them to behave in the same ways freely, it suggests that no one is freer than the other: "the slave in chains is free to break them," and he can choose whether "to remain a slave or to risk the worst in order to get rid of his slavery" (1969:550). Sartre gives an example of a worker back in the 1830s. That worker could have rebelled to improve his situation but did never believe that "to suffer and to be are one and the same" (1969:435). What prevents the worker from rebelling against his hard conditions is not the lack of freedom or the lack of choices. It is probably due to his inability to recognize his conditions or options, or it is due to his preference not to bring himself to see his choices because he does not believe in his own freedom. Besides, the worker potentially believes that suffering alone "cannot be in itself a motive for his acts [towards change]" (Sartre, 1969:435) and that it is natural for him, as a worker, to suffer and comply with the system, which defines him in terms of his suffering and obedience.

However, the difference between the master's freedom-oriented demeanor and that of the slave is attributed by Sartre to the two phases or forms of being, namely the being-in-itself and the being-for-itself. Sartre believes that while the being-in-itself is not conscious, the being-for-itself is conscious. The being-in-itself refers to the phenomenon that "can on no account act upon consciousness" (Sartre 1969:Ixiv), which makes it neither active nor passive. This being is static and does not change; it "is never anything but what it is" (Sartre 1969:Ixvi). This belongs to objects that cannot be anything other than what they are, as their essences are

unchanging. Therefore, an object is not conscious about what it is; it just exists, and it can never change into another object, as it cannot redefine itself or change the essence that exists before it does. Therefore, it has nothing to do with freedom.

The being-for-itself is the opposite of the being-in-itself in terms of consciousness and essence. This type of being is conscious of what it is, what it is not, and what others are. This being is that of human beings who are aware of what they are. Unlike the being-in-itself, the being-for-itself is active, and the essence of this part of being is never static and is constantly changing. Sartre assigns three requirements for the being-for-itself: "(1) to not be what it is, (2) to be what it is not, (3) to be what it is not and to not be what it is" (1969:137). Sartre explains that the being-for-itself is not always, what it is, and it does not have a fixed definition for itself, which explains why no individual has a fixed essence.

Elaborating on the consciousness of the being-for-itself, Sartre confirms that "all consciousness, as Husserl has shown, is the consciousness of something" (Sartre 1969:li), which means that consciousness "has no content" (Sartre 1969:li). Consciousness cannot exist without being conscious of something; therefore, it is nothing until there is something to be conscious of. When that thing is there, then the being-for-itself redefines it without being stuck to its previous definitions for itself, thus recreating itself at every possible point. As the being-for-itself becomes conscious of another being, it then creates itself through being conscious of what it is not. Man cannot become anything before he is conscious of something, and he cannot be anything before he exists. By creating his essence after he exists, a human is free to be whatever he wants through his choices and consciousness.

Sartre clarifies this situation by referring to the determinists' claim that "there is no action without a cause and that the most insignificant gesture (raising the right hand rather than the left hand, etc.) refers to causes and motives which confer its meaning upon it" (1969:436). Arguing that there cannot be an action without a motive, Sartre states that the worker's misery and suffering do not constitute a motive since the worker believes it is natural for him to suffer. The worker cannot have a motive unless he can view the end he wishes to reach, for "the motive is only understood by the end; that is, by the non-existent" (Sartre 1969:437). Thus, instead of having a motive to act and revolt, the worker might ironically have the motive to keep his stance, which is probably the "fear of dying from starvation" (Sartre 1969:437). In short, the worker does have choices, and he makes the decisions that correspond with his motive, which is basically to keep his job at any cost. For further clarification, the following section displays how Sartre introduces freedom and responsibility in *No Exit* as defining factors of humans, and how such concepts are inevitably associated with the concept of the death of God.

4. Discussion

Garcin, Inez, and Estelle in Sartre's *No Exit* find themselves locked after death in an empty room in hell for eternity by a Valet. In the beginning, each of the three characters denies the responsibility for any crimes or sins that may have caused him/her to be imprisoned in such a place. Later, Inez asks the other two to stop lying and confess their responsibility for such damnation. Inez is satisfied that her crimes/sins have nothing to do with any external influence or power, including God;

therefore, it is better to confess such crimes and bear the responsibility. On the other hand, Garcin and Estelle are not willing to bear the burden of responsibility; therefore, they dodge against confessing their crimes for a while. This conflict of perspective is central to the development of the play, as it points to the interaction of willingness and freedom with responsibility and anguish, which can never take place without believing in the death of God.

According to Nietzsche, "as long as God exists, a subject which overcomes itself cannot come into being" (Lackey 1999:737). Believing that God oversees, controls, and decrees everything suggests that humans are not free and should never, therefore, be viewed as responsible for anything. Analogically, enjoying the freedom and suffering the burden of responsibility constitutes ultimate pieces of evidence that God is dead. Noteworthy here is that the death of God in this context "is not the negation or denial of God" (Foale 2000:74). Rather, it is a moral necessity that allows "rationality ... to be man's proper nature through which he frees himself from prejudice and false opinion in the pursuit of the true and the good" (Roney 2013: 95). Thus, Inez asks Garcin and Estelle to talk as free individuals who acknowledge their belief in the death of God and who are ready to bear the responsibility of their deeds, as humans' existence and authenticity demand for adopting such an approach.

Complying with the general guidelines of humans' existence, as theorized by Sartre, Inez, Garcin and Estelle start confessing their crimes, which inevitably involves declaring their belief in the death of God. They seem reluctant and cautious when practicing that game-like deed, but they have eventually found themselves "forced to define themselves through their macabre relationship" (Şafak 2014:20-21). They talk freely, thus giving each other the means to torture one another. The three characters torture each other by directly bothering one another or indirectly reminding each other that they could have chosen at one point to commit or not to commit their crimes and that their freedom of choice makes them responsible for the crimes they have committed. By having the belief that they could have decided not to commit their crimes, the three characters indirectly confirm their belief in the death of God. Nietzsche says, "Once a human being reaches the fundamental conviction that he must be commanded, he becomes 'a believer'. Controversially [sic], one could conceive of such a pleasure and power of self-determination, such a *freedom* of the will that the spirit would take leave of all faith and every wish of certainty (1974:347). Accordingly, the game-like interaction among Inez, Garcin and Estelle stems from their shared belief in the death of God.

Interestingly, the characters' belief in the death of God provides them with the opportunity to enjoy the pleasure of practicing freedom; simultaneously, it enables them to occupy the empty space created by the absence of God. Susan Foale explicates, "Nietzsche himself, however, alludes to man's wish, having killed God, to go beyond himself, to put himself where God was, thereby replacing the divine logos" (2000:73). This explains why Inez, Garcin and Estelle continue confessing their crimes despite the anguish resulting from confessing crimes or sins before other people. It seems that the level of pleasure associated with playing the role of

God is much greater than the level of pain associated with exposing oneself to other people's stings of criticism and derision. As Akram Senejani (2013) says, "*No Exit* is a play about the devouring gaze of the other and how it restricts one's freedom, incorporated into the play itself and played out on stage through the gaze of each other, while their failure is played out by the constant state of the play's spectators" (p.22).

The absence of God from the scene enables Garcin, Inez, and Estelle to observe each other, judge each other, and better understand the manifestations and reverberations of their freedom and responsibilities. At the beginning of the play, Garcin is brought to a hotel-like room by a Valet. That room is where Garcin and his companions are to get punished after death; yet, it is not made clear whether that place is part of hell. The room is viewed as part of reality -the reality of Garcin, a setting that overwhelms any possible association between the play's life-like actions and the presence or dominance of God or other deities. The presence of hell does not imply the presence of God since hell here seems to be a state of mind rather than a place. It is made of the "limits placed upon us by the very existence of free and conscious others" (Heim & Heim 2015:129). Thus, the only thing to consider regarding the setting at the beginning of *No Exit* is that it consists of a room that allows the three characters to always watch one another, thus continuously practicing torturing each other and suffering the consequences of this responsibility. In fact, "Estella needs to be fondled by Garcin, Garcin needs the trust of Inez who is not attracted by men, Inez wants Estella, but Estella finds Inez repulsive. Since their desires for one another remain unfulfilled, their interdependence- though it is one of hate -ensures an eternity of torture" (Şafak 2014:21).

In such a setting, humans are influenced "by the presence of another in such a manner that they immediately become aware of all 'gestures, and expression acts and conducts'" (Kaya 2019:583). In Sartre's words, "the subjectivity that we have thus arrived at, and which we have claimed to be truth, is not a strictly individual subjectivity, for we have demonstrated that one discovers in the cogito not only himself but others as well" (Sartre 2007:44). However, the play later introduces the reasons for locking up the three characters there, and it seems that Garcin, Inez, and Estelle are responsible for their imprisonment or damnation. "There is Garcin, an assassinated left-wing journalist and draft dodger who believes he's in hell because he mistreated his wife; Inez, a sadistic postal worker with a penchant for seducing other women; and Estelle, a pretty pampered debutante who killed her baby and drove the penniless father to suicide" (Bering 2008:1). God is not responsible for casting those characters in hell; rather, the several crimes committed by the three characters lead them to hell and cause them to get exposed to each other's stings.

Garcin, Inez, and Estelle are (*metaphorically*) dead; yet, their death does not point to the presence of God at all. From a religious perspective, man's death does not need to be caused or conducted by God. The act of finishing one's life, in several religions, is conducted by an angel. In Sikhism, for example, the angel of death is called Azrael, who "appears on earth in human form and hits sinful people on the head with his scythe to kill them and extract their souls from their bodies. Then he takes their souls to hell and makes sure that they get the punishment" (Guru

2015:166). In Islam, the angel of death is called Archangel Azrael, and he is responsible for "[separating] the soul from the body and [returning] it to God" (Guru 2015:166). In Judaism, the angel of death, who also has the same name, takes the life of a human by standing at his/her head with a sword, "to which clings a drop of gall. As soon as the dying man sees the angel, he is seized with a convulsion and opens his mouth, whereupon the angel throws the drop into it. This drop causes his death" (Singer & Adler 1964:481). In Christianity, "when people die, it is not because the Lord intervenes and takes the spirit from the body ... It [is simply] a natural process" (Jackson:para.8). Accordingly, the death of Garcin, Inez, and Estelle in *No Exit* is not to be attributed to God, but to other entities that exist and function without demanding the presence of God at all.

As evident in *No Exit*, Sartre does not ignore the fact that people die; simultaneously, he believes that as people exist independently, death exists independently. Thus, God does not control one's life, which involves one's choices, decisions, and responsibilities. Sartre writes:

God is dead. Let us not understand by this that he does not exist or even that he no longer exists. He is dead. He spoke to us and is silent. We no longer have anything but his cadaver. Perhaps he slipped out of the world, somewhere else like the soul of a dead man. Perhaps he was only a dream...God is dead (Sartre 2007:1).

This suggests that God exists but does not control or affect humans' freedom of choice, a viewpoint that proves that "Existentialism", as Sartre says, "isn't so atheistic that it wears itself out showing that God doesn't exist. Rather, it declares that even if God did exist, that would change nothing" (qtd. in Pomerleau 1997:430).

This existential perspective is clearly articulated in the life and death experiences of Garcin, Inez, and Estelle in *No Exit*. Garcin, who describes himself as a brave pacifist, has made several decisions before and after his death relying on his preferences rather than God's decree. It is Garcin himself who chooses to "launch a pacifist newspaper" other than any other job. He decides to get married and to be cruel to his wife. Garcin reports: "Here's something you can get your teeth into. I brought a half-caste girl to stay in our house. My wife slept upstairs; she must have heard everything. She was an early riser and, as I and the girl stayed in bed late, she served us our morning coffee" (p.25). In addition, it is his own will and decision to see his wife, who admires him, suffering; yet, "she never cried, never uttered a word of reproach" (p.24). Besides, Garcin's freedom is evident in his opting to leave his home and escape war, attributing that to his pacifist personality. Whether or not this is the real motivation of such decisions, it is undeniable that man entirely relies on his own free will rather than on God. Therefore, when the door of the room in hell is opened, Garcin is forced to neither stay nor leave. God does not impose any decision on Garcin, who eventually decides not to leave, "reasoning that his salvation lies in the room with Inez" (Bering 2008:6).

Likewise, God has no role in Inez' life and death experiences. She is a sadist lesbian who loves to torture others and cause them suffering. Inez has an affair with

her cousin's wife with whom Inez lives. Nonetheless, that affair with Florence does not prevent Inez from torturing the couple. She used to torture her cousin by encouraging his wife to leave him, and she tortures Florence by reminding her every day that they both have killed the man together. In hell, she keeps seducing Estelle and torturing Garcin by calling him a coward and by looking at them both through the gaze of the other. In fact, "Inez seems to know what is going on ... She is equally calm and clear about their situation ... It is Inez who first claims that the three will torture one another ... she is aware that most of the pain will be caused by her" (Webber 2011:50). Inez has always been free to choose and do whatever she wants; none of her choices, decisions, or deeds are determined by any external power. Everything stems from her own free will, which implies the death of God for her.

The same logic applies to Estelle, who decides to marry a wealthy man and betray him with young Roger. Upon getting pregnant by her lover Roger, she decides to drown the baby. When her lover commits suicide, she decides to go back to her husband before she finally dies. In hell, Estelle "initially denies that she belongs in Hell by forcing a false sense of innocence" (Kaya 2019:583). Ironically, she refuses Inez's seduction and chooses to seduce Garcin herself, thus practicing torture against both characters as well as herself, thus eventually proving herself as a torturer. In fact, her decisions and actions "not only caused the death of their respective executors but also directly affected and caused pain to others in the world [and in hell]" (Kaya 2019:584). Noteworthy here is that Estelle's choices and actions are made by her rather than by God or any other superior power; a state that testifies to her complete freedom as a direct consequence of the absence of God from her life experiences.

This productive absence of God is reinforced further by using the indefinite pronoun "they" in certain scenes where readers expect to find the word "God" or even the pronoun "He". After entering the room with the Valet, Garcin wonders: "Damn it all, they might have left me my toothbrush" (p.4)! The pronoun "they" suggests that Garcin is not aware of the authoritative figures (powers) that are responsible for imprisoning him in hell. Obviously, God is not mentioned, and it seems that Garcin is not viewing God as the supreme power that dominates heaven and hell. To complicate this notion, Garcin ironically asks about his "toothbrush", as if he is saying: if God oversees hell, then that God should pay careful attention to my toothbrush! Sartre is not only avoiding the presence of God in this scene; instead, he indirectly suggests that even if there is God, then that God should be responsible for certain silly tasks and roles no more.

Similarly, responding to Garcin's questions about the lights that cannot be turned off, the Valet says, "the management can cut off the current if *they* want to" (p.6). The referent of the pronoun "they" is not clear, and the word "management" does not necessarily refer to God, a group of Gods, or other certain entities. Even if God is the embedded referent here, then that God is responsible for the silly task of "cutting off the current". The same impression is emphasized in the scene where Inez comes into the room to find Garcin complaining: "how beastly of them! They've removed everything in the least resembling a glass" (p.9). The speaker criticizes the unknown group that controls that place, thus inspiring Estelle to

question the authoritativeness and logic of such a group. She says, "Really I can't imagine why they put us three together. It doesn't make sense" (p.13).

The several ironic phrases and statements expressed by Garcin, Inez, and Estelle to deny or undermine the presence of any God-like figures in that context indicate that those characters believe in the absence of God in favor of believing in their own free will. Yet, they are unable to avoid the association between free will and responsibility; therefore, their belief in the death of God causes them to suffer anguish. Through their choices, decisions, and deeds, the three characters have caused themselves to get cast in hell; therefore, they blame themselves rather than God for such a position. Through his conversation with the Valet, Garcin declares that he is aware of what is happening. He says,

All right, let's put our cards on the table. I assure you I'm quite conscious of my position.... A man's drowning, choking, sinking by inches, till only his eyes are just above water. And what does he see? A bronze atrocity by – what's the fellow's name? -Barbedienne. A collector's piece. As in a nightmare (pp.4-5).

The words "drowning", "choking", "sinking", "atrocity", and "nightmare" imply that the speaker is not happy. He feels annoyed probably with being in such a situation or with being conscious of his own responsibility and misery.

Likewise, Estelle is annoyed with her situation; therefore, she tries to leave the place when Inez and Garcin ask her about her life, choices, and actions. Similarly, Inez is annoyed with the slightest thing Garcin does, suggesting that she is in anguish. When Garcin twists his mouth, Inez says, "Remember you're not alone; you've no right to inflict the sight of your fear on me" (p.9). Inez is not interested in sharing her anguish with other people. At the same time, she prefers not to share other people their anguish. It seems that Inez is afraid of suffering "the eternal objectification of others" (Kaya 2019:585), which constitutes the main threat against one's inherent freedom. In fact, Sartre's three main characters in *No Exit* have experienced this fear from others. Garcin declares, "hell is - other people" (p.45). This statement, as Devaki Mirthula (2019) says, "remains as an immediate affirmation of the intensity of others" (p.172), considering that "The Other brings about in the individual the feeling of shame by fixing him/her with a 'look'" (Onwuegbuchulam 2014:34).

To escape this anguishing reality, Garcin and Estelle try to deny their responsibility for their past and actions, which constitutes a stance of "bad faith". Talking about his life experience before coming to hell, Garcin introduces himself as a brave and pacifist person -although he is seen as a coward by his companions before and after death. Estelle confirms that she has been forced to marry an older man after losing her parents and becoming responsible for bringing up her younger brother. She then explains that her choice to marry that rich man was the best and only option she has had; therefore, she should not get blamed for anything. When talking about Roger, the lover, she blames fate for causing her to fall in love with him. She says, "Then two years ago I met the man I was fated to love" (p.16). When talking about cheating on her husband, she boasts that she was loyal to him -as she

refused to escape with her lover. She reports, "he asked me to run away with him, and I refused" (p.16). Estelle thinks that denying the possession of the freedom to choose and decide may help her escape the burden of responsibility. Like Garcin's declaration that he is in hell by a fluke, Estelle confirms she is in hell by mistake. Challenged by Inez and Garcin to confess her crimes and accurately report on her past, Estelle responds: "Anyhow, isn't it better to believe we've got here by mistake?" (p.15).

As Estella and Garcin realize that freedom is inevitably associated with responsibility and that responsibility usually causes anguish, they start convincing themselves that their freedom has been victimized in the past by certain external conditions and powers. Estella and Garcin's technique of "bad faith" depends on creating and promoting the belief that humans are not completely free and that their decision-making capability gets sometimes influenced by certain external factors. For Sartre, "it was bad faith (self-deception) to try to coincide with our egos since the fact is that whatever we are we are in the manner of not being it due to the 'othering' nature of consciousness" (Flynn 2013:para.19). This technique may have provided both characters with the opportunity to say or feel that they are inculpable of anything in the past, but Inez seems dissatisfied with adopting a self-contradicting principle that acknowledges one's freedom and irresponsibility at the same time. In response to Estella and Garcin's absconding logic, Inez declares: "What's the point of play-acting, trying to throw dust in each other's eyes? We're all tarred with the same brush ... Yes, we are criminals-murderers-all three of us. We're in hell, my pets; they never make mistakes, and people aren't damned for nothing" (p.16). Inez is pretty sure that freedom resulting from believing in the death of God is always associated with anguish responsibility, thus denying that responsibility may lead to believing in the presence of God and eventually undermining the cornerstone of humans' existence and essence represented by freedom.

5. Conclusion

Garcin, Inez, and Estelle's life and death experiences have nothing to do with God, who is never given by Sartre in *No Exit* any considerable task to conduct. In this play, God does not define individuals' social values or moral orientations; "the Gaze of the Other" makes the individual "responsible for what the Other sees" (Cox 2009:137). This principle is praiseworthy, as it undermines Søren Kierkegaard's existential belief that "human beings have the potential to [recognize] themselves as spiritual selves. As such they should be properly related to God (as their creator and the source of their being), as well as to all others who are to be [recognized] and treated first and foremost as spiritual equals" (Smith 2007:182). Kierkegaard's viewpoint implies that humans' existence is defined by their spiritual relationship with God. On the contrary, Sartre suggests in *No Exit* that God has nothing to do with defining humans' existence. It is the responsibility of humans to define each other's essences and acknowledge their existence accordingly, which represents the concept of the death of God.

God in *No Exit* is dead; yet, his death potentially functions as the main foundation of the complete freedom experienced by Garcin, Inez, and Estelle. In

No Exit, the death of God is productive and inspiring, as it encourages humans to define their existence from their viewpoint rather than that of "the mega-narratives, such as the *Torah*, *Bible*, and *Qur'an*, which seek to manage life affairs and indirectly restrict humans' creativity or freedom" (Zuraikat & Mashreqi 2020:3). Towards the end of the play, Inez and Garcin talk about Garcin's past while Garcin explains that individuals are defined according to what they wish and will themselves to be. Inez responds: "Prove it. Prove it was no dream. It's what one does, and nothing else, that shows the stuff one's made of" (p.43). She then adds, "One always dies too soon __or too late. And yet one's whole life is complete at that moment, with a line drawn neatly under it, ready for the summing up. You are__ your life, and nothing else" (p.43). Inez clearly says that humans are completely free to choose and act the way they like without thinking or consulting with God. Thus, the death of God generates humans' freedom, which ironically causes anguish for those who realize that the cost of their freedom incorporates the burden of responsibility and "eternal damnation" represented by the gaze of Others (Kaya 2019:583).

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