



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

Student Name: Dylan Phillips	
Module title: P+E	Student number:
For completion by marker:	
Comments: The main weakness of this essay is that there are <u>no</u> references, no attempt at referencing. This is a serious omission. Further, there is no evidence that secondary sources have been consulted, & very little evidence that 'Existentialism is a Humanism' has actually been read. I advise to ensure that you provide references, not least in order to <u>avoid plagiarism</u>. You also need to pay attention to the detail of the arguments at stake. Much of what you	
Marker's signature: DJ	Date: 27/11/19
Provisional mark: 38	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

saying this essay is much too general - too much like an overview of some of the main

Dylan Phillips

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

(All quotes and references are sourced directly from Jean Paul Sartre's essay 'Existentialism as a humanism' as well as a lecture of the same name given by Sartre in 1946.)

This essay is intended as a means by which to explore the possible interpretations and meanings which can be gleaned from the insights of Jean-Paul Sartre when he said in his lecture, 'Existentialism is a humanism.'

'That mankind is condemned to be free.'

} Disjointed.

As can be expected, the implications of this statement are plentiful and mercifully fascinating to consider. For the purposes of general convenience this essay will be broken up into parts based on the various effects of this stance (For it is indeed both a moral and a rational stance) and the realisations one can reach by taking it into account in their observations of situations, actions, and in-actions.

- Gr.
- punctuation

I intend for this to be done through firstly introducing in greater detail Sartre's point within the context that it is given, as well as exploring the direct interpretation of the statement as he described it.

Which is?
This being very closely connected to the concept of Existentialism as a humanism it becomes very clear that the idea of mankind's condemnation to its own freedom is a very wide view which offers an answer to many questions of responsibility and morality.

Which statement?

Now, for this first section we shall go into the actual meaning behind the quote, and what Sartre was in fact saying by contending it in the first place.

'Mankind is condemned to be free' is Sartre's way of explaining the responsibilities held by mankind, and by extension the shirking of these responsibilities by many on irresponsible grounds. This is described very well in Sartre's response to Dostoyevski's statement 'If god does not exist, everything would be permitted.' To which Sartre says, in order to express the problematic nature of our reliance on the non-physical or otherwise unresponsive:

pg. nos.

But he also says that his philosophy doesn't depend on God's existence or non-existence.

'Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse.' - Jean-Paul Sartre, Existentialism as a humanism. Without the excuses we have made to pardon ourselves from certain realities, mankind is left with the realisation that the individual is in fact permitted to everything, and is responsible for their actions no matter the situation. In his own words: 'This means that there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom.'

This freedom encompasses morals, and rules, and taking into account the absence of an omnipotent God from the equation, leaves mankind without excuse for their actions or beliefs, whether individually considered moral or immoral, and as such these beliefs must be taken responsibility for. There is no 'Human nature' that can be given as reason for decisions made, as we do not share any one instance of 'human nature'. The vast differences in moral outlooks across the world further supports this and presents the case that morality is itself the responsibility of the individual, and the values that morality takes on are also done so at the decision of the one holding that belief or beliefs.

But considers his Kantian stance.

To use an example Sartre himself gives, he was approached by a student of his who told him of a situation which presents this very idea. This young man, who approached Sartre during the second world war, had been witness to a fight between his mother and his father where he had witnessed his father's intentions to be a "Collaborator" with the German army, despite the students brother and the collaborating fathers own son having been killed in the German offensive of 1940.

Once the father had left, the Mother found herself all the more attached to her son, who was the only person she felt she had left in her life. All the while the son harboured a desire for revenge, which Sartre describes as a 'somewhat primitive but generous sentiment.' The son found himself arriving at a point where he had two choices. He could flee to England with the intention of joining the Free French movement, or he could stay and care for his Mother who he knew would be driven mad with grief were anything to happen to him while fighting.

It would have been easy for the son to reason that, 'I cannot seek to avenge my Brother, as my Mother needs me.' But he did not do this, as he understood that it was a choice. It was his freedom to choose to go and fight, or stay by his mother's side, and he chose to stay with his Mother who had lost so much that he was now her only reason to live. It could be said that he did the moral choice by tending to his Mother, or it could be said his choice was immoral as it meant he did not fight. But these moral standings are also choices, just like his choice to stay with his Mother. Morality acts merely as a factor, but the freedom of choice is still there.

The commanding officer who is given orders that will inevitably send twenty soldiers to their deaths, is by this standard the one responsible for those soldiers deaths. The soldier

References needed

who executes a civilian on the orders of one they consider in a position of power, is the one responsible for choosing to pull the trigger.

The prisoner sentenced to be hanged, chooses whether to die with a smile on their face or a frown.

No matter how miniscule it is amongst the situation it is in, there is always that freedom. And it is exactly that freedom which creates the cage of responsibility we find ourselves condemned to live within.

Now that we have covered the general meaning of Sartre's statement, let us move on to discussing the implications this has in conjecture to other outlooks of a similar nature. This concerns other approaches to the problem of accountability and arguments concerning the concept of free will.

As Sartre's approach here is often considered ^{an} ~~the~~ ^e ~~extreme~~ libertarian view of what free will really is and what form it takes, there are indeed many opposing or just different outlooks with which it clashes. One of the more immediately opposing views to this totally libertarian outlook is of course determinism, which Sartre himself uses as an example of his point. I made reference to a quote on this earlier, 'There is no determinism. Mankind is free, mankind is freedom.'

Where a steadfast deterministic outlook would posit that there is indeed no such thing as free will, and that every action is determined as a reaction to previous events and actions, the approach of mankind's total freedom of choice instead offers that nothing but one's own decisions in the moment determine one's actions. These viewpoints differ to the extent that they could be considered to be at total opposite ends of a spectrum, and as such offer completely counter views of accountability, in that mankind's condemnation to freedom means we are always accountable for our actions, whereas hard determinism would instead suggest that, as we are not capable of affecting our determined course of action, no individual can be held accountable for their actions.

This concept of accountability however brings up a parallel between these two viewpoints. If everybody is responsible for every single action they take, no matter how big or how small, then who are they accountable to? Themselves first and foremost but this creates a barrier that isolates the individual and leads to the establishment of personal values which separate them from the societal values which they live within, and that has the potential to lead to all kinds of disarray.

You could perhaps consider that the individual is accountable to a god, though this then creates a state wherein free will and morality in general stops being a matter of choice and is more likely to be a matter of fear of consequences established by such a figure. Jean

Draw the leading material.

Ref.

74 You really need to be dealing on the primary source material.

Paul Sartre gives an example of such a predetermined moral structure in the telling of French professors in the eighteen-eighties who, upon deciding to endeavour to formulate a secular morality, concluded that:

'God is a useless and costly hypothesis, so we will do without it.'

This is to say that, as the dependance on a god who decided the form morality takes is in itself a damaging prospect which denies the possibility of differing values which societally built moral structures creates, it creates rifts wherein societies of differing values tear one another apart in attempts to force their ideas of morality, as differing moral structures would not only exacerbate tension and discomfort between these differing societies, but also offer a form of justification for hostile actions taken, and place the accountability for those actions on the hypothetical shoulders of the one considered to have defined such moralities, in this case, a god, as can be seen in the atrocities committed in the Crusades.

Now, the parallel this problem of accountability creates between determinism and Sartre's view is to do with the understanding that within both, it is not the individual who the individual themselves is accountable to, but society as a whole. The determinist stance creates a situation wherein external forces are the cause for all actions, which are themselves external actions which cause further actions and so on, making the society which is the root of actions which determine the individual's actions the one to whom the individual who is not considered responsible is accountable to.

Within Sartre's structure, yes the individual is responsible for their every choice and action, but it is the individuals around them and their societal values of morality which create the reaction to said actions. It is the shared moral values of a society that chooses to punish the individual who chose to murder another individual, why they choose to do what they do is irrelevant, but the fact they choose to punish what they choose to consider as wrongdoings and willfully do so through force if necessary is what forms the value of 'justice' which the society builds so that accountability can be taken for actions, and those accountable for actions that betray this justice are accountable to society, and to the societal view of justice.

As this is the case, both determinism and total freedom create a situation wherein the individual is accountable to their society, and it is from this accountability that what is and is not moral is decided.

Moving on we come to the implications that accompany the free will structure that Sartre's statement proposes. Consider for me a situation wherein you are posed with the option of fight or flight. This being one of the most well known instances wherein an individual might consider themselves not responsible for their actions, as these are considered to be

Ref's needed.

instinctual or animalistic reactions which are a natural response to a hostile situation. A hedgehog does not choose to fight a bear and all that. But this instinct itself can still very much be considered a choice. A deliberate action taken in response to an external pressure which demands certain responses. Perhaps it is not the choice of the thinking brain, as that is slow and methodical and rarely springs into action fast enough to affect situations where instinct is required for safety's sake, but to imply that the choice of the subconscious mind or even the body is not in fact the choice of the individual and that they are not accountable for such things, could be considered a stance separating the consciousness from the body as its own state. Rendering the body and the mind separate entities working in tandem, rather than both being one in the same. Which itself then raises moral questions regarding a responsibilities and accountabilities between the symbiotic.

Jean Paul Sartre refers to this conscious, non physical entity that makes up our thoughts as 'Essence' and says that:

'For If indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's action by reference to a given and specific human nature;'

Through this understanding, one arrives at a point of no excuse. This is important as it brings to light certain understandings which are remarkably helpful in tackling feelings of hopelessness or no control.

By removing any trace of excuse, one is left a hard reality. A reality that is as simple and clear as, 'The reason why you haven't done that yet, is because you haven't done that yet.' Say in terms of an assignment. It would be remarkably easy to convince yourself that you didn't do it or you left it till last minute as the result of forces beyond your control, but the reality of the situation is as black and white as 'It is not done, because you didn't do it.'

There's a very optimistic tone to the whole process of accepting one's own accountability for their actions or inactions, and it can be said that in Sartre was taking on a very rational stance on the matter of free will and personal responsibility in saying this.

To conclude, the meaning behind Sartre's statement:

'Mankind is condemned to be free'

Refers to the only real occasion wherein mankind is without the freedom of choice. We can not choose to not be free, not while alive anyway. There is freedom present in all situations, even those as small as individual thoughts. So long as the human conscience is present, there is no state wherein the individual is without freedom, and freedom is the only thing which can truly condemn essence.

It can also be further taken that the accountability, that lack of excuse which this total responsibility brings with it is the form this condemnation takes, making us admit that our actions are our own, and removing the veil under which individuals hide from the knowledge of what they do, demanding that they had no choice when in fact choice is all they are condemned to have, and that their choices are their own to live with, no matter the surrounding influences which they felt influenced them.

Bibliography:

Jean Paul-Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (2019)

<<https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm>>
[accessed 12 November 2019].