

UNITED WISDOM

Existential Choice: Freedom and Circumstances in Sartre

Freedom and Action

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Epigraph

> *the moment of choice and action*

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), Part III, first section, the paragraph on the present. The RU fragment is our own translation. The epigraph belongs to Beauvoir, rather than Sartre: her criticism of detached contemplation identifies a separate voice in discussing existential choice.

What this article is about

Some decisions remain difficult after information has been gathered. Two paths are available within different limits, each protects something important, and a rule does not completely settle their relationship. We may seek an explanation that chooses for us: a vocation, character, a family's demand or someone's informed opinion. These considerations can matter. Between their significance and a definite act, however, a question remains about how we respond to this situation now.

In selected contexts of *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Sartre connects human existence with a project and choice in a situation. We consider a limited meaning of this position without promising omnipotence or blaming someone for circumstances. Beauvoir's separate primary voice preserves freedom's connection with other people. An authored fictional scene shows how this discussion differs from listing external possibilities and why missing a final guarantee permits no disregard for facts, agreement or consequences.

I. Two Important Undertakings Remain Two

Imagine Nina, a fictional researcher of local history. She has been invited to help prepare an exhibition in another city for six weeks. The project fits a longstanding interest. Her father has also asked her to remain nearby in the evenings while he recovers after treatment. Support arrangements remain under discussion. We assume neither medical necessity for her particular presence nor easily available replacement. Nina has significant relationships and work, but incomplete information about ways of participating.

Avoid turning the scene into a ready-made problem about the correct choice between family and vocation. Neither her father nor the exhibition is a symbol to manipulate for an attractive

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argument. Nina needs to establish the help requested, which dates are genuinely mandatory and what the organizer can offer. Only then will it become clearer whether two incompatible paths exist or other options are available. A decision's philosophical significance does not arise from missing information or require artificially preserved uncertainty.

Suppose the conversations have occurred. Remote work on part of the exhibition is possible but excludes attending its opening. Her father will discuss assistance from other relatives but does not want everything decided for him. Nina can choose forms of participation, each retaining and losing something definite. Imperfection does not make them equal. They should be compared by content rather than the intensity of anxiety or the attraction of the general name freedom.

The question now has an object of its own. Which participant in these relationships and this undertaking does Nina choose to be under present conditions? It does not erase the question of available paths. It adds a relationship with what she values and expresses through action. She need not decide unaided, but assistance should not become fabricated evidence that her essence predetermined the path. Her decision remains a particular response, discussable without a final formula for her identity.

II. A Project Is Not a Ready-Made Essence

In the selected opening of *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, Sartre disputes a predetermined human essence and discusses a project. This is a philosophical position rather than an established psychological law. Our limited concern is avoiding a description of someone as a ready-made script that has already chosen every subsequent act. Primary text actually read.

Nina may describe herself as family-centred or as a researcher. Both descriptions have a history and may express important connections. Each nevertheless permits different forms of participation. Being there for her father does not always require abandoning work; undertaking research does not always mean accepting this journey. A general label closes the question prematurely when it replaces discussion of forms. There may still be a need to establish what is required and what has been agreed.

Nor should a project mean a detailed life plan written to completion once and for all. In our own application it names a direction that acquires content through action and revision. Nina can value research while not yet knowing how to combine it with present care. Uncertainty does not establish directionlessness. A broader undertaking encounters a particular case in which available forms and others' expectations cannot be derived from an occupational label or an earlier dream.

The past does not vanish either. Nina's experience, promises and relationships change the choice's content. We do not suggest being an entirely new person every morning. The point is

different: the past supplies grounds and consequences without necessarily being a voice that ends today's discussion without her participation. Changing her involvement may require explanation and agreement. Attributing that change to an immutable essence or calling it total self-abandonment are two premature ways to close the question.

III. Circumstances Have Weight of Their Own

Discussions of choice can become cruel when circumstances are dismissed as excuses. Travel dates, work conditions, her father's request and available assistance are actual questions here. Nina does not manufacture them through an inward decision. If remote work is prohibited, an imagined option does not become available through desire. If her father rejects a form of help, his answer cannot be replaced with a convenient version of his interests. Choice belongs within established conditions, including their restrictions.

Sartre's selected later context gives human situations historical content. We do not use his position to establish equal access to possibilities. Our limit is clear: philosophical attribution of choice neither measures material freedom nor cancels an external impediment. A personal response can be discussed only while retaining what is available, what is excluded and what remains unknown.

For example, Nina learns that the project demands daily presence without paying for accommodation. This changes the journey available to her, rather than merely her attitude. Real information about resources and conditions is needed, without figures invented for a philosophical conclusion. If the path proves unavailable, the question of choosing between two executable forms changes. Acknowledging the restriction matters more than constructing a drama about insufficient courage. Impossibility should not be converted into a concealed wish to withdraw.

Some circumstances make our voluntary exercise unsuitable altogether: coercion, threats, unsafe conditions and decisions requiring specialist knowledge. This article determines neither medical duties nor anyone's legal position. It examines an ordinary philosophical question within a fictional scene. This cannot become a demand to accept responsibility for every harm or for other people's actions. Distinguishing a free response from actual conditions serves precision rather than locating someone to whom the entire situation can be attributed.

IV. A General Rule Does Not Allocate Every Significance

Nina can consult important principles: do not leave a relative without necessary support, keep promises and respect your own work. Difficulty does not make them empty. They identify questions that cannot be bypassed. The particular case still requires establishing what is necessary, promised and available. A general principle of respect does not itself settle six weeks away against evening support under these agreements and resources.

In Sartre's selected example, a pupil faces caring for his mother and joining France's liberation struggle. The author examines the difficulty of obtaining a ready-made decision from a general teaching. This is a historical philosophical illustration, not an analogy equating a present family scene with war. We use only the question of moving from a general ground to a particular choice, preserving differences in scale, danger and relationships.

Nina therefore still needs to consider content. If assistance can be shared by agreement and her father wants this, one path acquires new conditions. If not, another is described differently. We cannot decide beforehand that duty always requires staying or independence always requires leaving. Missing a ready-made answer does not make every decision equally grounded. Known needs, promises and agreement distinguish options, even without producing a final guarantee.

Philosophical discussion becomes useful by retaining this remainder. It need not destroy rules to preserve choice. It can show which part a rule determines and where judgment remains necessary. Nina's question is specific: which participation can she acknowledge as hers, understanding known losses and limits? The question's difficulty makes no answer infallible. It can be discussed, revised after new information and assessed by consequences without making the entire case a test of one virtue.

V. Feeling Matters Without Signing the Decision

Nina feels joy imagining the exhibition and guilt imagining departure. Both experiences matter to her account; neither automatically establishes the necessary action. Guilt may concern a genuinely broken agreement, uncertainty or an expectation never discussed. Joy may accompany meaningful work without establishing suitable conditions. We investigate no hidden causes of feeling and prescribe no treatment. We distinguish experience from grounds for a particular deed in a known situation.

Measuring a decision solely by feeling's strength produces another expectation: once emotion becomes sufficiently clear, perhaps choice will disappear. Research and her relationship with her father may matter simultaneously. This combination need not resolve into complete emotional agreement with one form. Someone can decide and still regret a lost opportunity.

Regret does not necessarily make the decision false. Understanding it requires returning to the undertaking's known content rather than only the reaction's intensity.

Feelings also change after action. Staying may make Nina keenly miss the opening; leaving may make her anxious and homesick. A later experience does not directly establish absent earlier grounds. It adds content that may require discussion or change. She can acknowledge this cost without renaming it a final verdict: I chose this, lost that and now see something else to clarify.

Feelings can be approached through questions. What exactly am I sorry to leave? What genuinely matters in the request? Which expectation have I accepted and which am I assuming? Answers can give choice content without becoming a method for forcing oneself to desire one path without remainder. A decision may retain conflicting feelings. Our scene establishes no universal emotional rule. It permits a precise description of what Nina herself knows and what she still needs to establish.

VI. Advice Helps Without Removing the Question

Nina discusses the case with a colleague and a close friend. The colleague knows the exhibition's organization; her friend helps clarify family agreements. They can change available information and propose an unimagined form. Assistance should not be treated as an obstacle to independence. Someone can choose to seek advice while remaining a participant. An opinion nevertheless differs from factual knowledge and from affected people's agreement: advisers do not automatically speak for those people.

If the colleague confidently recommends travel, this does not establish secured support for her father. If her friend recommends staying, this does not show exhibition participation is impossible. Each piece of advice may emphasize one significance without knowing another. Nina can ask what information supports it. Incompleteness does not require dismissing advice; understand its limits before making it an answer to an entire question it may address only partly.

Wanting to transfer a difficult decision to an authority is understandable. Yet an expert told me leaves unanswered why this advice and form were selected. Trust sometimes has grounds, particularly in specialist knowledge. Name its object. Medical information belongs with an appropriate professional; philosophical discussion cannot manufacture it. Advice about values can also help without becoming a professional determination merely through confident delivery.

After the discussion, Nina can select another person's suggestion and call it her decision. Independence does not demand an original answer nobody previously proposed. It asks that known participation not disappear behind someone else's name. If circumstances change, the

explanation may change too. Seeking advice becomes part of the decision's history rather than a document guaranteeing all outcomes and cancelling later questions. It permits supported action without promising permanent release from personal judgment.

VII. Others Remain Participants

Nina wants to arrange support without losing the journey. Care may be present, but the plan is not yet an agreed relationship. Her father needs an opportunity to specify suitable assistance, relatives to accept or decline involvement and the organizer to state real work conditions. Without these replies, the plan contains assumptions about people. Even a reasonable intention does not make them executors of Nina's sequence or create agreement through its name.

In the selected Part III, Beauvoir connects freedom's concrete fulfilment with an open future and others' freedom. This is her own philosophical position. It differs from permission to do anything desired and does not make others' freedom automatically deprive someone of their own. Selected primary context. Her voice remains distinct from Sartre's text and our everyday illustration.

Our own application asks about a proposal's form. Nina can offer support without declaring another's life arranged before discussing it. She can express the journey's importance without requiring her father to regard it as his main concern. Participants may differ. Agreement guarantees neither absent regret nor absent conflict. It distinguishes an actual reply from a convenient supposition and a shared arrangement from unilateral control over someone's time.

Avoid creating the reverse absolute duty: because others matter, Nina must abandon every project. Relationships require attention to particular needs, possibilities and promises. Sometimes changing a plan is warranted; sometimes another form of assistance is needed. This article chooses no outcome for her. It preserves a decision's human composition, in which another remains someone who speaks. Their freedom is no empty obstacle for inward courage to defeat; her freedom does not dissolve into a duty never to disappoint anyone.

VIII. A Decision Contains No Guarantee

Suppose Nina chooses remote participation and stays nearby according to an agreed schedule. This completes part of the choice without securing an error-free future. The exhibition may change, support may need different arrangements and she may experience the lost journey differently. Today's decision cannot be required to know all those events. It can respond accurately to known conditions and honestly identify what remains open. A guarantee and a ground differ, although both may promise reassurance.

No guarantee does not permit neglecting what can be checked. Nina can establish schedules and participation conditions. If she does not, a philosophical appeal to uncertainty does not turn an omitted check into profound freedom. Some uncertainty is unavoidable; some concerns a clear step not yet performed. Our example supplies no quantitative measure. Distinguish by object: what cannot be known in advance and what an actual participant can be asked now.

A decision does not become right merely through sincerity either. Disregarding known agreement or consequences leaves questions about the act. Choice's existential significance protects no one from every assessment. Nina can name her decision while acknowledging its limits, preserving possible correction. She need neither blame herself for the whole situation nor prove philosophy justified every step beforehand and made subsequent discussion unnecessary.

Meaningful responsibility here involves naming participation within known and available limits rather than promising total control. Nina reports her chosen form, agreements and remaining unknowns. If someone expected more, clarify the difference instead of hiding it under freedom. Decisions have consequences and other participants. Someone does not disappear after choosing, but neither becomes the sole cause of everything subsequently happening around them.

IX. Revision Does Not Erase Authorship

A week later the exhibition dates change. Remote work can finish earlier and the journey now takes several days. Nina discusses conditions again. This does not make the earlier choice unreal: it addressed a different known situation. New information changes available participation. Revision may retain direction while changing means, or reveal changed significance. Distinguish these before calling every movement inconsistency or demanding preservation merely because a decision was previously made.

Revision nevertheless does not erase promises. If people already relied on Nina's schedule, a new decision needs notification and agreement. Inwardly changing one's mind is one fact; changing a shared arrangement is another. The discussion of projects returns to actual relationships. Others need not instantly accept an option because Nina considers it more her own. She can explain and hear a reply while distinguishing her choice from another's assessment of its consequences.

Sometimes revision follows recognizing an error. Nina discovers she assumed unavailable assistance. The new action then concerns an omitted check, not only a changed external condition. Name that distinction if established. It need not make error a description of the whole person. Acknowledging a particular omission supplies a corrective object without

promising to remove all remaining conflict or recover every lost opportunity, as if a new plan could simply replace the past.

The project remains open in this limited sense. It releases no one from consequences but permits responding to a new situation. Someone can continue, change form or withdraw while naming known reasons. Fidelity or freedom cannot predetermine every option's ethical assessment. The case needs content. This requirement does not make philosophical discussion useless: it explains why a general personal label or teaching does not settle all future participation without the person.

X. Freedom as a Question of a Particular Response

Sartre's discussion of projects questions how we describe people. We have used it narrowly: a pre-existing identity label should not become the sole script for action. Beauvoir preserves a separate question about freedom among others. These primary voices have their own contexts. Selected passages supply neither a final system nor general choice psychology, nor permission to transplant historical examples into every present situation without checking differences and conditions.

In Nina's story, a free response does not mean absent circumstances. It means particular participation can be questioned after conditions are established without substituting vocation or a demand for complete confidence. Nina can accept advice, arrange support and select limited work. Participation need look neither heroic nor contrary to expectation. Her choice can coincide with a rule or suggestion, provided coincidence conceals neither the decision's object nor her known relationship to it.

This differs from mapping external possibilities. A map helps establish existing paths; this discussion asks how an available path acquires significance in a project and relationships. Both scales matter, but one should not be settled with the other's words. A beautiful account makes neither unavailability voluntary refusal nor an existing option already chosen. Situations retain facts, meanings, others' replies and uncertainty. Sometimes the precise next step is clarifying a condition rather than making a final choice.

Where choosing remains necessary, regret and missing guarantees may remain. These prove neither correctness nor failure. Someone can name known grounds, undertake particular participation and remain able to respond later. Existential discussion then does not replace life with a ready-made verdict about freedom. It returns to a definite act: what do I choose here, how does this relate to what matters, and where must I acknowledge another person, an external condition or my own lack of knowledge?

What this means in practice

For voluntary reflection, choose a small, safe question where a decision genuinely remains after basic conditions have been established. Avoid threats, coercion, medical choices or determining legal duties. Record available forms of participation, known conditions and one open question. If another's reply or specialist information is needed first, obtaining it may be the next step. Philosophical writing does not replace it.

Name what matters in each path, promises already accepted and affected people. Mark a general label that seems to choose for you: character, vocation or role. Ask which form it actually implies and what remains your present judgment. You need not reject a role or advice; understand its object and limit.

If selecting action, state a known ground and what you cannot guarantee. New information permits renewed discussion with attention to effects on others. The exercise clarifies one question without proving an authentic life or requiring solitary decisions. You can stop or decline it. Where safety or appropriate support is needed, seek relevant help while keeping philosophical reflection within its limits.

Key quotation

> *through the freedom of others*

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Part III, “Freedom and Liberation,” the paragraph on freedom genuinely willing itself. Our own translation appears in RU. This fragment belongs to her argument about freedom as open movement rather than yielding to every demand. It is not attributed to Sartre.

Connections between traditions

Sartre's *Existentialism Is a Humanism* supplies contexts of projects and difficult particular choices. Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* remains a separate voice on present action and others. Related questions erase neither differences between works nor the limited scope of passages read. Historical positions are philosophical arguments, rather than experimental evidence that everyone has equal capacity to choose.

Nina is an authored fictional character. Unlike the earlier article on negative and positive liberty, this article does not classify access or guarantees. It concerns a particular response's significance after checking conditions. External impossibility, voluntary refusal and changed agreement retain different statuses; personal projects do not manufacture others' consent.

Sources

1. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*,1945 lecture, published1946; Marxists Internet Archive. Selected contexts on projects, the pupil, action, historical situations and others read; the author's complete corpus is not claimed. Selected pages of a French PDF were also read, without claiming rights for its unidentified edition. No literal Sartre quotations used here.

2. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), Part III, selected first- and second-section contexts; Marxists Internet Archive. Complete selected paragraphs read, not the whole book or part. Specific translation basis and worldwide rights unestablished; both short reader quotations separately attributed.

Tags

Sartre, Beauvoir, existentialism, choice, freedom, situation, circumstances, project, meaning, action, decision, relationships, agreement, others, advice, rule, feeling, uncertainty, responsibility, revision, promise, assistance, conditions, historical philosophy, independence, limits of knowledge, voluntary practice, United Wisdom

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