

## Existential Freedom in Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper intends to answer to what degree the characters in Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man* live based on freedom within existential philosophy. As Existentialists believe, each individual is solely responsible for giving meaning to life. These human beings, through their consciousness, create their values and determine a meaning to their life. This paper bases its theory mainly on Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Heidegger's *Time and Being*, which concern being, freedom, and responsibility, and on other relevant theorists who discuss existential freedom and the being in life. The concept of freedom which is of primary importance to philosophers from the beginning of life is discussed in *Dangling Man*, where a character like Joseph struggles to win his freedom by going to war and leaving his life behind. For him, the war answers his questions and promises him an identity and self. Joseph could be argued as an existential individual who lives based on his freedom of choice and action.

**KEYWORDS:** Anguish, Being, Existentialism, Freedom, Responsibility, Self

### INTRODUCTION

Freedom is defined by Merriam Webster as the state of being free, the absence of necessity in the choice or action, and liberation from slavery or other powers. Withing existential reading, freedom is defined as having the choice for our actions. Existentialists insist that our actions are determined by our circumstances. As the term lies at the heart of existentialism, meaning "self-determinism, the capacity to decide what to do" (Omogrebe, 36). Existentialists believe that man is free by nature, having full control over his/her actions. Jean-Paul Sartre, as an existentialist believes, "It is necessary to point out to common sense that the formula to be free does not mean to obtain what one has wished, but rather by oneself to determine oneself to wish (in the sense of choosing)" (*Being and Nothingness*, 481).

Existential philosophers stress individual existence, subjectivity, individual freedom, choice, and responsibility. Heidegger as an Existentialist "questions how human beings should live, what they are, and concerns the meaning of life and death" (*Being and Time*). According to Heidegger, "there is no separation of mind and matter, and no consciousness separate from the world". He then adds that: "a person's usual understanding is dictated by the public, and that individual reality requires distancing oneself from the public and creating one's projects and view of things. Jean-Paul Sartre the father of Existentialism argues that "human beings are essentially free, free to choose and free to negate. One can always decide to change, and what one will make of oneself depends on him or her alone" (Yeganeh 595). Existentialists believe that human beings don't have a fixed nature or essence, they make their choices to create their nature. But this freedom of choice requires commitment and responsibility. Human beings must accept the responsibility of their choice and must accept the result of their action.

Addressing existence, existential philosophers precede existence to the essence and see human life in terms of paradoxes. Blaise Pascal believes that the "human self is itself a paradox and contradiction". Later Kierkegaard asserted that the human situation is absurd and ambiguous. According to him: "the individual's response to this situation must be to live a committed life, and this commitment could only be understood by the individual who has made it" (Yeganeh 593). As Sartre notes in his *Being and Nothingness*:

What is human freedom if nothingness comes into the world? It is not yet possible to deal with the problem of freedom in all its fullness. The steps which we have completed up to now show clearly that freedom is not a faculty of the human soul to be envisaged and described in isolation. We have been trying to define the being of man so far as he conditions the appearance of nothingness, and this being has appeared to us as freedom. (25)

Freedom for Sartre is a nihilation of nothingness; freedom precedes essence. For Sartre, "freedom is impossible to distinguish from the being of human reality. Man does not exist first to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the being of man and his being free" (25). Sartre goes further to add that,

We are fully conscious of the choice we are. And if someone objects that by these observations it would be necessary to be conscious not of our being chosen but of choosing ourselves, we shall reply that this consciousness is expressed by the twofold

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"feeling" of anguish and responsibility. Anguish, abandonment, and responsibility, whether muted or full strength, constitute the quality of our consciousness in so far as this is pure and simple freedom. (464)

Saul Bellow is a writer of culture who mainly in his works focuses on characters' major conflict with freedom. In his major novel namely, *Dangling Man*, the major character struggles for freedom. In *Dangling Man*, Joseph, the major character of the story searches for truth in his life and prefers to go to war to reach freedom. He chooses to abandon his job, his wife, and his social life. According to existentialists, each individual is solely responsible for giving meaning to life. Through their consciousness, these human beings create their own values and determine a meaning to their life. Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man* pertains to the notion of freedom within an Existential framework.

### DISCUSSION

Saul Bellow was born in Quebec in 1915, while he was raised in Chicago. He attended the University of Chicago, received his Bachelor's degree from Northwestern University in 1937, with honors in sociology and anthropology, did graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, and served in the Merchant Marine during World War II. His first novel, *Dangling Man*, was published in 1944 which was a success. Later books include *Seize the Day* (1956), *Henderson The Rain King* (1959), *Herzog* (1964), *Mosby's Memoirs and Other Stories* (1968), and *Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970). He is a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award-winning author, so he is placed among the most talented authors of his time. As Trepanier states:

Bellow's political thought was fundamentally rooted in philosophical and religious concerns about alienation, spirituality, and the nature of modern civilization. For Bellow, the disorienting nature of modern civilization with its materialism and misleading knowledge was to be recognized and sometimes resisted by his heroes, who are often alienated and suffering from spiritual emptiness. (36)

It could be argued that Saul Bellow is one of the most outstanding American novelists; he is regarded as a genius since World War II. "Like Schlossberg, Bellow has a high opinion of what is human" (Rovit 7). In his novel, Joseph asks: "Who can be the earnest huntsman of himself when he knows he is, in turn, a quarry?" Bellow's characters most of all struggle with humanity, self, and freedom. Joseph, the major protagonist of this novel is a dangling man in life; he is waiting to be drafted to war while he feels disconnected in his present situation in life. Bellow in this novel narrates that, "Joseph suffers from a feeling of strangeness, of not quite belonging to the world, of lying under a cloud and looking up at it" (Bellow 24).

Joseph is a character who is intelligent, passive, isolated, alien to society and life, uncomfortable with his present situation. He says, "There is nothing to do but wait or dangle, and grow more and more dispirited. It's clear to me that I'm deteriorating, storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and goodwill" (10). Nothing in life makes sense to Joseph. He has a problem dealing with minor issues of life, even going out or doing something in his vacant time. Joseph describes how it bothers him to do nonsense or read the most interesting books he desired once.

According to Joseph, nothing holds him or makes him interested as in his old days. Joseph is a willing but heedless listener; he is fighting and struggling inside and has opposing feelings. He is constantly involved in an interior monologue which makes him hesitate about his beliefs, feelings, and actions. He no longer confides in his wife, escapes human touch, and runs away from relatives, friends, and neighbors. He feels uncomfortable outdoors and prefers to reside inside, idly just thinking and reading. He thinks: "I have carried over from my school days the feeling that there is something unlawful in being abroad, idle, in the middle of the day" (11). He feels anxious to find a reason to leave his room. It is too much for him that the moment he decides to leave his room, he reconsiders what he has just thought.

In his current situation, Joseph just feels stupor; he is unaware of life and existence. It seems that Joseph is dealing with existence and humanity. Once he says, there is something wrong with the existence. According to Joseph, "everything is good because it exists. Or, good or not good, it exists, it is ineffable, and, for that reason, marvelous" (24). The main question that Joseph is concerned about is, "how should a good man live; what ought he to do?" (32).

*Dangling Man* is written in a journal by Joseph; he describes the months he spends out of work, waiting for the draft. Joseph gradually becomes alienated from his friends, his brother and family, and his wife. Joseph feels disillusioned in life, he finds himself turning more inward each day, finally creating the alter-ego as a means of saving his sanity and of testing the strength of his ideas. Joseph is free, but seems to be unable to bear the burden of his freedom, he, therefore, decides to write to fill the boredom dragging on. In his journal Joseph writes about his identity and self which he thinks refers to his past and not the meaningless present. He describes:

"Joseph, aged twenty-seven, an employee of the Inter-American Travel Bureau, a tall already slightly flabby but handsome young man, a graduate of the University of Wisconsin- major, History- married five years, amiable, generally takes himself to be well-liked" (21). He maintains that this is his old self and identity and of his present, he is not updated. He adds that he cannot define an identity and self for himself which stems from his difference or fear. It shows that he is stuck in past, even himself. In his present situation, there is nothing he can make sense of, lean toward, or give meaning to which makes him a selfless and useless person.

Joseph in his journal notes that it is a painful obligation to look and submit himself to the invariable question: "where was there a particle of what, elsewhere, on in the past, had spoken in man's favor? There could be no doubt that these billboards, streets,

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tracks, houses, ugly and blind, were related to interior life" (20). Joseph in many ways answers his questions. He makes it clear that the meaning of life, surrounding, and situations stem from a human's interior. What Joseph feels, lives, and suffers stems from his own miserable and mixed interior.

As Cheng argues in his essay, "Joseph's disorderly and declining condition is best symbolized by the psychological and physical problems of the characters surrounding him" (77). He lives in a poor and chaotic neighborhood. Two characters bother Joseph too much. Mr. Vanakar, an old neighbor is a queer and annoying creature who always irritates him. He is too much obsessed with this man and he is annoyed by his constant coughing. Mrs. Kiefer is another neighbor whose condition constantly attracts Joseph's attention. She is a bedridden woman who is not expected to live long. She is blind and very nearly bald; she must be close to ninety (13). Mrs. Kiefer and Mr. Vanakar serve as two domineering powers that are constantly haunting the psyche of Joseph. They precisely mirror the chaotic and deathlike situation from which Joseph continuously strives to escape. It is significant to note that this situation eventually comes to an end when Mr. Vanakar has to move and Mrs. Kiefer passes away.

Joseph is alienated, so he sets up the past against the present, and, associating himself with the past presents himself as a man of sensitivity in opposition to the general feeling of his time, the Hemingway code of the "hardboiled": "Do you have feelings? There are correct and incorrect ways of indicating them. Do you have an inner life? It is nobody's business but your own. Do you have emotions? Strangle them" (9)

Day by day, Joseph feels his consciousness fade away which parallels his diminished outward experience. He feels his room and generally his life as a cell and prison which he struggles to survive. Each day his self which is defined by his life, marital situation, career, surroundings, actions, and social contacts is diminishing so leading him to nothing. Joseph's vision of the physical world is affected by his inner self; he sees just the negative side of life while believing in goodness. His idle, long and meaningless surrounding reflects himself. He sees "ranges of poor dwellings, warehouses, billboards, culverts, electric signs blankly burning, parked cars and moving cars" (24). Life is empty and monotonous for Joseph which reflects his inaction and passivity (10).

In the meantime, Joseph struggles to define a self for himself. He once says that he is splitting into two: "all at once, I saw how I had lapsed from that older self" (26). Joseph loses identity by splitting from his past. He describes himself in the third person; he sees himself as different and passive. Joseph can just identify and define himself in the past. According to him, the old self had lived to a general plan, what elsewhere he calls an ideal construction. This plan was a pattern into which the world would fit, and thereby be given meaning.

Loss of identity grows to a point where Joseph can no longer understand the motives for his actions. When they are in a restaurant, he is guilty of an unusual explosion of temper when an acquaintance from his days in the Communist party refuses to recognize him. Joseph is surprised by his action and says that he has behaved unaccountably which by Joseph means the denial of his identity. Joseph forces the man to remember him and then becomes satisfied and says: "That is what I wanted to hear, I just wanted to be sure" (36). Joseph is well aware of his alienation since he says: "There's a lot of talk about alienation. It's a fool's plea. 'Is it?' you can divorce your wife or abandon your child, but what can you do with yourself?" you can't banish the world by decree if it's in you" (137). As Joseph feels bored, he is aware that it is caused by his isolation. Though he thinks all his problems will be solved by his leave in the end he understands that it is not the case. He understands that his destiny and freedom are related to himself. When he converses with his alter ego he notes that:

The war can destroy me physically. That it can do. But so can bacteria. I must be concerned with them, naturally. I must take account of them. They can obliterate me. But as long as I am alive, I must follow my destiny despite them. Then only one question remains. What? whether you have a separate destiny. *ah*, you're a shrewd wiggler, said Tu As Raison Aussi. But I've been waiting for you to cross my corner. Well, what do you say? I think I must have grown pale. I'm not ready to answer. I have nothing to say to that now. (168)

This represents the fact that Joseph believes in destiny while he thinks that he is free to live and deal with his destination. He is in ongoing conflicts in his mind. First, Joseph freely chooses to abandon his job and all his habits to go to the war, then he thinks of keeping up with his previous life manners. In the remaining months waiting to be drafted, he has chosen to be free and intends to live in idle freedom while no one forces him to change his way and live a controlled life. Even Iva leaves him free enough to enjoy his solitude and isolated life. Arguably, Joseph has the freedom to pick and choose. "He is free to exploit the bits and pieces of his personality without having to fix the place of man in the un-shifting scheme of eternal values. (Rovit 23)

As Joseph dangles between his consciousness and alienation, he intends to abandon the external world and escape prison life to find solace in the chaotic atmosphere of the war. Joseph is an identical modern man who lives a pathetic life. He is an observer of the misery of life which depresses him too much, so he is in search of a way out of it. Joseph can be regarded as a hero of modern society since he doesn't conform to the situation and rebels against a life of entrapment in a bureaucratic life. He prefers to fight and die rather than live a dead life. He is struggling for his freedom and tries to define his freedom. Freedom from an existential point of view is bonded to anxiety. Contrary to everyday experience, the human being does not live a well-structured universe that has an inherent design. Drawing from Sartre, Yalom adds that "The universe is contingent; everything that is, could have been created differently, and that the human being is not only free but is doomed to freedom" (220).

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It could be argued that, Joseph's life and surrounding reflect his inner sense and feelings. He ignores others while he is ignored; he feels meaningless while his surrounding doesn't make sense and makes him more dispirited and disillusioned day by day. Joseph, like Saul Bellow, is affected by his root and he is inclined naturally to humanity, spirituality, and suffering, therefore, he is much interested in a quest for truth, freedom, and redemption. Since most of Bellow's works seem autobiographical, it could be argued that Joseph's going to war refers to Bellow's own experience of war. According to Fiedler, Bellow "has realized that for his generation the war itself is an anti-climax, that their real experience is the waiting, the dangling, and indecision before the draft" (3).

According to Levenson, "dangling men belong to the discourse of American literature; they do differ in particular attributes, in compliance with the author's imagination and the historical era" (7). Furthermore, Freedman suggested that in *Dangling Man* Bellow "explores the life and consciousness of a disaffiliated urban hero" (8). Joseph is dangling between the war and the conventional life he used to have, or as Nilsen adds: "between commitments and value systems" (9).

Bellow quitted his job to be drafted to war a year before writing this novel. He had to spend some time waiting. His wife managed his life while he had no chance to return to work. This was a time that crumbled away all his interest and writing intelligence. This is exactly the feeling that he has projected to his character, Joseph. Joseph mirrors Bellow, who undergoes a complete loss. Joseph is isolated from his neighbors and friends; furthermore, he is ignored and humiliated by his brother and niece. Joseph feels disconnected from his brother because of his material thinking and life. His brother is a typical American Dream who is highly concerned with money, while Joseph has nothing and lives in a cheap location with his wife hardly managing the household and the rent. This difference makes him isolated from his brother and also makes him refuse his help and support. Joseph has a problem with his niece because of her humiliation. She regards him as a nonentity. The conflict strengthens when Joseph gets upset and punishes him. This act results in a quarrel and Joseph's subsequent isolation. He is being inflicted with the feeling of nonsense and nothingness.

It is argued that "Joseph is a prototype of modern qualities of passivity, victimization, and nonentity" (10). Not only Joseph is helpless, but the vagueness of wartime also burdens him as well. Joseph is responsible for what he bears. He has chosen the burden of his life. If only he could decide not to quit his job and leave his wife, he would live like others. He is responsible for his present burden, idle and nonsense. According to Sartre's point of view, Joseph is free; he decides to leave and go for his own freedom. In fact, he finds nothingness in his current life, therefore he decides to leave so that he could live his existence. He needs to act in order to escape his passivity. He finds himself responsible for his life, thus he struggles to escape the nothingness he has found himself in. However, Joseph finds himself anguished and in a bad faith which stems from his own choice. Joseph's freedom is troublesome for him. It causes anguish; Joseph is condemned to be free and this freedom is a burden for him which makes life nonsense. That is why he decides to go to the war, with the hope that he could get rid of his condemned freedom.

Before leaving, Joseph wants something to happen for he cannot bear the nothingness": "It may be that I am tired of having to identify a day as the day I asked for a second cup of coffee," or "the day the waitress refused to take back the burned toast" (*Dangling Man* 36). These minor occasions seem important factors in Joseph's identification. remarks that "trouble, like physical pain, makes us actively aware that we are living, and when there is little in the life we lead to hold and draw and stir us, we seek and cherish it, preferring embarrassment or pain to indifference" (36). Joseph comes to terms with the fact that pain is a part of life, and too much freedom and passivity spoils the man. The man is free to choose either way, but he has to accept the consequences. Though Joseph has chosen a different meaning of life and manner, he is unable to bear the consequences hence he wants to escape it.

*Dangling Man* highlights a man's alienation, suffering, rational introspection, and redemption. Joseph represents a character that is stuck in existential anguish. Joseph's affirmation for life and his subsequent desire to redeem himself is Bellow's central intention: "There are, then, these two preparations: one for life and the other for death" (Bellow 119). Joseph is plunged into existential anguish which makes him reconsider then to evolve so that he can confront the existential dilemma of life and death. For Opdahl:

Joseph's conflict is not between the self and the world but in his perspective of these two attitudes – life and death – through which he perceives the world. However, death, as much as it can be construed as finality will also be explored as the death of self-instrumental in paving the way for Joseph who must confront, address, and filter out the vanities of self as he prepares for absorption in a larger community. (qt. in Dubreej 108)

It is argued that *Dangling Man* is a journal of a man's interior self which makes its voice heard by debating with exterior consciousness. It is clear that Joseph is an intelligent man; he regards himself as a scholar since he has studied the Enlightenment and Romanticism. In the dragging time of his waiting, Joseph keeps up writing biographical essays on the philosophers of the Enlightenment but when he comes to Diderot he comes to a stand-still. Joseph tries to write his thoughts in a journal in an attempt to study the ramifications of his existential journey. While Joseph ponders on his existence and self, he finds all kinds of reasons to estrange himself from his friends and relatives. In his solitude, he falls prey to paranoia, he thinks everything is meaningless. Meanwhile, Joseph finds himself far away from his old self and thinks his past fading and wasting away. He finds his old self unbearable; what he is mainly concerned about in his present situation is impending death.

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Joseph is sure that his current situation cannot provide him transcendence and comfort so he struggles to seek this in the war; it grants him the truth, humanity, freedom from the prison of life, and solace. Joseph significantly tries to put aside his boring life, so he is exposed to: "Reduced to the same common physical, social, and historical denominators as everyone else, he is last seen standing in a line of naked military recruits" (Critical Overviews to Saul Bellow's Novels). Seemingly, Joseph's departure provides him with a new beginning and a new life that would reduce his tensions and which would grant him freedom. "The imagery of being naked is symbolic in that Joseph entered the world naked and like a new-born could not have survived without the community of his mother and family; quite similarly he is being reborn having discarded his existential self and now seeks the umbilical support of the larger community symbolized by the army" (Dubreej 111). Generally, Bellow's fiction is not the image of a man seeking, but that of a man brooding amid his solitude; of Joseph arguing wearily with the Spirit of Alternatives. According to Yalom, some philosophers claim that:

Due to the architecture of the human mind, we are also the creators of the structure of our external reality, for the very shape of space and time. It is here, in the idea of self-construction, where anxiety dwells: we are creatures who desire structure, and we are frightened by the concept of freedom which implies that beneath us there is nothing, sheer groundlessness (qt. in Smith 8).

While Joseph is waiting to be drafted, he is living on his wife Iva's earnings, who is ready and willing to support him. Joseph claims that, "it is no burden and that she wants me to enjoy this liberty, to read and to do the delightful things I will be unable to do in the army" (9). Joseph is free; he has nothing to do but to dig into his inner self and study the interior. He decides to keep a journal, even though he understands that to keep a journal nowadays is considered a kind of self-indulgence, weakness, and poor taste. The more he dives into his inner world, the more he becomes dispirited, and the more he becomes alienated and estranged from the outside world. Joseph is lost in a world of chaos; his life is falling into decay. Therefore, Joseph is dangling in an existential mold.

In the opening pages, Joseph insists on his right to embrace his emotions: "Do you have emotions? Strangle them. To a degree, everyone obeys this code...to hell with that; I intend to talk about mine" (9). In his own words, we feel Bellow's respect for the role of emotion in his work: "Nothing is legitimate in literature or any work of art which does not have the support of some kind of emotional conviction. The ideological conviction means almost nothing; the emotional conviction means everything" (qtd. in Abbot 272). As humans, our very existence is a place where revelation and meaning occur. Heidegger in his *Being and Time* states that "The salvation must come from where there is a turn with mortals in their nature" (118).

It is argued that Joseph is an existentialist hero since he is concerned with being, human existence, freedom, and responsibility. He ponders: "In a city where one has lived nearly all his life, it is not likely that he will ever be solitary; and yet I am just that; I am ten hours a day in a single room" (10). This represents Joseph's isolation and alienation as a major existentialist character. Joseph adds: "My Chicago friends and I have been growing steadily apart. I have not been too eager to meet them. And so I am very much alone; and I have begun to notice that the more active the rest of the world becomes, the more slowly I move and that my solitude increases in the same proportion as its racket and frenzy" (12).

Moreover, Joseph continues to explain that he is stuck in an existential hell and is losing those essential values that had previously fortified him; he is gradually descending into his world of existential bitterness. He says: "There is nothing to do but wait or dangle, and grow more and more dispirited. It is clear to me that I am deteriorating, storing bitterness and spite which eat like acids at my endowment of generosity and goodwill" (15). As Joseph moves forward, he feels deeper into the existential pit. Gradually, Joseph fails to understand the failings and frailties of the human condition and the need for accommodation and forgiveness. He lives in a false belief that the quest for the ideal defines his existence. Also, Joseph is too preoccupied with the abstract ideals of the Enlightenment and Romanticism that he has drifted too far into the realm of existential rationality. Therefore, he is lost in the sea of existence and humanism, losing his direction and old values, consequently. He is musing to himself after the party as the walls are closing in on him: "This was only the beginning; In the months that followed I began to discover one weakness after another in all I had built around me" (57). This represents the fact that Joseph is heading in a nihilistic direction. His angst is palpable as he is torn between his existential potential and the grace of God; he has just finished listening, for the second time, a Haydn divertimento for the cello, played by Piatigorsky:

And was I to become this whole man alone, without aid? I was too weak for it. I did not command the will. Then in what quarter should I look for help, where was the power? Grace by what law, under what order, by whom required? Personal, human, or universal, was it? The music named only one source, the universal one, God. But what a miserable surrender that would be, born out of disheartenment and chaos; and out of fear, bodily and imperious, that like a disease asked for a remedy and did not care how it was supplied. The record came to an end; I began it again; No, not God, not any divinity. That was anterior, not of my own deriving. (67- 68)

Joseph's choice to depart to the war makes him spend his last year passively, which is a period of indecision for him. This is the time that he is not regarded as a productive member of the society, therefore his absorption in his inner life, contributes to his dangling position. The more Joseph digs into his interior self, the more he becomes isolated, and the more it causes paranoia. From an existential standpoint, Joseph feels a state of emotional estrangement; since he refuses to participate in the flow of humanity, he

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is unable to exercise the conduct of being humane, kind, and benevolent. This is the plight of the existential man as he insists that he has the power to determine and define his human condition individually.

As much as he struggles to define his own identity, Joseph constantly seeks to be recognized as a member of society, and when others fail to acknowledge him, he overreacts. It is believed that Bellow is signaling that once Joseph has determined to disconnect himself from society, in exchange for his freedom, he loses the right to a communal identity though it seems that Joseph wants his freedom and communal respect as well. Joseph is conscious of his losing identity and self-respect, though he doesn't want to accept the fact, thus overreacts. Nonetheless, it is transparent that he is the sole responsible for his turmoil. Initially, he admits: "I have fallen into the habit of changing restaurants regularly. I do not want to become too familiar a sight in any of them, friendly with sandwich men, waitresses, and cashiers, and compelled to invent lies for their benefit" (14). Joseph feels that his status of being unproductive provokes disrespect as he refers to the maid who comes in to clean his room with a lighted cigarette in her mouth: "I think I am the only one before whom she dares smoke; she recognizes that I am of no importance" (15).

Joseph's separation from the world has made him isolated. It is only in his isolation that he feels imprisoned. This prison refers to the world for Joseph. He says, "I, in this room, separate, alienated, distrustful, find in my purpose not an open world, but a closed, hopeless jail. My perspectives end in the walls. Nothing of the future comes to me; only the past, in its shabbiness, and innocence ... one room holds me" (75-76). For Joseph to get rid of this prison, he has to die, and a way to embrace death is by going to war which is an easy means of human death. Joseph has the fear of the "un-human in the all too human city" (68). Therefore, he struggles to construct an ideal self, "Man tries to make himself into a god, dehumanizing himself to remove himself from humanity" (76). Joseph intends to be more than human; he desires idealism but cannot reach it which results in his self-hatred. He thinks of himself as a thoughtful and good man so keeps asking "How should a good man live?" (83).

On the other hand, Joseph feels self-righteous. He thinks that his friends have failed him and he also thinks superior to his brother though he is materially dominant. For Joseph, people surrounding him seem basic. He cannot understand the "likelihood of baseness in other people" (105). He is unaware of the fact that all these stems from his inner side, and his real feelings towards himself. He looks at others from through his own lens and perspectives. Joseph's real feelings resurface when he muses with his Alter ego and talks freely in his journal:

There was a time when people were in the habit of addressing themselves frequently and felt no shame in making a record of their inward transactions. But to keep a journal nowadays is considered a kind of self-indulgence, a weakness, and in poor taste. For this is an era of hardboiled-dom. Today the code of the athlete, of the tough boy ... that curious mixture of striving, asceticism, and rigor ... is stronger than ever. Do you have feelings? There are correct and incorrect ways of indicating them. Do you have an inner life? It is nobody's business but your own. Do you have emotions? Strangle them. To a degree, everyone obeys this code. ... To hell with that! I intend to talk about mine ... (9)

Joseph prefers to speak about his feelings rather than strangling them. He accepts that he is weak but anyway tries to deal with it. Joseph finds no choice but to face his internal turmoil which seems like a lion wrestling within him.

To add up, Joseph chooses to not obey and not follow the rules. It is his choice, so he has to face limitations and suffering since he goes against the grain. He is determined to define his existence but suffers the consequences of it. Consequently, he is faced with isolation, dread, and anxiety, thus suffering the painful loneliness. For Sartre:

For acceptance of one's absolute freedom is the only existence commensurate with an honest desire to exist fully as a man. But the recognition comes not in ecstasy but anguish. It is not a merging with a higher power but a realization of one's isolation, not a vision of eternity but the perception that one is wholly processed, the making of a Self with which one cannot be united. (xxvi)

This is why, Joseph feels anguish. His whole stance of isolation and freedom amounts to being a claim to a separate destiny. But this is something he cannot claim. Therefore, he faces an unbearable reality. In Joseph's isolated world social relationships have faded; he has a musing relationship with his alter-ego, wherein he struggles to comprehend his existence. He has entered an alien world where Joseph meets an alter ego, offering self-knowledge and, perhaps, salvation. As Joseph writes; "I am neither so corrupt nor so hard-boiled that I can savor my life only when it is in danger of extinction" (166). As Ellen Pifer writes: "the pursuit of authenticity may begin to constitute its peculiar version of orthodoxy; nihilism becoming a covert sort of creed; It is this unspoken creed that Bellow has come increasingly to suspect and to challenge in his fiction" (5). Joseph's pursuit of existence based on personal freedom and intellectual synthesis is prone to failure. According to Dupree, "Bellow's point of view is that the existentialist, having disconnected himself from God and community, plunges into an abyss fraught with angst and turmoil (V).

The answer to Bellow's major question; "How should a good man live; what ought he to do?" (39) is tied to what extent a good man lives according to his freedom and free will and to what degree he or she seeks religious transcendence, and to what degree he or she is ready for the outcome of his choice; he has to prepare himself to endure suffering. Since the majority of Bellow's heroes are Jewish, as an artist he is deeply troubled with the evil and atrocities leveled against Jews. To a great extent, his work is indirectly addressing intimate suffering that he would have understood in his time and place. The main conflict in Bellow's novel is the man and his attitude to the world.

## Existential Freedom in Saul Bellow's *Dangling Man*

Joseph, as an existential and major character, has to accept his failing and admit the victory of the world over his physical being, hence seeking a source of value that is inherent in his inner self. Joseph concludes:

We are afraid to govern ourselves. Of course. It is so hard. We soon want to give up our freedom. It is not even real freedom, because it is not accompanied by comprehension. It is only a preliminary condition of freedom. But we hate it. And soon we run out, we choose a master, roll over on our backs and ask for the leash." "Ah," said *Tu As Raison Aussi*. "That's what happens; It isn't love that gives us weariness of life; It's our inability to be free" (14).

Joseph believes that the reality behind all human troubles is fear of their freedom. When man thinks he is not free, he chooses not to be free since he is condemned to be free. For Joseph, quest for freedom unites all people as it is generally perceived as a means of purification, which could ensure the ascertainment of the sense of life. Joseph describes the desire as follows; "All the striving is for one end. I do not entirely understand this impulse. But it seems to me that its end is the desire for pure freedom. We are all drawn toward the same craters of the spirit – to know what we are and what we are for, to know our purpose, to seek grace" (15).

Finally, the status of freedom does not fulfill Joseph's wishes because he thinks his role in society is of no significance, he is determined to end this state and terminate his freedom. His freedom has brought up misery and isolation. This is why he enlists himself and leaves to the war on his own accord. Joseph finally perceives that the acquisition of subjective freedom does not necessarily result in salvation. He assumes that; "We struggle perpetually to free ourselves. Or, to put it somewhat differently, while we seem so intently and even desperately to be holding on to ourselves, we would far rather give ourselves away. When what we want is to stop living so exclusively and vainly for our own sake, impure and unknowing, turning inward and self-fastened" (16). Consequently, Joseph thinks that he is no longer responsible for himself.

### Conclusion

This paper concluded that Saul Bellow's major characters in *Dangling Man* pertain to the notion of existential freedom. It was argued that Joseph, the major character is an existential figure who lives based on his freedom of choice and action. This is where the existentialist concept of free will comes into play. For existentialist, man is free by nature, having full control over his actions. They stress individual existence, subjectivity, and determination. Joseph, as an existential character decided to live based on his own determination and choice. He intended to live consciously by his own free will because he believed that he is free and wants to live free. That is why, he negated all his life willingly because he is aware that human nature and essence is not fixed. Joseph chooses to create his own nature which therefore requires his commitment and responsibility. At the result of his own choice, Joseph finds his situation absurd and ambiguous. This ambiguity arises as the result of his free will which brings about nothingness and negation of it, consequently.

Joseph, struggles to search for truth in his life and prefers to go to war to reach freedom. He chooses to abandon his job, his wife, and his social life. He isolates himself from society, being stuck in his own world, which makes him alienated and distrustful. Still, Joseph intends to feel loneliness rather than living an imprisoned life. For Joseph to get rid of the prison of life, he has to die, and a way to embrace death is by going to war which is an easy means of human death. Therefore, he struggles to construct an ideal self. Joseph intends to be more than human; he desires idealism. Though he feels anguish, he insists on going for it. For Joseph, this freedom has fear; the status of freedom does not fulfill his wishes because he thinks his role in society is of no significance. So, he is determined to end this state and terminate his freedom. This also highlights his freedom, to have a choice of living or dying.

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