



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

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Module title: <u>Phenomenology & Existentialism</u>	Student number: <u>1804962</u>
For completion by marker:	
Comments: <u>This essay presents quite a thorough answer to the question set, successfully drawing on a range of primary & secondary sources.</u> <u>However, the conclusion tends to let the essay down as it lacks clarity & goes against what you've said in the body of the essay (this may be because of the lack of clarity, rather than genuine misunderstanding). Further, more by way of critique would be beneficial.</u> <u>That said, you address many of the main themes & concepts relevant to the question set.</u>	
Marker's signature: <u>[Signature]</u>	Date: <u>27/11/19.</u>
Provisional mark: <u>65</u>	
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University of Cambridge

Faculty of Divinity

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Remarks	
To the Dean of the Faculty of Divinity	
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. and in reply to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.	
I am, Sir, very respectfully, Your obedient servant, J. H. [Signature]	
Pf [Signature]	[Signature]
[Text]	

What does Sartre mean when he contends that humans are condemned to be free?

In order to understand exactly what Sartre means by the above statement, we need to understand certain types of Sartrean terminology or at least terms/words which Sartre offers a specific meaning to. For instance, we need to know what Sartre means by such words as anguish or facticity. We need to know the difference Sartre draws between a being in itself and a being for itself. However, before we can even know *this*, we need to know where Sartre draws influence from, to fully grasp what his terminology means in relation to the above statement. Therefore, I will try to link Sartrean terms to the appropriate thinkers who had an impact on Sartrean terminology; terms such as anguish/facticity and a being in itself (en soi)/for itself (pour soi). To give you an idea of the importance of this, we should bear in mind that all of the terms specified so far are all heavily borrowed from Martin Heidegger with the exception of anguish. Particularly, facticity is directly rooted with Heidegger's vocabulary.

Heidegger's key interest within philosophy was ontology; the study of being. Though Heidegger, was not just concerned with the being of *anything* but primarily the being of *people* (Dasein). According to Robert C. Solomon's understanding, in *From Rationalism to Existentialism*¹, Dasein can accurately be described as, 'being there' in the strictest sense. Now let us consider both 'being' and 'there' in isolation. In Mary Warnock's *Existentialism*², 'being', through a Heideggarian consensus, means we cannot separate ourselves away from the notion of existence among other things. We exist necessarily within the world. As for the word, 'there', philosopher and literary critic George Steiner in *Heidegger*³ states the word *there* is synonymous *with* the world. Hence, 'humans exist in the world' can be broken down into merely, 'being there'. It is precisely because of Heidegger setting up his definition of Dasein in this way that we can give context to the terms being in itself and for itself because the paradigm Heidegger uses for the term Dasein puts such a heavy emphasis on humanity. The Dasein, due to such an emphasis on humanity has a subjective attribute ascribed to it. Unlike the rest of the world, presumed by both Sartre and Heidegger, to have a fixed, concrete mode of existence, the existence of people depends on themselves and how they choose to use it. Thus people, as an ontological category (Dasein) are distinct from the hard objects of the world.

Dasein links in and may in fact be another way of describing the being for itself. What Sartre means by being for itself comes down to consciousness. A being that *is* being pour soi does have consciousness and manifests itself within a world of objects to be conscious of. We can think of the conscious being as a being who has to exist within Dasein, who cannot separate themselves away from existence and the relation said being has to objects is the relation said being has to the world (the *there*). In this respect, Dasein and the being for itself has a dynamic relationship with the world.

¹ Solomon C, Robert, 1972, *From Rationalism to Existentialism: The Existentialists and Their Nineteenth Century Backgrounds*, Harper and Row, New York

² Warnock, Mary, 1970, *Existentialism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

³ Steiner, George, 1978, *Heidegger*, The Harvester Press Limited, Sussex

Good use
of second
dasein
Sartre

✓

✓

Remind for clarity

Where we see the first set of significant differences between Heidegger and Sartre is the relation Dasein/being for itself has to being en soi. Sartre may agree with Heidegger that every instance of being in itself is posited in relation to Dasein (being for itself) yet Sartre would go further to suggest that such a relation has a high level of pressure. The being-in itself for both Heidegger and Sartre is essentially the fixed, material existence of objects. Sartre characterises being en soi in *Existentialism is a Humanism*⁴ as a classification for inanimate objects. Anything unable to make a conscious choice will belong to the being in itself classification. Sartre believed the polarity between en soi and pour soi caused humans (beings for themselves and beings in themselves) to develop a sense of confusion. The part of us resembling the being in itself are the fixed parts of who we are; where we were born, our skin colour, the language we speak and the parents we may have. This part of our being is closely related with a word Sartre borrows from Heidegger; facticity. In Heidegger's view of facticity, we are stuck with our own concrete surroundings; thrown into such a world. Sartre's use of the term is not quite on the same wavelength but still refers to the fixed, inanimate nature of objects. Sartre however, views facticity as the limitations of our freedom. Take for example, a man with no legs does not have, on any factual grounds, the freedom to walk. Yet we are still conscious beings thus a part of the being for itself still remains. This consciousness allows for our decision making within a world of unconscious entities. Sartre uses the example of an inkwell to explain further the criteria for being for itself; an inkwell has no ability to consciously refer to itself as an inkwell whereas a human, whatever vocation they happen to hold, can make a conscious decision to give themselves such a label. The inkwell cannot rise itself out of its own situation unlike any human. This gives Sartre a lever to suggest humans have a higher type of connection to their given situations than any mere object can have. We, unlike other objects of the world have the conscious ability to make choices.

It is through our ability to make choices where we begin to feel anguish; another key term which relates closely with the notion of condemned freedom. According to Dr Walther Ziegler, in *Sartre in 60 Minutes*⁵, anguish grows out of man's unbridled freedom. We will find anguish whenever we take a moment to think about the limitless degree of freedom we have and the never ending amount of choices we are confronted with; a perfect example of anguish manifesting in choice could be if we were to think of our ability to commit suicide. We ultimately have the freedom at any moment to end our own lives if we wish so⁶. What causes us to have such a high level of freedom to even create the anguish in the first instance is the realization that man has no premade essence before his own existence. Again, like Sartre, Heidegger's mainly philosophical focus was on ontology. Both believed the existence of man came before any form of metaphysical abstraction as to what man actually is (if there was any abstraction at all). Man is what he is based on the actions he makes rather than anything set in stone before his conception. God, natural law, morality, nothing comes before man in order to shape what man actually is. If such is the case, humanity has nothing specifically to aspire to than what individuals choose to aspire to. Without such a sense of guidance and an admittance that all is

⁴ Sartre, Jean Paul, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Translator: Philip Mairet in 1946

⁵ Ziegler, Walther, *Sartre in 60 Minutes*, pp. 48 to 50

⁶ Ibid Walther

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more or less permissible, individuals feel a sense of anguish with the extent of their choices and the reality that they and only they are responsible for said choices.

three.

There are only 3 exceptions to such unmitigated choice; being born, the freedom *not to choose* in a particular situation and the freedom of others. The lack of freedom to be born once again, brings us back to Heidegger and a potential influence upon the philosophy of Sartre. The way Sartre negates freedom of birth has an overtone of Heidegger's use of the word, 'thrownness'. Thrownness, if we take the definition of William J Richardson in *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*⁷ we find an adequate definition of what thrownness is supposed to mean in the Heideggerian sense. Thrownness is an ontologically matter of fact explanation of the limitations of being human. The limitation here being, like in Sartre's case, the limit on the freedom to be born into the world.

Thrownness - could you expand your discuss on here?

From such an all encompassing view of freedom, Sartre begins to shape his ethics. Sartre was left questioning what ethical choice could be the right ethical choice if there was nothing underpinning human action in a metaphysical manner. If any choice could be deemed acceptable then there has to be a new way of establishing value between moral judgements. A good way of explaining the terminology at this point and Sartre's solution to these moral quandaries could be through allegory. ⁸A student approached Sartre with a moral issue. He could not decide whether to journey to England and join the war effort or stay back home to look after his mother. His mother necessitated around the company of her son after having already lost her husband and oldest son and the student knew full well, her emotional well being would be on the line if he were to be killed on the frontline. Yet, this would be his only chance to defend Europe against an imposing fascistic enemy. Sartre's solution to such moral problems as these is the individual in question must make an *authentic* choice. Linda A. Bell, in *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity*⁹ describes Sartrean authenticity as an acceptance of ambiguity. We come to terms with the fact that we are not determined in the same way other objects are (being in itself) and embrace the lack of determination through our decision making. Sartre himself in *Anti-Semite and the Jew*¹⁰ refers to authenticity as the ability to assume, 'the responsibilities and risks it involves'. What we get from both definitions is a sense of taking ownership of the idea we are self-determined. So if we return to the problem laid out by Sartre's student, either choice he makes is a justifiable choice as long as he is willing to accept that *he* is the one having to do the choosing and takes full responsibility of that fact.

The authenticity in many ways could be what Sartre ultimately means by, 'humans are condemned to be free' since the realisation of said authenticity means we have to be aware we have no choice altogether in our level of freedom. The ability to be authentic is the condemnation of freedom realised. The opposite of such a realisation would be what Sartre calls bad faith which juxtaposes the notion of being condemned to be free since an individual

⁷ Richardson J, William, *Through Phenomenology to Thought*: New York City: am University Presspp. 37

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Bell, Linda A, 1989, *Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity*, Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press

¹⁰ Sartre, Jean Paul, *Anti-Semite and the Jew*, New York: Schocken Press

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Paradox of Freedom.

freely chooses to act as though they are not responsible for the choices they make. In order to act in bad faith an individual must choose to act as though they are not making any choices at all. To illustrate bad faith, Sartre uses the example of a waiter. The waiter, according to R.D. Laing in *Self and Others*¹¹ is ironically too much like a waiter. The way he carries a tray or how he speaks to customers. In Sartre's view, this waiter is only, 'playing' at being a waiter and offering a disingenuous performance as to what a waiter actually is and Sartre goes on to claim, in reference to this waiter, in *Essays in Existentialism*¹² the melodramatic attempt by the waiter to appear as though he is a waiter shows he the waiter has the ability to grasp the essence of what a waiter actually is. What the waiter lacks however, through his behaviour, is a genuine portrayal of a waiter. The waiter is more than aware of his own pretense and therefore is aware he is trying to convince *himself* that he truly is a waiter. The waiter acts in bad faith by choosing to believe that he has no ability of authentic choice. The waiter, as an illustration of the central theme of bad faith, is the byproduct of what we become when we choose not to act authentically and thus, the byproduct of choosing not to realise we are condemned to make certain choices.

Due to the paradoxical nature of what bad faith actually entails, there has been criticism charged against it. As Brian P. McLaughlin points out in *Self Deception and the Nature of the Mind*¹³ the problem of bad faith begins with trying to work out exactly how an individual would be capable of doing it. It is not just enough that the waiter can deceive himself into the role of the waiter but the waiter has to take on two oppositional modes here. The deceiver and the one being deceived. This problem is better outlined by McLaughlin when he explains how the deceiver has to know they are the one doing the deceiving (ultimately knowing of any existing falsity) whereas the deceived, in order to be properly deceived must have no knowledge of the deception because otherwise there is literally nothing to deceive them with¹⁴. It seems logically contradictory for the waiter or anyone else for that matter to exist in both states at the same time.

This does however, adequately describe the waiter. In order for the waiter to be good at capturing the essence of being a waiter, in an attempt to deceive himself, he needs to know himself well enough to know how to lie to himself. By knowing ourselves well enough we can take advantage of all the various arguments and false lines of reasoning we know we are susceptible to. The waiter engages in this deception by knowing how easy it must be to lie to himself about his own level of freedom.

If we consider all the terms that have been addressed so far in their chronological order then we have a good understanding as to what Sartre means by being condemned to freedom. First, we know we are not *en soi* because we have a level of conscious ability (*pour soi*). We can transcend the situation the usual everyday objects of the world have. Second, through facticity

¹¹ Laing, R.D., *Self and Others*, (1969) p.44

¹² Sartre, Jean Paul, *Essays in Existentialism*, Citadel Press, 1993, pp. 167-169

¹³ McLaughlin P, Brian, *Self Deception and the Nature of Mind*, Perspectives on self-deception, Pages 63, 207 and 220

¹⁴ Ibid pp. 207

we are forced into the situation in which we are conscious by the fact we have been born into the world in that way. This is a small limit on the level of freedom we have within the world which initially condemns us to have to make choices. Third, we are forced not only into a situation in which we must choose but there is such a great extent as to what choices we can ultimately make we feel anguish. The choices are so far reaching that we feel uneasy being pushed into the situation in which we are confronted to make them. Four, the reason there are so many choices is because we have to live in a world where nothing has been predetermined for us. Five, by embracing this lack of freedom to not be free we are actually able to take full responsibility for our actions because we would altogether have to accept nobody else is causing us to make them. The acknowledgement of this necessary freedom is how we reach an ability to become authentic. Last of all, there is the consequence of not acknowledging our freedom through bad faith.

In summation, through Sartre's influence of Heidegger to move towards the notions of en soi and pour soi and through the various terms explained, being condemned to be free means accepting our lack of freedom as a necessary part of our existence. To come to grips with the fact that we, as conscious beings, must perpetually be thrust into decision making. We are condemned to have to make a choice whether or not we want to because one of the limits of our level of choice is the ability to choose not to exist. We are condemned *not* to be determined like the objects of the world because there is no prior essence giving us a structured existence. Without any abstraction conception of what it means to be human or why we are here, we are forced into the situation of ultimate freedom.

Do you mean 'accepting our freedom'?

Gr.

Swicide cases suggest otherwise.

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