

Works

- French existentialist philosopher and writer
 - *Pyrrhus et Cineas* (1944)
 - *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947)

Pyrrhus et Cineas

- Explores the question of ethical responsibility from an existentialist framework
- The concept of the free subject implies an ethical consideration of other free subjects in the world
 - Each individual must create a bond with others through ethical action - projects that express our own freedom and encourages freedom in others
 - Sees others as the axis of my freedom (without them I cannot be free)
 - Believes that human beings are constantly engaged with projects which transcend the factual situation (cultural, historical, personal, etc)
- One's transcendence of being is realized through the human project which set up its own end as valuable rather than relying on external validation or meaning
 - The goal of action is established as an end
 - Beauvoir believed in absolute freedom of choice; the responsibility that such freedom entails; that projects must arise from individual spontaneity and not from an external institution, authority or person

The Ethics of Ambiguity (1947)

- Continues themes first developed in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*
 - No necessity that we exist
 - No predetermined essence or standard of value
 - Human freedom requires the freedom of others for it to be actualized
- Human Situation
 - Human existence is an ambiguous mixture of internal freedom to transcend the conditions of the world and the weight of the world which imposes itself on us
 - To live we must assume this ambiguity rather than flee it otherwise we fail
- Existentialist conversion of flight into will
 - Allows us to live at the cross roads of freedom and facticity
 - Requires us to engage our freedom in projects (emerge from spontaneous choice)
 - Ends and goals of projects should never be set up as absolutes
 - Meaning of actions - not determined by an external source of values (i.e. God, the state etc.) – rather our own spontaneous act of choosing them
 - Each individual must assume his/her project and not try to escape freedom by escaping into the goal
- Growth, development and freedom

- Incorporates an analysis of childhood – argues the will or freedom is developed over time
- Children live in a serious world – doesn't mean that he is serious - allowed to play
- Numerous inauthentic attitudes
 - “Sub-man” – bored and lazy he restrains the original movement of spontaneity in the denial of his/her freedom - can become the pawn of “serious men” to enact brutal, immoral and violent action
 - “Serious Man” - gets rid of his freedom by claiming to subordinate it to values which would be unconditioned. Follows external value standards
 - “Nihilist” - If his ‘idol’ is proved false he may deny that the world has any meaning at all
 - “Adventurer” so close to an authentically moral attitude
 - Throws themselves into life with zest, into exploration, conquest, war, speculation, love, politics - chooses action for its own sake
 - Only cares for his own freedom and projects – can become tyrannical
 - “Passionate man” – Sets up the object as an absolute as a thing disclosed by his subjectivity
- Genuine human being
 - Does not recognize any foreign absolute not consciously and actively chosen by the person himself
 - Realizes that an individual is always situated within a community – separate existents are necessarily bound to each other
- Situation and mystification
 - Recognized that some situations are such that they cannot be simply transcended but serve as strict and almost unsurpassable inhibitors to action
 - Oppressed peoples such as slaves and many women who live in a child like world
 - Cannot claim they are living in bad faith – we can only judge the actions of those individuals as emerging from their situation
- Authentically moral attitude understands that freedom of self requires the freedom of others
 - To act alone without concern for other is not free
 - “No project can be defined except by its interference with other projects”
 - Thus if my project intersects with others who are enslaved- either literally or through mystification – I too am not truly free
 - If I do not actively seek to help those who are not free, I am implicated in their oppression