



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

Student Name: <u>Georgia Williams</u>	
Module title: <u>PtE</u>	Student number:
For completion by marker:	
Comments: In this essay you make very good use of the primary reading, evincing a good understanding of Sartre's concept of bad faith. You incorporate Sartre's examples & present a fairly well considered analysis of those examples. You also draw on relevant secondary material but I think this material could be used in more depth to develop your critique. That said, you have provided a well structured essay that makes some interesting & plausible points. Overall, a well considered answer to the question set.	
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* Avoid comma-splices — ~~use the~~ ^{separating} (what should be) 2 separate sentences with a comma rather than a full-stop.

Georgia Williams

Essay question

What is Bad Faith?

The idea of bad faith is a concept that Sartre fought long and hard against, especially when coming to the terms of defining it. In this essay, I will compare the works of his main text; *Being and Nothingness*¹ and his essay of *Existentialism is a humanism*² as well as looking at the work of others who both criticize and assess what Sartre means by Bad faith. After careful analysis I will attempt to understand how he defines Bad faith and for what purpose we need to understand it.

Sartre argues that we are free beings and in no way is our future determined or fixed however, he believes it is this freedom that gives us the feeling of anguish. For anguish he argues that we don't like the idea of being free as it means one is entirely responsible for one's own actions therefore, the idea that we are not free beings allows one to escape from such anguish as it allows the possibility that not all actions are one's own. When defining anguish in his essay *Existentialism is a humanism* he uses the example of a military leader sending men into an attack he argues that "in making the decision he cannot help but feel a certain anguish"³ however he then proceeds to say "it does not prevent their action, on the contrary it is the very condition of their action for the action presupposes there is a plurality of possibilities..."⁴ this clearly defines that in anguish we find we have a freedom of choice that we cannot escape. And it is this choice that we fear as it makes us responsible. In the example above the idea that the military leader who has led men to their deaths leaves him with anguish but will also leave him with the guilt that he may not be able to escape. It is this lasting idea of guilt that can also lead us to want to believe we have no choice in our actions however if that were true it would mean we have no freedom which would contradict what Sartre says in *Existentialism is a humanism* where he states "man is free, man is freedom"⁵

Sartre also argues the idea of lying to one's self about our actions not being of our own consciousness and free actions is something discussed in the beginning of bad faith in Sartre's book *being and nothingness*. He uses this example of lying to demonstrate how bad faith and lying have a similar structure. When talking about lying Sartre argues that it isn't necessarily a negative thing. The idea of lying to one another is wrong however in this instance Sartre talks about how you are both the liar and the one being lied to thus, it makes the lying justified as he states "the essence of the lie implies in fact that the liar is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding."⁶ This example clearly shows that

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and nothingness*, New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd (1957).

² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a humanism*, 1946

<<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~baldner/existentialism.pdf>> [accessed 19.11.2019].

³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a humanism*, 1946

<<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~baldner/existentialism.pdf>> [accessed 19.11.2019]. page 4

⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a humanism*, 1946

<<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~baldner/existentialism.pdf>> [accessed 19.11.2019]. page 4

⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a humanism*, 1946

<<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~baldner/existentialism.pdf>> [accessed 19.11.2019]. page 5

⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and nothingness*, New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd (1957) page 71

one can lie to one's self as an escape from anguish but one can never truly deceive one's self as he knows the truth from which he is hiding. In this example we can argue how bad faith may be defined as lying to one's self.

A further example of what Sartre means by bad faith is displayed in his anecdote of the woman who goes out with a particular man on a date.⁷ The woman goes on a date with a man and understands what his intentions are however the woman tries to ignore the fact she has to decide as to what she wants from the man. It is this ignorance from the woman that gives the example of bad faith as she is lying to herself about what she needs to decide. In the book *Being and Nothingness* the following is said about the woman on the date;

"She is profoundly aware of the desire which she inspires, but the desire cruel and naked would humiliate and horrify her. Yet she would find no charm in a respect which would only be respect"⁸

This quote shows that the woman has a complete understanding of what the man in her company desires however she is confused about what she wants. In this instance it is fair to argue that Sartre may be wrong for using this as an example of bad faith. If we are to understand that the woman knows what she wants but is just lying to herself about it then yes that would be an example of bad faith as she is hiding the truth from herself however, in this instance she may just be confused as to what she wants. In the example it does state that she knows his intentions however it does not state hers. Here it should be mentioned that maybe Sartre is mistaking bad faith for confusion. If the woman is confused as to what she wants and therefore hasn't decided yet, then she is not lying to herself. This would mean she is not an example of bad faith. Within this example the woman rests her hand and the man holds it but rather than acknowledge his hand is there or move her hand away from his she does nothing. Sartre uses this as support for the example of bad faith as it shows the woman lying to herself about the decision, she knows she needs to make. However, the woman treats the man's hand as an object, a being-in-itself. It is here one should define that a being-in-itself means that it has no consciousness and is nothing more than an object. Therefore, when the woman depicts the man's hand as a being-in-itself she sees no reason to have to make a decision just as she does not need to make a decision about any of the other objects in the room. Within this date the man also makes comments to the woman about her beauty and appearance, within these comments she resigns the idea of any sexual meaning the comments carry with them and instead she takes them as if she were a being-in-itself rather than a being-for-itself. A being-for-itself is different to a being-in-itself as it is not objectified. When describing a being-for-itself we often think of human beings as its definition rest upon the idea that a being-for-itself is a conscious being. Therefore, when the woman was accepting the comments from the man we allowed herself to become objectified in order to avoid making her final decision with the man. I do agree that by the woman viewing the man's hand as a being-in-itself she is ignorant to his intentions furthermore by her interpretation his comments in a way that made them less understanding to the way they were intended she also displays bad faith as she was trying to deceive herself of his intentions, but I disagree that she is being ignorant about deciding what she wants. Therefore, if Sartre is going to define bad faith as lying to one's self then this is a weaker example. Within this example it is very easy to mistake bad

⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and nothingness*, New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd (1957) page 78-79

⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and nothingness*, New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd (1957) page 78

This definition, together with the distinction between being-in-itself & for-itself would be best placed at the beginning of the essay.

Good point. Could you develop this point?

faith with being confused, unless we can define that the woman had the same or opposite intentions to the man she was accompanied by there is no real way of telling if she was flattered by the attention from the man or if she was indeed just confused as to what she wanted.

The next example in his book is the waiter in the café example. Here we see the example of a man who is a waiter in a café, but Sartre argues he is playing a waiter which is an act of bad faith. In this instance it must be argued that is a man who's job it is to be a waiter is in bad faith is that the same for all those with jobs? Are they too in bad faith? Sartre argues that those with jobs being to convince themselves they are nothing other than their job, from this those in the society around them then view them this way too:

"the public demands of them that they realize it is a ceremony; there is the dance of the grocer, of the tailor, of the auctioneer, by which they endeavor to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor... society demands that he limit himself to his function."

From this we can argue everyone is in bad faith and bad faith becomes impossible to avoid. In this example the idea of having to limit one's self in order to conform to society is a concept much rejected by Sartre as it rejects the idea that we are free beings. This quote from *bad faith and the other* supports the idea that bad faith is a problem of free beings feeling the need to conform to society and thus limiting their actions to do so.

"Bad Faith, therefore, is a social disease rather than an individual failing, in Sartre's View, and is an ongoing condition rather than a sporadic activity"⁹

This need to limit one's self for society could be the very definition of bad faith, it gives the ^{idea} ~~ideology~~ that even as free beings we have no choice in our actions due to having to conform in society rather than a higher being that has determined our future. It is in this example we see this different understanding of bad faith. Unlike the first example, where bad faith was understood as lying to one's self, there is no reason for the waiter to lie to himself, he is just doing his job so, if he is not lying to himself or hiding from the truth then how is he in bad faith. In this particular example Sartre thus moves on to a type of bad faith where instead of lying to yourself you are acting as something you are not. In this instance the man is playing a waiter. It is here Sartre argues the man is playing because he is not constantly a waiter but rather that is his job. He states "...The waiter in the café can not be immediately a waiter in the same sense that this inkwell is an inkwell, or this glass is a glass"¹⁰ from this we see that Sartre is trying to identify that the waiter becomes something it is not. When the waiter is not a waiter it is just a man, it is only when that man goes to work that he becomes a waiter. This is where the idea of bad faith is installed in the anecdote. The man is restricting his freedoms when he goes to work as he is restricted to do only what a waiter would do. It is clear to see why this is considered bad faith to Sartre as it means the decisions of the waiter are somewhat influenced due to his job. It is in this example the man is trying to convince himself he must be a waiter because he must make money to provide and it is this

⁹ Jonathan. W, *Bad Faith and the other*,

<<https://www.jonathanwebber.co.uk/articles/BadFaithAndTheOther.pdf>> [accessed 07.11.2019]

¹⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and nothingness*, New York: Methuen & Co. Ltd (1957) page 83

exact thinking that leads him to believe he has no other choice. In this instance we can agree with the first example that bad faith is deceiving yourself as the waiter is trying to deceive himself by arguing he has no other choice. If the man, then believes he has no other choice he can not see how he would be a free being. In this instance we see bad faith as not having a choice, we see it as there is a restriction on your freedom.

The example of the waiter is criticized in *the Bad faith and the other* where it argues "why does Sartre think he can surmise someone's motivation on the basis of brief observations of their behavior across the café floor?"¹¹ He cannot. There is no way Sartre can deeply understand the person motivations from a brief observation however, he is able to make assumptions. These assumptions however may not always be the correct fact of the matter.

By careful analysis his works it is clear to see there is a divide of whether bad faith is lying and trying to deceive one's self or bad faith may also be limiting one's freedom. I would support that bad faith fits both of those definitions. There can be no one answer to the question of what is bad faith? By looking at both examples bad faith fits them both the same. Bad faith is the term that best fits both situations in the examples. When the woman was trying to deceive herself from the acknowledgment, she had to make a choice about the guy she was out with. It shows an example of bad faith as she was lying to herself even though she was not pretending to be something else she was being ignorant to the facts. In the second example with the waiter I believe the term of bad faith sits well here as the waiter was doing his job however, by doing so it meant that he was not able to live to his full freedom as his job limits his actions. Here it is an example of bad faith as Sartre insists, we are all free beings and that we are not limited in our actions in anyway.

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