



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

Student Name: Wheeler	
Module title: P+E	Student number:
For completion by marker:	
Comments: While this essay displays knowledge & understanding of the topic, it places greater clarity is needed in order to get across what you actually mean. You present an interesting critique, drawing of relevant secondary sources, but more precision is required in terms of how that critique is presented. Overall, this is a ~~pretty~~ fairly well written essay, but closer attention to grammar, expression & presentation is required.	
Marker's signature: [Signature]	Date: 29/11/19
Provisional mark: 60	
NB. All marks are provisional until confirmed by the final examination board.	

HPPH5023-Phenomenology and Existentialism Essay.

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

This essay will explore what Sartre implies when he contends that humans are condemned to be free. Sartre's counter intuitive statement will be explored through the works of philosophers such as Albert Camus and his perspective on the misunderstandings of Freedom¹, Mary Warnock and the other², and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of embodiment.³ This account will also refer to Sartre's beliefs and writings concerning what he terms as 'Bad Faith' and his ideas of 'Beings-for-themselves' and Beings-of-themselves.⁴ References will be made to works of literature, and some historical references to Darwin's theories, Aristotle and Plato's ideas on existence before essence, ~~ess~~ essence before existence,⁵ and Locke's theory of *tabula rasa*, the mind as a blank slate as opposed to innate essence.⁶

Living an authentic life is at the heart of Sartre's philosophy; what it means to be free as a human being. Sartre terms human beings as 'Beings-for-themselves' (*pour-soi*) as opposed to 'Beings-in-themselves' (*en-soi*). *Pour-soi*: Beings-for-themselves, conscious beings, beings that are conscious of themselves, *en-soi*: Beings-in-Themselves, inanimate object in the world, things devoid of consciousness.⁷

In his book *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre narrates a story of a waiter, and sets a vivid scene in a café in the scenario of 'The Waiter'. On entering the café our attention is brought to the waiter. Sartre's description of the waiter likens him to an automaton; the waiter's physical actions are described as if mechanical, devoid of consciousness. The waiter accentuates his every movement in the mode of being a waiter. "He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous for the order of the customer."⁸ Sartre goes on to say that the waiter appears to the viewer as if he is acting a role: "All his behaviour seems to us a game"⁹ and goes on to say, "he is playing at *being* a waiter in a café."¹⁰ This habitual action the waiter has created for his being is what Sartre refers to as Bad Faith. The waiter's way of being perpetuates itself in his mechanical actions, he is presenting himself as a being-in-itself. The waiter has disconnected himself from his actions, he plays this role unconsciously. For Sartre it is as if the waiter detaches himself from the potential of being anything other than a waiter; the waiter is so engrossed in his performance that nothing else remains for him but his being a waiter. All he is and ever will be is so contained in his role as the waiter he is nothing but a waiter. Sartre creates this isolated view to demonstrate that when we live in bad faith, giving one hundred percent of our being to a characterisation, we restrict ourselves from being anything other, we deny ourselves the freedom of fluidity and bury ourselves in facticity. We make of ourselves a being-in-itself.

¹ Ronald E. Santoni. 'Camus on Sartre's "Freedom": Another "Misunderstanding"', *The review of Metaphysics*, 61:4 (2008).

² Mary Warnock, *Existentialism*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

³ *Reading Merleau-Ponty*, ed. By Thomas Baldwin (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁴ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁵ Robin Attfield, *Ethics, An Overview* (London and New York: Continuum International, 2012).

⁶ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1971). p.72.

⁷ H. J. Blackman, *Six Existential Thinkers* (London: Routledge, 1965), p.111.

⁸ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p.59

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ *ibid*

You are trying to cover a lot here.

well laid out

There are indeed many precautions to prison a man in what he is, as if he lived in perpetual fear that he might escape from it, that he might break away and suddenly elude his condition.¹¹

Is our waiter afraid that if he loses his identity as a waiter, he will become nothing? And if, as Sartre says we are condemned to be free, our freedom is recognised in the nothingness, if I am not the waiter I am nothing. How can a being become nothing? For me Sartre's view of the waiter appears prejudiced by his own intellectual prowess, just because someone acts a part it does not imply that they have become that part. The waiter may still hold all his dreams and ambitions; indeed, he may see his role as a waiter as part of his own creation. If we are to believe as Sartre does that existence proceeds essence, then the being would exist before the waiter, the waiter must be a being before the realisation of himself as waiter. The fact that the waiter plays his role with definition and distinction does not explain that he is a being-in-itself, only that the waiter is being himself and in that moment he is the best waiter he can be.

The ancient epistemological concept of innate knowledge is revisited in Sartre's words. From Aristotle to Locke the idea of *tabular rasa* has been argued for. Locke posits that we have no innate knowledge, and it is through our reasoning that we define what we know. "The senses at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet, and, the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them."¹² Plato disagreed with this concept and proclaimed that humans had a soul which held innate knowledge which could be accessed throughout a life lived. Plato's view is echoed in literature of the Christian concepts of the soul, as destinies entwine with fate and the original cause of consciousness: God. Shakespeare's Romeo, as he has a premonition of his own untimely death, soliloquises "But he that hath the steerage of my course, direct my sail".¹³ Indeed, Romeo believes his fate to be in the hands of God, and not in the hands of earthly action. Samuel Butler gives an alternate view as he discusses fortune, and how we make of a goddess of it. In his novel *The Way of all Flesh*, Butler expresses "Perhaps some men are independent of antecedents and surroundings and have an initial force within themselves which is in no way due to causation."¹⁴ Butler acknowledges the possibility that humans differ in their views on the ontological arguments surrounding the issues of innateness. Darwin's theory of natural selection is seen as deterministic. He was concerned that our evolutionary inheritance determined our thoughts, from a non-deterministic understanding, human natural development is at the discretion of human beings and therefore self-determining and adhering to the concept of 'free will'.¹⁵ It is not the purpose of this essay to debate this argument, only suffice to note that Sartre agreed with Locke and Aristotle, that existence proceeded essence, and human beings are free to make of themselves what they will. For ourselves, we are condemned to make choices freely and to admit our mistakes as our own, we cannot blame a God, or the effects of a cause which is out of our control, or blame a predetermined destiny; there is no room for a narcissistic attitude which does not see any error in its ways. Our future destiny lies in the action of the hands that mould it today.

As conscious beings, beings-for-themselves, we hold the unique perspective of being aware of consciousness, as well as, and equal to, our physical, material body. Cartesian dualism is the mind and the body as two separate things. Our consciousness, our mind (or soul) is not material and may transcend the body. The body is a fixed thing that would be an inanimate object without the mind. Sartre held this view as posited by Descartes, that the consciousness could transcend the body, that the mind was free and not a fixed thing. Although our bodies may be in chains our consciousness

¹¹ ibid

¹² John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1971). p.72.

¹³ William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966). p.909.

¹⁴ Samuel Butler, *The Way of all Flesh* (London: Marshal Cavendish, 1993). p.27

¹⁵ Robin Attfield, *Ethics, An Overview* (London and New York: Continuum International, 2012). p.246

This is
a good
way to
1-1 module
Sartre's
ideas.

but

*

cannot be shackled, our mind is free to wander.

Gr. { The observer being observed as he observes through a keyhole demonstrates how, like the waiter, transfers from a being-for-itself into a being-in-itself through the addition of the other. Sartre gives the example of someone, moved by jealousy, spying through a keyhole observing another. The spy's consciousness is transfixed in the moment, unaware of anything other than that which is observed and the act of observing. Suddenly the spy is started and jumps back into reality by the awareness of themselves being observed by another, caught in the act of spying, the spy is set in solidity, the spy is stared on as if by medusa and set to stone in the act of spying. Guilt washes over the spy like concrete and the isolated moment is the mould. Set in stone the spy cannot move beyond the act of spying, like the waiter the spy has invested his complete consciousness in the act of spying and the consciousness is stuck in this action causing the being to become an inanimate object. The spy is now objectified by the other, and will exist as an object in the stare of the other, as an eavesdropper he is isolated.¹⁶ Sartre's view does hold beings in isolation, as does Cartesian dualism and the idea of humans as in the *cogito*, a thinking thing viewing others from the outside, and in the use of our freedom to choose we isolate ourselves by choosing for ourselves freely. Mary Warnock gives a differing view:

What do you mean here?

Other people are not, as Descartes tried to make us believe, merely hats and coats for us, beneath which we have to infer the existence of beings rather like ourselves. People exist in a full blooded way, and we know that they do directly, and without inference of any kind, because we know that we ourselves would exist differently if they did not.¹⁷

Merleau-Ponty asks the question "What then is freedom?"¹⁸ Eran Dorfman gives light to Merleau-Ponty's perceptions on this, that freedom sways between the flux and the fixed, "oscillating between actively constituting the world and passively accepting it as given and as already constitute."¹⁹ Freedom in its meaning is always fluid and changing, yet fixed at some point in meanings obtained through its use, like a dowsing pendant held at a point with intention and oscillating freely to express its divination. So, for Merleau-Ponty we are condemned to meaning, not to freedom. If our consciousness is free from our body it can transcend and be free, however, if, as Merleau-Ponty believes our consciousness is embodied in our physical body, we should have to find freedom in a different meaning. ✓ Good

In an article by Ronald E. Santoni, freedom is explored through Albert Camus's misunderstanding of Sartre's view on freedom. The article, in establishing Camus's misunderstanding of Sartre's view of freedom, clarifies Sartre's concept of freedom. Santoni quotes from Sartre's early work *Being and Nothingness* "Human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible: the essence of the human being is suspended in his freedom."²⁰ A being born empty, free of predetermination its content is its own 'no-thing-ness'. "With nothingness at its core, it is never anything, and never determined by anything"²¹. There appears to be contradiction here, and the concept of freedom, and how one is condemned to be free, gets difficult to grasp. It may be for Sartre all that we have innately is our freedom, when we appear to the world as blank slates, no-thing-ness, we are free beings. Even before we intellectualise what it is to be free, we innately know what that is. We know

¹⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). p.259

¹⁷ Mary Warnock, *Existentialism*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). p.115

¹⁸ *Reading Merleau-Ponty*, ed. By Thomas Baldwin (London and New York: Routledge, 2007). p.147

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ Ronald E. Santoni. 'Camus on Sartre's "Freedom": Another "Misunderstanding"', *The review of Metaphysics*, 61:4 (2008). p.786 ✓

²¹ *Ibid*. p.787

what it is to be free of a consciousness that eternally looks to define something with the given meaning of words when it *just is*. As our consciousness comes into being it is aware of its own freedom, it is not confined to the body; in this sense we are totally free. However, this consciousness if housed in a body lives and is given life through the facticity of the body; the two are not separate entities, they are combined and restricted temporally and spatially. Can the consciousness of a person who walked this earth a thousand years ago live in the body of a person who lives now, can my consciousness live in the body of another who stands beside me now? if so, that would be a consciousness that was completely free. To be condemned to be free, but to have freedom and not use it is the interpretation I shall propose. That in embracing what it is to be free we condemned ourselves to a life of servitude, we must always serve our freedom. There is a way of making practice out of living a free life, indeed Sartre, in my view, walked his talk, he lived by example of his own views, he was a freedom fighter, and although his philosophy is sometime seen as more political than existential, he was an advocate for personal freedom. Santoni quotes from Sartre about the absurdity of freedom:

Freedom is 'the freedom of choosing but not the freedom of not choosing. Not to choose is, in fact, to choose not to choose. We are a freedom that chooses, but we do not choose to be free.' Freedom is not free to exist or not to be free.²²

For my final point I shall return to Mary Warnock "Action is the unmasking of reality and at the same time a modification of that reality."²³ In order to change the future we must recognise the past and anchor ourselves in the present with a good sense of how the world is. "The agent of change in history turns out to be, not the individual free revolutionary, but the group of which he is a member."²⁴ In the dramatic fictional speech by William Wallace at the battle against the English at Stirling Bridge he cries "They may take our lives, but they will never take our freedom". Wallace has a whole army of men behind him to assist in his battle for freedom, and each individual is willing to have his life taken in the name of freedom. It is not the individual consciousness we fight, *mano el mano*, but the collective consciousness of a party, a class, the haves and the have nots. "His enemy is another class in society and the cause of his enmity is the contingent fact of the scarcity of material goods."²⁵ When Sartre termed the concept 'we are condemned to be free' the whole world was reeling from the devastating effects and atrocities of the Second World War, and the Nazi occupation of France. The world was alive with the cries of those who were witness and subject to its brutal attack on the freedom of the individual, many had paid a hefty price in maintaining that freedom and blame spread across the world like a virus. In order to bring control back to the conscious individual, to find comfort in one's own existence, freedom must come at a price and that price is to condemn ourselves to a life of choice not servitude, but only in our collection of consciousness, when all humans think as one can that freedom be truly recognised, and as Warnock observes we all want the same things, more or less.²⁶ Whether we find our freedom in the accumulation of wealth, knowledge, family, nature or a peaceful existence we are condemned to choose, we cannot sit idly by and leave it to chance.

²² Ronald E. Santoni. 'Camus on Sartre's "Freedom": Another "Misunderstanding"', *The review of Metaphysics*, 61:4 (2008). p.789

²³ Mary Warnock, *Existentialism*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). p.128

²⁴ Ibid. p.129

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Ibid

* How
clearly
he is
above
all

clearly
not
clear
what
you
mean
here?

Bibliography

Attfield, Robin. *Ethics, An Overview* (London and New York: Continuum International, 2012).

Baldwin, Thomas, ed. *Reading Merleau-Ponty*, ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

Blackman, H. J. *Six Existentialist Thinkers* (London: Routledge, 1965).

Butler, Samuel. *The Way of all Flesh* (London: Marshal Cavendish, 1993).

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1971).

Santoni, Ronald E. 'Camus on Sartre's "Freedom": Another "Misunderstanding"', *The review of Metaphysics*, 61:4 (2008).

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*, tr. Hazel E. Barnes (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism and Humanism*, tr. Philip Mairet (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978).

Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works* (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966).

Teichman, Jenny. And Katherine Evans. *Philosophy a Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

Warnock, Mary. *Existentialism*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).



