

## **Freedom in War – Contrasting Perspectives from Critical Realism, Existential Phenomenology and Analytic Philosophy**

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The proposed contribution compares critical realist, phenomenological and analytic approaches to human agency, through the prism of the idea of freedom in war.

To the existential phenomenologist Jean-Paul Sartre, human freedom is existential in that it comes with existence and cannot be dispensed with – human beings are thus condemned to be free. Even in war, no one is truly ‘mobilized’ passively but anyone participating in a war has ‘chosen’ it as they could always get out of it by suicide or by desertion. This highly agential view of the human resurfaced in Giddens’ definition of agency as the ‘ability to do otherwise’, which is available to even those in solitary confinement for they could go on hunger strikes or commit suicide. Archer criticized Giddens for ‘defining agency in such a way that any individual in any situation could not *not* be an agent’, which renders invisible the relative distinction between agency and structure in what Archer called ‘central conflation’.

Yet the nature of Archer’s objection to Giddensian agency, and indirectly by implication, Sartrean freedom, was not so much philosophical, in the sense of denying that human beings always have a choice in some form, as it was methodological, in the sense of chastising ‘the ability to do otherwise’ for failing to distinguish between different degrees of voluntariness or embeddedness. From this methodological perspective, eliding the gradience of human agency blurs the distinction between the levels of responsibility of differently situated individuals in war, as evidenced by the long-standing debate in analytic philosophy on the responsibility attributable to individuals for fighting in an aggressive war. While traditional just war theorists argue that individual foot soldiers are not responsible for the inter-state aggression which is a collective action over which the individual cannot be expected to have agency to influence, but are only responsible for atrocity crimes such as targeting civilians, revisionist just war theorists argue that individual foot soldiers have agency over and are responsible for the inter-state aggression itself, evoking Giddens’ and Sartre’s visions of human agency in war.

What the revisionist just war theorists, Giddens and Sartre have not explicitly engaged with is the sociological concept of 'emergence', which enables the stratification of social reality to generate a more vivid picture of the complex human condition that takes into account the structural enablement or constraints of differently situated individuals in war. While existential freedom in war may be subject to sociological critiques for lacking the necessary precision to describe social reality, the concept remains valuable in directly awakening individuals to their innermost, radical freedom, in ways reminiscent of Bhaskar's metaRealist approach of positioning ourselves back into the internality of the world as a participant rather than as an external perceiver or investigator, which echoes Marx's call for using philosophy not only to interpret the world, but to change it.

Key words: human agency, freedom, war, critical realism, existential phenomenology, analytic philosophy