



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Report on part of state final examination Defence of master's thesis

Academic year: 2024/2025

Student's name and surname: Ing. Bc. Matouš Haicl, Ph.D.
Student's ID: 67737519

Type of the study programme: Master's (post-Bachelor)
Study programme: Philosophy
Study ID: 786942

Title of the thesis: Is a Human Being Absolutely Free? Objections to the Concept of Freedom in Early Sartre
Thesis department: Institute of Philosophy and Religious Studies (21-UFAR)
Language of the thesis: Czech
Language of defence: Czech
Supervisor: Mgr. Ondřej Švec, Ph.D.
Reviewer(s): doc. Mgr. Jakub Čapek, Ph.D.
Date of defence: 17.06.2025 **Venue of defence:** Praha
Attempt: regular

Examination proceedings: Doc. Jan Palkoska, chair of the thesis defense committee, welcomes the candidate and introduces the members of the committee. The candidate starts presenting his work, explaining the main concepts of his analysis, namely, the notion of absolute freedom in the work of Sartre (mainly in Being and Nothingness and Existentialism is a Humanism). He also explains to what extent Sartre rejects the existence of a general human nature or essence that could determine or place limits on human freedom. The candidate explains that the thesis makes a series of objections against Sartre himself, proceeding gradually from one work to another. The candidate distinguishes between different conceptions of freedom in Sartre (a vulgar and a more technical conception of freedom). The candidate moves then on to Merleau-Ponty's objections against Sartre's views in Phenomenology of Perception. Sartre rejects all forms of determinism and the very idea that there can be something like a human essence or (universal) nature. Finally, the candidate presents the theme of human fallibility or guilt, which is traditionally considered an inevitable limitation on human freedom, and which Sartre had to overlook in order to defend his radical conception. The thesis does focus on interpreting the compatibility of Sartre's conception of human freedom with the phenomenon of inherent guilt. The candidate concludes adding that towards the end of his MA thesis, he tries to propose a view that is alternative to Sartre himself, mainly drawing on the position of Paul Ricoeur. The chair thanks the candidate for the presentation and gives the word to the supervisor, Ondřej Švec. The supervisor expresses his overall appreciation of the candidate. He explains to the committee, that Matouš Haicl's Master's thesis is a philosophically mature and

critically stimulating contribution to the interpretation of Sartre's concept of freedom. The supervisor goes on summarizing some of the claim made by the candidate in the thesis. The author begins by reconstructing the ontological foundations of freedom in Being and Nothingness, and convincingly demonstrates the originality of Sartre's distinction between ontological freedom and practical freedom, which operates within the concrete situatedness of human life. At the same time, he raises critical doubts as to whether this emphasis on ontological freedom can satisfactorily account for the real conditions of human action. The central part of the thesis is, however, devoted to a confrontation between Sartre's concept of freedom and Augustine's doctrine of the will's corruption. Here, the author moves beyond a purely phenomenological framework to explore the extent to which Sartre neglects certain features of human experience that theological thought has long acknowledged as constitutive aspects of existence.

At the end of his discussion of the candidate's MA thesis, the supervisor emphasizes some of the work's shortcomings: one possible shortcoming is that the conclusion could elaborate further on the underlying assumptions of the critique—especially the question of whether it makes sense to speak of human nature as positively defined and normatively binding. If the overall line of criticism rests on this assumption, then the thesis would benefit from a philosophical defense of why human freedom cannot be considered an original and self-sufficient principle, but rather bears the marks of a prior brokenness. However, this is more a question for the defense than a point of final evaluation. The supervisor ends praising the overall work, the way the candidate works both with primary and secondary literature and proposes excellent as a grade.

The chair now gives the word to the opponent, Doc. Jakub Čapek. The opponent starts expressing his agreement with the supervisor's positive judgment of the work. He finds the criticisms the candidate makes against Sartre interesting and precisely formulated. He also praises the candidate's mastery of the literature on the topic, albeit he claims that the author could have included some additional texts of primary and secondary literature. The opponent moves on and then focuses upon chapter 4 of the thesis, the one about the concept of "guilt." The opponent also asks how, precisely, Sartre understands the idea of "guilt."

The second question for the candidate is about the theological motives underlying Sartre's work: "Couldn't something be salvaged from the analogy between the theology of guilty freedom and Sartre's analysis of insincerity?" He then formulates a third question: "Is Christianity to be identified with the belief in a hierarchically ordered world and the assumption of the existence of universal values?" The opponent closes his presentation confirming the excellent-grade proposed by the supervisor.

The chair gives now the word to the candidate, who has the right to reply to the questions.

The candidate replies first to the objections made by the supervisor, starting with the one about the question of human nature and essence in Sartre. He explains his objection against Sartre and the claim that human nature exists. He criticizes Sartre for not recognizing it. He then discusses the concept of freedom in the work of Sartre and his insufficiency. The candidate then moves on to discussing all the other questions/objections by the supervisor.

The supervisor reacts to some of the candidate's remarks about the human nature. The candidate then focuses on the comments made by the opponent. He reacts to the opponent's criticism of the way he defined Christianity on page 47 of the thesis. He then replies to the objection about the use of primary and secondary literature, explaining that he was relying upon the difference between Sartre as a philosopher and as a literary author, and that he wanted to discuss only the philosopher (without considering his literary works). He

then discusses the question about theology in Sartre, mentioning the differences between Sartre and Augustine on the idea of freedom. After that, he moves on to addressing Sartre's understanding of guilt, explaining its meaning and problems.

The opponent accepts the candidate's answers, but also emphasizes the problems connected with the way the candidate resorts to Ricoeur's book on will and freedom.

The chair, Doc. Palkoska, asks the committee if there is any question, and Prof. K. Thein expresses his concern about the problem of human nature or essence in the candidate's reading of Sartre. He reminds the candidate that there are also Christian thinkers, for example Pico della Mirandola, who reject the idea of a human nature. He also mentions the debate about determinism in the history of philosophy and contemporary analytic philosophy.

The candidate reacts to Prof. Thein's remarks on the debate about freedom and determinism, and then tackles his objection about the Christian tradition and the issue of human nature.

Prof. Thein takes the word once again, stressing that it is not enough to criticize an author with the argument that in his philosophical system there is something missing. Also Švec expresses his own skepticism about the candidate's thesis about human nature.

The chair summarizes the sense of the objections against the assumption of the idea of human nature and invites the candidate to leave the room for a second.

The chair communicates to the candidate that the final grade of the defense is 1 (excellent).

Result of defence: excellent (1)

Chair of the committee: Palkoska Jan, doc. Mgr., Ph.D.

Committee members: De Santis Daniele, doc., Dott. Ric.

Thein Karel, prof. PhDr., Ph.D.

I have been acquainted with the protocol:.....