

Gentrain Unit 15 Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) May 8, 2014, Dr. Cindy Ausec

Existentialism – (Dictionary definition) A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe, regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts

Sartre's definition – “a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity”

Works

- *Being and Nothingness* (1943)
- *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946) – popular definition of what is common to all atheistic existentialism

Existentialism is a Humanism

- Answering four charges brought against Existentialism
 - Inviting people to remain in ‘quietism’ because no solutions are possible and action in this world is impossible
 - Dwelling on human degradation
 - Considering man as an isolated being
 - Denying the reality and seriousness of human undertakings
- Two kinds of existentialism: Christian and Atheistic
- 18th century – atheism of the *philosophies* discarded the idea of God
 - Other philosophers “essence precedes existence”. Before anything comes to exist there is an idea of the thing to be created (paper knife)
 - Existentialist believe the “existence preceded essence.” There is no way for an essence or nature of mankind to precede its existence therefore existence precedes essence
 - We arrive without any pre-established nature – A person creates himself, defines his own essence or nature

Man is Responsible for what he is

- Choosing one's essence
 - When a person chooses his own essence, he chooses for all people because all that we do affects others
 - He chooses what he is convinced is the best for himself as a human being – what would be best for any human being
- Experience **anguish** when we recognize that we are responsible for ourselves and all of humanity by the choices we make, and we must make those choices
- **Forlornness** – by this existentialists mean that God does not exist and that we have to face all the consequences of this

- Existentialism has been defined as the study of the “unique experience of the alone individual”
- There is no “good” or “right” already established in the nature of things, no cosmic order or morality
- **Despair** means that we shall confine ourselves to reckoning only with what depends upon our will, or on the ensemble of probabilities which make our action possible – **in other words you can only count on what you can do**

Man is Action

- Man is nothing else than a series of undertakings, he is the sum, the organization, the ensemble of the relationship which make up these undertakings
 - First I should involve myself and act – Actions are how we measure a man
 - Reality alone is what counts – dreams, expectations, and hopes cause one to define a man negatively and not positively because they may remain unfulfilled
- No “human nature”
 - A coward makes himself cowardly and the hero makes himself heroic – always the possibility for the coward not to be cowardly and the hero not to be heroic
- Existentialism is not ‘quietism’ – defines a man in terms of his actions
 - Optimist because a man’s destiny is within himself
 - Tells him his only hope is in his acting
 - Action is the only thing that enables man to live
- Descartes’ *I think; therefore, I am* – basis for existentialism subjectivity. One discovers in cogito not only himself about others as well

The Human Condition

- All people strive to become something under the same limitations and conditions, and because this is so, we cannot exercise our freedom without regard to the universal human dilemma: we must act in such a way as to ‘solve’ it for all people

Existentialism is Humanism

- There is no universe other than a human universe, the universe of human subjectivity
- Reminds man that there is no law-maker other than himself