



Undergraduate assignment feedback form (to be completed by marker)

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Module title: <u>PTE</u>	Student number:
For completion by marker:	
Comments: This is an interesting essay that draws on secondary material in a successful manner. It is well-researched & your approach to the title question reveals a certain degree of individuality (for you have approached issues not core beyond those we've discussed in the lectures). That said, the structure of the essay could be better organised so that one paragraph leads to another/ builds on the former in a more plausible fashion. Further, there is some need for more by way of a critique, but, overall, this is a good	
Marker's signature: <u>[Signature]</u>	Date: <u>29/11/19</u>
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piece of work

What is bad faith? - James Barrow [1702562]

Sartre's view is the most prominent on the matter of bad faith, but there are more philosophers who look into the matter in a different depth, such as Simone de Beauvoir. This essay will focus entirely on Sartre's view for the sake of brevity.

✓ 'Bad faith' as defined by Jean-Paul Sartre requires some background knowledge on some of Sartre's other works in philosophy, specifically regarding materialism. Sartre holds a similar view on the material world to that of Karl Marx, who is quoted as saying, "Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."¹ In essence, Marx rejects the notion of religion as he believes it to be similar to a drug that people take to relieve the pressures of the material world by promising the existence of a better world that will be attained after death. Sartre is similar, as he writes in his ~~book~~ *Existentialism and Humanism*, "[...] man may be born a slave in a pagan society, or may be a feudal baron, or a proletariat. But what may never vary are the necessities of being in the world, of having to labour and to die there."² Sartre argues in this quote that the circumstances of one's birth may affect that person's religious belief or mindset for how they view the world, but that these do not affect the notion that we as a species exist in the now, and that we as people will eventually die in the world that we know. All we know is what we see in the material world around us, regardless of our beliefs in the extraordinary or what could happen after we die.

This is a prelude to Sartre's concept of 'bad faith', as bad faith is the belief that people may perform as a different entity in the sense that they are denying themselves by acting in such a way that it may be for the betterment of society (at least in their minds). They are not acting in a way that truly represents themselves, but rather in such a way that a different being is presented as they reject who they are for this 'play-acting'. Sartre himself writes it as such:

Do you need to make the distinction between beings - i.e. themselves, and for themselves before you analyse here?

Let us consider the waiter in the cafe. His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. [...] All his behaviour seems to us a game. He applies himself to linking his movements as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other; his gestures and even his voice seem to be mechanisms; he gives himself the quickness and pitiless rapidity of things. He is playing, he is amusing himself. But what is he playing? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a cafe.³

The actions that this analogous waiter has performed reject the material world that Marx and Sartre have proposed, as the person that the waiter truly is can be seen as having fallen to the wayside so that he may continue the façade that he is this being that is assigned to being a waiter as opposed to his true self. Benjamin K. Elwyn comments on bad faith, saying "Its centrality rests in the fact that, like all our attitudes, bad faith determines the way the world and the people within it appear, shaping all our thoughts and actions as agents in the world."⁴ Every set of actions that every human being takes part in is a conscious decision made either to adhere

¹ Joseph O'Malley and Karl Marx, *Critique Of Hegel's 'Philosophy Of Right'* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 131.

² Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Mairet (trans.) *Existentialism & Humanism* (Methuen, 1987), pp. 42-55.

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Routledge, 1956), p. 82.

⁴ Benjamin K. Elwyn, "Multiplicity: A New Reading of Sartrean Bad Faith", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 20.3 (2012), 601-618 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2012.671583>>.

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to the person that they are, insomuch that they are acting in good faith and not constrained to any other identity that they may be acting as, or that they *are* play acting as different things and denying their own reality.

Sartre argues that the very idea of nothingness must denote that an experience of nothingness exists, and therefore from that a person can make the logical conclusion that nothingness exists in the material world in an abstract concept.⁵ Sartre cites how a blind man may experience the world without the ability to see. He argues that because he sees nothing, the totality of the blind man's world is affected by the nothingness that he sees, and therefore that the nothingness, adding to the experience of the material world must therefore mean that nothingness as experienced by human beings as existing in the world that we know through our own limitations.⁶ Sartre is quoted as saying "It is evident that non-being always appears within the limits of a human expectation."⁷ In the following chapter, Sartre notes that this concept of nothingness existing must be the point in which that humans can act in ways in which they are not, as the nothingness acts as a singular realisation among humans that they can become anything that they want if it were to fill that void which by all definitions must exist.⁸ What is wrong with this ideology is that when a human being realises that they can become anything, they may try to become something that they are currently not, which is acting in bad faith. This ties back into the aforementioned café waiter analogy that Sartre proposed, as he is merely acting as a waiter. That is not what this person is, yet it is what the person is intended to be seen as. He wishes to be seen as a waiter, so therefore he denies his own reality to project it onto others.

Sartre's view on 'bad faith' also stems from how he makes a distinction as to how human beings differ in their existence and purpose in relation to every other thing that exists, saying that human beings are '*beings for-itself*'. This is the concept that human beings are beings that exist with a primary purpose in their existence, and that everything else must simply exist for no other purpose other than the objective fact that they do indeed, exist. Sartre refers to non-human beings as '*beings in-itself*'.⁹ Sartre argues that the waiter knows what it means to be a waiter, but in that notion, the waiter is only making the conscious choice to become a being in-itself, or a being that serves only to exist for the sake of existing and not to exist for a purpose that one could define as being free and willing. It is the waiter's choice to act as he is, and through that, he is acting in bad faith, as he is not acting according to how his existence allows to its full extent.¹⁰ *Re word.*

However, what must be stated as not acting in Sartre's definition of 'bad faith', is that if there is an outside cause that is causing a person to act in ways in which they would otherwise not, as they are not in control of them acting in such a manner and that it is not a conscious choice, as it is with Sartre's analogous waiter. Such outside causes could be coercion from another person or a mental illness that affects judgement. Joseph S. Catalano posits as such:

For example, a person with a manic-depressive illness appears to be ignorant of the reasons for his extreme change of moods. He goes to an analyst asking for help to understand why he acts the way he does. Clearly, many psychoanalysts would not

⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Routledge, 1956). p. 7

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. p. 8

⁹ Sartre, *Existentialism & Humanism*. p. 42-55

¹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre and Stephen Priest, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 2005).p. 219

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explain his illness as a phenomenon of 'bad faith', but they would all agree that at the present time the person truly believes that he does not know the reason for his behaviour, and thus he needs help.¹¹

What Catalano notes is important for the distinction of 'bad faith', as acting in a way that is different to how a person would act normally is not the true definition of when someone is acting in bad faith. In the example provided in the quote, it is the act of going to the psychoanalyst that is the defining feature of the man's existence, as he is aware that he requires help on account that any other decisions that are supposedly made by him are not part of his existence. His seeking help is the only important factor, and he is not acting in bad faith, simply because it is an external force creating the other decisions and a conscious choice from the man alone is the only thing that remains important, as he recognises his incapacities and is wanting for a change to where he can act as a 'being for-itself.'

With this, however, the same set of actions could be acting in bad faith if one were to turn the intentions around. If the man went to the psychoanalyst for ostensibly the same reason, but with the conscious decision that he does not like the man he is and would like to consciously change himself for his own personal gain and that he did not have a manic-depressive illness that needed rectifying, instead opting to hold the illusion that he has one, then that would indeed be an example of Sartre's concept of 'bad faith'. This would show a conscious effort of sound mind to act as a new being. Catalano's example in his commentary then must follow Sartre's idea that acting in 'bad faith' must be a conscious decision made by a person, unaffected by outside influences. Even though a person may be unaware that they are acting in bad faith, it would still be their own efforts of their own mind that denotes them being in bad faith.

Sartre holds the view that humanity is "condemned to be free,"¹² by which he means that the only choice that we as human beings cannot make is the decision to not be free in a conscious sense. Every choice (aside from the choice to no longer be free) that we make is a choice that is made of our own free volition, to such a point that even the decision to be born is somewhat a choice, as a person can make the choice to end their own life, which is a conscious decision to negate the fact that they were born. A longer quote by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* reads:

[...] my freedom is the unique foundation of values and [...] nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, or this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable. My freedom is anguished at being the foundation of values while itself without foundation.¹³

Freedom to Sartre is the baseline of existence, as "existence precedes essence".¹⁴ This can be linked to the first point in this essay, as Sartre holds the view that existence only truly matters in the material world, and if this is the case, then our existence there must take precedence over any 'essence' that we might have in a spiritual or religious sense. With this, we are free. As a result of this freedom, we are condemned to be free through no choice of our own. The *anguish* of this responsibility is the catalyst for how we act as free agents of the world, and therefore the potential for human beings to act in bad faith. Existence would be easier for people if the outcomes of all decisions were not decided by themselves, and they are forced to make the

¹¹ Joseph S. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 78-95.

¹² Sartre, *Existentialism & Humanism*, p. 42-55

¹³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. p. 72

¹⁴ Sartre, *Existentialism & Humanism*, p. 42-55

decisions through this condemnation of freedom. Utilising this freedom to act as a being in-itself, like the analogous waiter that was discussed before, is utilising this freedom in bad faith. Sartre further argues about this anguish of the responsibility of freedom as he writes:

The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it, precisely because it could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself. Human reality therefore is by nature an unhappy consciousness with no possibility of surpassing its unhappy state.¹⁵

What this quote purports is further evidence for the fact that bad faith is how individuals attempt to reject their freedom by becoming a being that exists only for the sake of existing, rather than a being that has a further purpose to exist for a cause. Sartre argues that anyone acting in bad faith is an 'unhappy consciousness' that will never leave the state of being unhappy for as long as they continue to deceive themselves that they are acting for the betterment of themselves by attempting to deny this freedom from which they cannot escape. By saying that this is 'by nature' for human reality, Sartre is positing that the concept of bad faith is an inevitability, as no singular person is able to ascertain and understand what their freedom truly means, and that they anguish not just because they are condemned to be free with all the responsibilities that come with this, but also because that freedom is beyond their understanding. Life is what people make of it but it is often made to be what it should not be. It should not be attempted to be made of something else that serves no purpose for itself.

Bad faith is therefore the notion that people may act in a way that is not indicative to their true nature and freedom, and that the anguish that the responsibility of that freedom creates is near-inevitable. A person may act like a being that is perfect at their responsibilities, but at a certain point that person becomes an automaton of that purpose they have assigned themselves, and will therefore be acting in bad faith as they attempt to act without freedom and without true responsibility.

¹⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. p. 133-134

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