



Undergraduate assignment feedback form (to be completed by marker)

Student Name: <i>Esme Luchman</i>	
Module title: <i>PTE</i>	Student number:
For completion by marker:	
Comments: <i>Although this essay contains relevant facts & ideas, there are quite a few misconceptions related to Sartre's concept of bad faith.</i> <i>further, there are a lot of spelling mistakes & grammatical inaccuracies which result in a lack of clarity throughout.</i> <i>That said, there's evidence of having gained knowledge & some understanding of the title question & secondary reading material has been utilised in order to attempt a critique.</i>	
Marker's signature: <i>df</i>	Date: <i>29/11/19</i>
Provisional mark: <i>53</i>	
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ESME

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

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) is known as the father of existentialism.¹ His philosophical ideas were so popular that they contributed to, and even shaped the philosophical landscape in the decade that followed the second world war. He was born and grew up in Paris where his interest in politics developed. Although he never formally joined the party, he had a relationship with the French communist group until after the war, he thought until then, that it was the only political party concerned with the French working class.² Sartre's view that humans are condemned to be free is criticised for being too nihilistic. Condemnation in any context appears, at first sight, to be emphatically negative. However, Sartre is trying to prompt us into examining our own freedoms and responsibilities. Like any existentialist, he tasks us with looking inwards, he urges us to avoid being anything other than ourselves, to make our own choices by casting out bad faith. When Sartre contends that humans are condemned to be free he means that, because of bad faith, we must accept the feeling of anguish in order to be truly free and authentic.

There are some aspects of Sartre's philosophy which have been contended, I examine some of these debates. I discuss freedom of being, nothingness, anguish, bad faith and *The Waiter*³. His works, *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism is a Humanism* (among other scholarly works) are key to my analysis of this topic.

Sartre's contention reflects a complete freedom totality, this being an anti-deterministic, libertarian view. In other words a concept of absolute free will or freedom to choose with no predetermined fate. Sartre begins from the assumption that humans are "beings-for-themselves" and it is as such that these beings have absolute freedom. A being *for* itself is how Sartre describes human existence or consciousness, this is in contrast to a being *in* itself which is Sartre's understanding of objects or things without self awareness.⁴ The distinction between these two types of being, a being *for* itself and a being *in* itself, Sartre describes as essence or consciousness.⁵ A being *in* itself is assigned a predetermined essence which has been decided before it is brought into existence unlike beings for themselves who have no such pre existing essence, no idea of what they should be.⁶ For example, when considering the notion of building a table one first must think of it's design, how best to make the table suited for its purpose. You already have a preconceived idea of what a table should be, its function.⁷ This is the predetermined essence which Sartre assigns to beings *in* themselves and denies beings *for*

¹ Thomas Flynn, 'Jean-Paul Sartre', ed. by Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2013)

<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/sartre/>> [accessed 21 November 2019].

² Flynn. Section on Politics.

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E Barnes (London and New York: Routledge, 2003). (The waiter p129) (Anguish p8) (Bad faith p47)

⁴ Sartre.

⁵ Sartre. (p9)

⁶ 'Existentialism Is a Humanism', trans. by Philip Mairet, 1946, p. 2.

⁷ Mairet.

themselves. Therefore, it seems, absolute freedom comes down to, for Sartre, this lack of pre existing idea; we can choose to do whatever we want, to be whoever we want no matter what the situation, *nothing* stands in your way. It is the revelation of this nothingness which according to Sartre, causes people anguish.⁸

Some misconceptions here.
Sartre asserts that human beings create nothingness through nihilation.⁹ In the Sartrian sense "nihilation" means becoming nothing or becoming non-being. To demonstrate what he means, Sartre tells the story of going to meet Pierre in the cafe. ¹⁰Say you walk into a cafe with the expectation to see someone you know, Pierre. When you arrive, you can see that Pierre is not there. How do you know he is not in the cafe, since, there is no empty Pierre shaped space to indicate him *not being* there? As you scan the cafe for your companion, everyone else fades away into nothingness. You reject them from the mind for being irrelevant to your current situation. In other words, you turn them into nothing. It is important for Sartre's contention that humans are condemned to be free, to understand the concepts of anguish and nothingness.

Or rather, fade into the background.
Sartre uses analogies to explore his idea of anguish including "the look" which is explained below.¹¹In his book *Being and Nothingness* ¹²Sartre gives two examples to illustrate his understanding of anguish, the first is vertigo for fear of the future and the second is the Gambler to demonstrate how anguish is a necessary evil in the face of the past. The feeling of vertigo overwhelms you when you stand at the edge of a high cliff or precipice. You look down at the rocks or beach below, picture your body lifeless and distorted at the bottom. Sartre believes the feeling of vertigo, nausea and dizziness, comes from the knowledge that there is nothing preventing you from throwing yourself over the edge and becoming that lifeless future version of yourself. There is also nothing to stop you from turning back, and continuing on your path to an unknown future version of yourself.¹³

Let us now, imagine that a gambler has put herself in a considerable amount of debt. So, this feeling of dread makes her resolve to give her habit up. But what happens when this feeling fades and she realises that there is *nothing* between her and her past self, nothing stopping her from gambling again. Equally, there is nothing stopping her from continuing with her resolution. Sartre says that in order for the gambler to be able to do this, she must realize the nothingness and know that she is always free to choose (living in anguish), but more than that she must remember the feeling of dread that comes from financial ruin and embarrassment, she has to relive this feeling every day for her resolution to stick. Voicing the thoughts of the gambler, Sartre writes "I am alone and naked before temptation as I was the day before... I perceive with anguish that nothing prevents me from gambling. This anguish is me since by the very fact of taking my position in existence as consciousness of being, I make myself not to be the past of

⁸ Sartre. (p9)

⁹ Sartre. (p9)

¹⁰ Sartre. (P71)

¹¹ Sartre.

¹² Sartre. (p vertigo 8, gambler 94, the look 252 etc.)

¹³ Sartre.

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good resolution which I am." He is trying to examine how the past creates a feeling of anguish over who we were, and how nothingness is between I as I am now and I who I will be.

49. Sartre also puts forward the concepts of "being-for-others"¹⁴ and "the look". As I understand it, Sartre is explaining a third state of existence which we drift in and out of depending on whether or not we are being observed. In other words, we each have a preconceived idea of a person i.e. they will have some kind of character/personality. When we perceive someone, we immediately subjectively objectify them, by putting them in a category related to their image, behaviour and the objects around them. For instance, if you saw a woman coming out of a hospital whilst on the phone and her expression suggests she is not enjoying the conversation, many plausible possibilities come to mind as to who she is? Why she was there and who she is talking to? You see her getting into a car that looks a tad old and dirty, with a missing wing mirror and a big scratch on the driver side door. Any conclusion that you make about who this woman is, is an objectification, you are fixing her in your mind as a thing, or as Sartre describes, an *other*.¹⁵ We make her into a being other than a being for itself and a being in itself. To describe how this affects us Sartre uses "the look" as an example. Imagine that you are motivated by something (such as jealousy or curiosity) to look through a keyhole in a door and press your ear against the wood. Inside the room you observe what seems like another dimension, you are completely absorbed by what you see. You lose yourself inside the room, the idea that you are yourself crouching outside pressing your eyes to the keyhole forgetting your own freedoms and responsibilities, is gone. You are *being* purely for the sake of others (the people in the room). "My attitude, for example, has no "outside"; it is a pure process of relating the instrument (the keyhole) to the end, tone attained (the spectacle to be seen), a pure mode of losing myself in the world..."¹⁶

Suddenly, you hear a floorboard creek behind you and a feeling of dread explodes within you. You have been caught in a state of non being. Someone is now objectifying you. Sartre says that the only way to overcome the feeling of dread is to objectify the person looking at you so that you are equal in your existence. This is how being for others could be linked to anguish. You quickly remember, as you are seen, that you are a being for itself with complete freedom. This can also be connected to the feeling of vertigo, which I look at in more detail above and bad faith.

The concept of bad faith is, in my view, essential when considering Sartre's condemnation of human freedom. Having bad faith or living in bad faith is, in Sartre's mind, immoral behaviour. Bad faith means, to be deceitful towards your true self and others, it describes a certain two faced or "double mindedness" in the mode of being. In order to avoid bad faith we must live authentically as a being for itself. Living in bad faith is trying to exist within the parameters of a

¹⁴ Sartre. (p252) *The Look*

¹⁵ Sartre. (p251)

¹⁶ Sartre. (p317)

not correct.
He does not
condemn
it.

being in itself. In other words, to act in bad faith is to deny our freedom¹⁷ as beings for themselves. Sartre deems bad faith completely avoidable and believes that no matter your situation, there is always a choice to act with authenticity. Hence, to act in good faith one must dismiss the victim mentality that comes with feeling as though events are 'out of your hands'. To live authentically you must accept your freedom totality, perceive that you can make any decision, in accordance with beings for themselves and act with authentic, intrinsic, intention. The anguish we feel over this responsibility is at the heart of existentialism, it is the absence of external factors by which to guide our choices, and through using external influence that leads to bad faith.

Sartre's observation of the waiter is used to illustrate his concept of bad faith.¹⁸ Sartre sits in a cafe and watches a waiter as he works. He perceives the waiter's movements as uncharacteristically robot like, as if the waiter was an automated service designed by an engineer. Sartre gives a wonderful description of a waiter in his book *Being and Nothingness*. "His movement is quick and forward, a little too precise, a little too rapid. He comes toward the patrons with a step a little too quick. He bends forward a little too eagerly; his voice, his eyes express an interest a little too solicitous...trying to imitate in his walk the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton while carrying his tray with the recklessness of a tight-rope-walker by putting it in a perpetually unstable, perpetually broken equilibrium..."¹⁹

Here, Sartre is attempting to explain how the waiter (a being for itself) is unauthentically taking on the role of being a waiter (the role is a being in itself). He says that the waiter is living in bad faith by trying to become a being in itself, the waiter is deceiving himself to avoid the anguish of his own freedom.

When first reading Sartre's account of the waiter an issue came to mind; Sartre does not entertain the idea that the waiter is simply enjoying his tasks and consequently seems over enthusiastic in his manner, therefore he would be acting in good faith. However on further reading it became clear that although myself and others hold this objection to the waiter acting in bad faith, Sartre does not contend that all waiters are acting in bad faith. His doctrine allows for the idea that one of many potentialities could be, the waiter took on the job in full knowledge of how he should present himself, perhaps the owner of the establishment asks this of him i.e. the waiter knew and agreed to this as part of his role prior to getting the job.²⁰ It could be suggested that by using the waiter example Sartre is discerning authentic behaviour from the inauthentic. It also seems hypocritical of Sartre to assume he understands someone else's motivations since this is against his own account of individual phenomenology. However, Sartre also contends that by analysing someone's behaviour through prolonged observation.²¹ I would

¹⁷ Anthony R. Yue and Albert J. Mills, 'Making Sense out of Bad Faith: Sartre, Weick and Existential Sensemaking in Organizational Analysis', *Tamara: Journal for Critical Organization Inquiry*, 7.1 (2008). p73

¹⁸ Sartre.

¹⁹ Sartre. (p120)

²⁰ R. F. Khan, 'D. Z. Phillips on Waiters and Bad Faith', *Philosophy*, 59.229 (1984), 389-91.

²¹ Khan.

argue that Sartre could not possibly have been able to fully analyse the waiter's motivations from a single encounter, but I will discount this observation since I do not believe he was being judgmental in his account, more that he was using a subjective observation as an objective example to demonstrate bad faith.

When Sartre used the word 'condemned' to describe human freedom, I believe he was referring to the paradoxical nature of human existence and consciousness. The word 'condemned' in this context can mean that we do not have the choice to be free, according to Sartre living against your own freedom is in bad faith (deceitful). In other words we are not free to choose freedom, which is a paradox in itself. Just as it is ironic for freedom to cause anguish, especially considering the historical context of Sartre's work. His most influential writings happened during or just after the second world war and his experience of anguish is likely to have informed his understanding of it. Regardless of this, Sartre's philosophy of being, nothingness, anguish, the human condition and his evaluation of freedom, are still, arguably some of the most relevant philosophies in the modern day.

Gr.

Why?

This could be discussed above, not in the conclusion (as it raises a new point).

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