

The Philosophical Roots of Psychology

(by Thomas Wren)

Lecture 7

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Jean-Paul Sartre

Four Psychological Themes

	<u>Human Development</u>	<u>Model of the Mind</u>	<u>Method of Inquiry</u>	<u>Self & Society</u>
<u>Plato</u>	Knowing the Good (escaping from the cave)	Four levels of knowledge and four levels of reality	Conceptual analysis and reminiscence	Three parts of soul and three classes of society
<u>Aris- totle</u>	<i>Eudemonia</i> (human flourishing, happiness, virtue)	Rational & irrational faculties of the soul (teleology)	Logical and empirical observation	Man as <i>zoon politikon</i> (civic life as part of human flourishing)
<u>Des- cartes</u>	Quest for certainty (from naïve belief to solid knowledge)	Mind and body as separate substances (dualism and innate ideas)	Analytic meditation (radical doubt and "The Cogito")	The autonomous self (Descartes' robot problem)

Four Psychological Themes, Continued

	<u>Human Development</u>	<u>Models of the Mind</u>	<u>Method of Inquiry</u>	<u>Self & Society</u>
Classical Empiricism	Acquisition of experience (Writing on the "tabula rasa")	Mind as a blank slate (No innate ideas)	Ockham's razor (Representative realism)	The Self as a question mark Prosocial behavior & natural law
Schopenhauer and Freud	Empowering the ego (das Ich)	Multiple levels of consciousness	Clinical interviews and interpretations	Civilization and its discontents
Sartre	Quest for Authenticity (Existence before essence, Radical choice)	Consciousness as "No-Thingness" (Subjectivity & objectivity, Anguish in face of freedom)	The Phenomenological Method	Master-Slave Dialectic of Staring & Stared-at Selves (Hell as other people)

Agenda

- Sartre's Historical Context
- Existentialism's Big Question
- 1. His Conception of Human Development
- 2. His Model of the Mind
- 3. His Method of Inquiry
- 4. His Conception of the Individual & Society
- Appendix: Sartre's Relevance to Contemporary Psychology

Historical Context

Chaos, War, Anxiety, and Existentialism

- Various social and emotional crises following the first half of the 20th Century.
- Following WW1, two decades of instability and increasing desperation:

The painful political and military events of the first half of the 20th century are well known, but its many forms of social and emotional crises may not be as familiar to the generation born in the second half of that century.

Short summary: The Treaty of Versailles (1919) ended WW1 but created two decades of instability and increasing desperation:

- People no longer trusted their institutions, including their cherished traditions and, for many, their established religions.
- When at the beginning of WW2 France fell almost immediately and a right-wing puppet government was installed at Vichy, the French people were shocked and utterly demoralized.
- But hope was not lost. The French held on, waiting for a counter-invasion. They knew that Charles de Gaulle had organized the Free French Forces in England, the Amis were about to enter the war, and a very effective French underground was resisting the occupation.
- Their hopes were fulfilled. In 1944 176,000 Allied soldiers invaded Normandy, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Historical Context, Cont.

WW2 and Its Aftermath

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

- Influenced by the German philosophers Edmund Husserl and (especially) Martin Heidegger
- During WW2 became an intellectual leader of “La Résistance”
- Coined the term “Existentialism” in 1943, during the darkest days of the Second World War.



Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

Sartre (1905-1980) was an intellectual leader of “La Résistance,” the romantic French partisan movement that still continues to inspire feelings of patriotism, heroic individualism, and stoic resolution in the face of absurdity and disillusionment.

As a young professor he learned about Husserl's Phenomenological Method and went to Berlin to study it. Later studied the early work of Heidegger (Husserl's student), especially Heidegger's ideas of Angst and human freedom in *Sein und Zeit*.

He invented the word “Existentialism” in 1943, during the darkest days of the Second World War.

After the war he continued to be a flamboyant spokesman for the Left in France, but during the 1950s he abandoned the heavy individualism of existentialism in favor of a unique and less dogmatic sort of Marxism that the French Communist party itself condemned.

Sartre's Big Question

“How can we be conscious of consciousness?”

Related Issues:

- Human freedom
- Self-knowledge

Excursus: A Short List of Sartre's Existential Themes

1. Phenomenology
2. Being & Nothingness
3. Existence & Essence
4. Authenticity (Good Faith) & Inauthenticity (Bad Faith)
5. Consciousness & Selfhood
6. Freedom & Anguish
7. Self & Other

1. Sartre's Conception of Human Development

- Sartre's Two Incompatible Conceptions of the Direction of Development:
 - What we should try to become
 - (Corresponding Goal: An Authentic Person)
 - What we actually do try to become
 - (Corresponding Goal: An In-Itself-For-Itself)

Nothingness vs. Thingness (Sartre's Big Idea)

REALITY	
Nothingness ("No-Thingness")	Being ("Thingness")
Consciousness	Objects of consciousness
Subjectivity ("I know")	Objectivity (What I know)
Indeterminate, unstructured	Determinate, structured
Freedom	Necessity
The For-Itself (<i>Pour-soi, Für sich</i>)	The In-Itself (<i>En-soi, An sich</i>)

The Phenomenon of Freedom

- **Sartre's Examples:**

- Lady in the Window (case study borrowed from J.-M. Janet)
- Gambler in Casino
- Soldier before Battle (cf. Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*)
- Champion of Sincerity
- Walking on the Bridge



Why Freedom Means Anguish

- Anguish (*Angst*) vs. Fear (*Fürcht*)
- Kierkegaard's & Sartre's conceptions of anguish:
 - Kierkegaard: Anguish is dread before the ultimate Nothingness of my ceasing to exist.
 - Sartre: Anguish is dread before the ultimate Nothingness of my continuing to exist.

Anguish (indeterminate object, e.g., freedom) vs. **Fear** (determinate object, e.g., an oncoming vehicle)

Kierkegaard's & Sartre's conceptions of anguish:

Kierkegaard: Anguish is dread before the ultimate Nothingness of my ceasing to exist (*my death*).

Sartre: Anguish is dread before the ultimate Nothingness of my continuing to exist (*my freedom*).

Anguish as Missing an Appointment

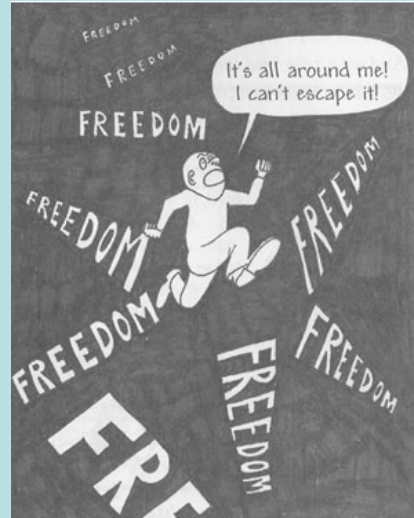


"Anguish is the expectation of not finding myself at that appointment, of no longer even wishing to be there."

Freedom as Bad News

“No Excuses”

- Flight as a coping strategy
- The anonymous “One”
- The inevitability of “Bad Faith”



Flight as a coping strategy

Tragic Irony: We always “know” what we are running from, and so can never succeed

The anonymous “One” (L'on, das Man")

Halfway recognition of our freedom

The inevitability of “Bad Faith”

Freedom as Good News

Radical Choice

- Life Patterns
 - Building an essence, leaving a personal history in one's "wake"
 - "Glissez, mortals" (André Gide)
- The Young Man's "Radical Choice"
 - Mother (To be a "country mouse")
or
 - Country (To be a "city mouse")

Life Patterns

Building an essence, leaving a personal history in one's "wake"

"Glissez, mortals" (A. Gide)

Note fluidity of metaphor (but our history hardens with death)*

Sartre's Young Man

Mother: family, church, tradition ("country mouse")

Country (la patrie): nation, resistance ("city mouse")

*A play on words (by T.W., not J-P.S.): In English a "wake" is the trail left by a boat or skier (in water or, by extension, snow). But it's also the vigil that is held for a deceased person prior to burial.

Freedom as Good News, Cont. Possibility of Conversion

- Three examples:
 1. Two hikers' different reactions to fatigue
 2. Group of mountain climbers meeting a boulder
 3. Title of Sartre's novel *St. Genet*



Three examples:

Two hikers' different reactions to fatigue ("Yes, but at what price?")

Group of mountain climbers meet a boulder

Title of Sartre's novel *St. Genet*

(Also recall Sartre's case of "the Champion of Sincerity")

Values as Guard Rails

- Values are home-made “guard rails”
- Normal phenomenon: We take values for granted
 - Action is primary, reflection comes later.
 - Consciousness is disruptive, “a wound.”



Values are home-made “guard rails,” that protect us against
(a) destructive behavior and, more importantly,
(b) Angst (anguish)

Alternative metaphor: “Values fly up as partridges” as we walk through a field, i.e., carry out a project.

Normal phenomenon: We take them for granted
Action is primary, reflection comes later.
Consciousness is disruptive, “a wound.”

When Guard Rails Collapse

Phenomenological reflection:

- Dissolves the alleged authority of values
- Leads to discovery of self as the source of values



Phenomenological reflection:

Dissolves the alleged authority of values

Discovery of self (authenticity): "Then I discover myself suddenly as the one who gives its meaning to the alarm clock, the one who by a sign forbids himself to walk on a flower bed or on the lawn, ... the one who makes the values exist in order to determine his action by their demands."

The Paradox of Good Faith

- The (im)possibility of Sincerity as a policy
- Implication: Good Faith is an ideal, but not a realizable one.



The (im)possibility of Sincerity as a policy

There can be no conscious decision to “Be spontaneous.”

Implication: Good Faith is an ideal, but not a realizable one.

Analogy: The Moebius Strip

2. Sartre's Model of the Mind

**2a. The Famous "Being and Nothingness"
Distinction Reformatted as "No-Thingness
and Thingness"**

2b. Existence Precedes Essence

2c. Consciousness and Selfhood

2a. No-Thingness vs. Thingness (Revisited & Expanded)

REALITY	
Nothingness ("No-Thingness")	Being ("Thingness")
Consciousness	Objects of consciousness
Subjectivity ("I know")	Objectivity (What I know)
Indeterminate, unstructured:	Determinate, structured:
- Ever-changing, fluid	- Stable, solid
- Active	- Passive

Indeterminacy is key concept for all of Sartre's discussions of human consciousness

2a. Nothingness vs. Thingness, Cont. (Existence vs. Essence)

REALITY	
Nothingness ("No-Thingness")	Being ("Thingness")
Freedom	Necessity
- Existence	- Essence
- Always creating self-other relationships	- Just is, no relationships with anything or anyone
Pour-soi (<i>Für sich</i> , For itself)	En-soi (<i>An sich</i> , In itself)
- Self-aware	- Not aware of anything

2a. No-Thingness vs. Thingness, Cont. (Self-Consciousness as a Special Case)

REALITY	
Nothingness (“No-Thingness”)	Being (“Thingness”)
Explicit Consciousness of X	X = an “It” (3 rd person)
Explicit Consciousness of Y	Y = a “You” (2 nd person)
Explicit Consciousness of Z This is <i>Conscience de soi</i> , <i>which creates a “transcendent ego” (i.e., the “Me”).</i>	Z = the “Me” (1 st person)
Implicit Consciousness of self while thinking of X,Y, or Z This is <i>Conscience (de) soi</i> .	No object (self is indirectly apprehended as an “elusive I”)

2b. Existence Precedes Essence

- Determinate, structured things have essences.
- Classical philosophy says this is also true of human beings.
- Existentialism denies this, for several reasons.

Determinate, structured things have essences.

It's their essence, or some part of their essence, that gives them their basic structure.

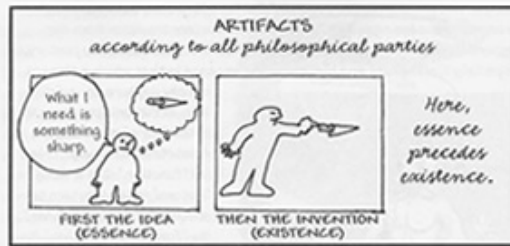
Classical philosophy (especially natural law theory) says this is also true of human beings.

Existentialism denies this, for several reasons (see next slide):

For Sartre (but not all existentialists), the main reason was his atheism.

For others, it was simply their rejection of Plato's notion of forms or Aristotle's natural law theory.

Sartre's Argument, á la Palmer



2b. Existence Precedes Essence, Cont.

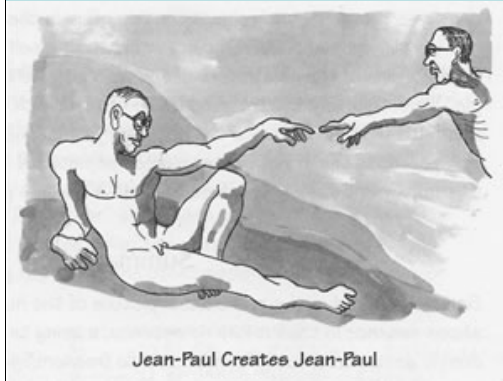
- But non-determinate, free entities (people) have no essence in the sense of “basic structure.”
- Instead they have freedom as what we might call a kind of “pseudo-essence.”

But non-determinate, free entities (people) have no essence in the sense of “basic structure.”

Instead they have freedom as what we might call a kind of “pseudo-essence.”*

*This is not an actual quotation from Sartre.

2b. Existence Precedes Essence, Cont.



Two More Paradoxes:

- Paradox 1: The human being is, in effect, “essentially free.”
- Paradox 2: Man creates his own essence.

2c. Consciousness & Selfhood

- Descartes: The source of all conscious activity was “the pure ego.”
- Sartre: The source of all conscious activity is “an impersonal spontaneity.”

Descartes: The source of all conscious activity was the “pure ego.”

Sartre: The source of all conscious activity is “an impersonal spontaneity.”

Sometime this spontaneity is more random than at other times.

Sometime thoughts, etc. just stream through my mind.

Sometimes my thoughts are more patterned, and leave me with the (false) impression that their ultimate source is a thing-like ego.

3. Sartre's Method of Inquiry

3a. The Phenomenological Method

3b. Its Application to Consciousness

3a. Phenomenology as a Method

- Phenomenology: Introspective study of the appearances found in consciousness (developed in Sartre's early works)
- Phenomenology studies only the appearances, not the things that appear.

Definition of Phenomenology: Study of the appearances found in consciousness

Important Distinction: Phenomenology studies only the appearances, not the things that appear (cf. Locke et al.)

3b. Applications of the Phenomenological Method to Consciousness

- Consciousness isn't passive.
- Self and consciousness are not identical.
- The “ego” is an object of consciousness (hence title of Sartre's 1937 book *The Transcendence of the Ego*)

Consciousness isn't passive.

It creates and interprets possibilities associated with phenomena.

Self and consciousness are not identical.

Consciousness “apprehends” the self, as we saw above.

4. Sartre's Conception of Self and Society

4a. The Self vs. The Other: "The Stare"

4b. Duel of Subjectivities: The Master-Slave Dialectic

4c. Sartre's Dramatic Summary (*No Exit*)

4a. The Self vs. The Other

“The Stare” (Fr. *Le regard*)

- Subject turns other person into an object.
- Other person “returns the compliment.”



You come in later, drop books, everyone “stares” at you. Why is this an unpleasant experience?

Women’s experience of being reduced to objects is commonplace, not so much so for men. This is emblematic of entire women’s movement.

4b. The Self-Other Relationship as a Duel of Subjectivities

- Duel of two subjectivities:
 - I stare at the person staring at me (and on and on...)
 - The Staircase Anecdote
 - Paradigm case of Hegel's "Master-Slave" dialectic

4c. No Exit

- Sartre's Own Dramatic Summarizing Statements:

- “Hell is other people.”
- “Man is a useless passion.”



Sartre's Own Dramatic Summarizing Statements (two famous final lines from his play *No Exit* and his book *Being and Nothingness*):

“Hell is other people.” (“L'enfer. C'est les autres.”)

“Man is a useless passion.” (“L'homme est une passion inutile.”)

Appendix

SARTRE'S RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY PSYCHOLOGY

Since the 1950s various “existential” and “humanistic” forms of psychotherapy have developed. Principal versions:

1. Rollo May's “Existential Psychology”
2. Victor Frankl's “Logotherapy”
3. Carl Roger's “Nondirective Therapy”
4. Other “Self-Actualization” methods

Since the 1950s various “existential” and “humanistic” forms of psychotherapy have developed, which either repudiate or minimize the role of the unconscious, and emphasize the client's freedom and ability to make free choices about how he or she will live life. Principal versions:

1. Rollo May's “Existential Psychology”: Rejects notion of unconscious altogether, in favor of conscious self-determination. People are afraid of non-existence and meaninglessness (“existential anxiety”) and seek self-realization.

2. Victor Frankl's “Logotherapy”: Keeps notion of unconsciousness but reduces its role in favor of the conscious search for “meaning” in life.

For further information on these and other clinical and theoretical approaches based on existentialism, see the web sites for “The International Society for Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy” and “The Frankl Institute of Logotherapy.”