

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE (1905-1980)



Early Works

Nausea

The Transcendence of the Ego

Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions
(1939)

The Psychology of the Imagination
(1940)

imprisoned by Germans in 1940
where he taught Heidegger to his fellow
prisoners

Being and Nothingness (1943)

began editing *Les Temps modernes*
1945

lecture “The Humanism of
Existentialism” 1945

published in 1946, inaugurated the
vogue of existentialism

Later Works

Saint Genet (1952)

Critique of Dialectical Reason (1960)

The Words (1963)

The Idiot of the Family (1971-72)

Existentialism is a Humanism

L’existentialism est un humanism was first published in 1946
and as Guignon and Pereboom tell us it inaugurated “the vogue of existentialism”
The film *Human, All Too Human: Sartre* (linked on course website)
emphasizes how it immediately established Sartre’s celebrity
in those giddy days in the Paris cafes after the liberation of Paris and the end of the war
it was often taken, some would say mistaken, as the definitive statement of existentialism

Sartre begins by stating that his purpose is to defend existentialism against some charges which
have been made against it
on the one hand he is responding to the charge that existentialism leads to a kind of quietism and
despair—that action is thus impossible because no solutions are possible
this is a charge the communists in particular had made against existentialism

on the other hand, from the Christian standpoint, existentialism is charged
“with dwelling on human degradation, with pointing up everywhere the sordid, shady, and slimy,
and neglecting the gracious and beautiful, the bright side of human nature” (290)

both sides, Sartre, notes charge existentialism with ignoring human solidarity. Sartre goes on to say that what he is going to say about humanism is going to surprise many and then he makes this definitive statement: “. . . by existentialism we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity” (290).

With this positive definition Sartre hopes to respond to those who find existentialism too gloomy, depressing, ugly, even vulgar, too preoccupied with “the dark side of human life” Sartre responds by saying that he wonders “whether they are complaining about it, not for its pessimism, but much rather its optimism. Can it be that what really scares them in the doctrine I shall try to present here is that it leaves to man a possibility of choice?” (291).

Sartre’s classic definition of existentialism, the common bond that ties together even atheists like Heidegger and himself with the Christian (Catholic) existentialism of Jaspers and Marcel, and that is the idea “that existence precedes essence” (292) this, of course, was already stated by Heidegger in *Being and Time* Sartre continues: “or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be the starting point” and this would be what Heidegger criticizes Sartre for: accepting the Cartesian starting point

the traditional view is that essence precedes existence
what does this mean?

Guignon and Pereboom help us by exploring the terminology: what is *essence*?
“And thus, a thing’s essence is made up of the characteristics it has that make it the kind of thing it is—characteristics that cannot be removed without the thing ceasing to be the kind of thing it is. For example, the Aristotelean idea that humans are essentially rational animals implies that in order to be human, an entity has to be a organism with a certain biological structure and has to have the potential for rational reflection, and if these characteristics were removed from an entity, it would cease to be human.” (256)

To define the essence of something is to answer to the Socratic question:
What is X?

Sartre thinks that there are entities for which their essence precedes existence
tools are one example

Sartre uses the example of a paper-knife
when the tool maker sets out to make a paper-knife he has an idea of what it is he is going to make, you must have an idea of what a paper-knife is before you can make a paper-knife
the essence precedes existence

Sartre points out that the traditional idea of human being was rooted in this conception, with God as the maker who starts out with an idea of human being, the essence of human being, before making the first human being

“Thus, the concept of man in the mind of God is comparable to the concept of paper-cutter in the mind of the manufacturer, and, following certain techniques and a conception, God produces man, just as the artisan, following a definition and a technique, makes a paper-cutter” (292)

Even after belief in God began to wane following the philosophical atheism of the 18th century this idea that essence is prior to existence still prevailed, as Sartre points out, in Diderot, Voltaire, and in Kant

he points out that for Kant there is this universal human essence that all human beings share, both the civilized bourgeois and the wild man in the woods

Sartre thinks this *essentialism* is untenable in the wake of the “death of God”

if God does not exist then we have to accept that for human beings existence comes before essence

man exists first and only afterwards defines himself

there are no pre-established set of characteristics that determines our true nature and proper function

there is no Form of Humanity or proper function

no fixed identity in one specific set of traits or accomplishments

this notion that man is determined only by his existence, the choices he makes,

implies that man at first is nothing (293)

(an idea that is prominent in *Being and Nothingness*)

Thus the first principle of existentialism:

“Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (293)

Sartre introduces the notion of man as a project

man is the being “who hurls himself toward a future” (293)

this notion of being propelled toward a future is also indebted to Heidegger

so human beings have the project of defining their existence

Sartre is careful to emphasize that we are not simply what we wish to be, a product of one’s dreams, but rather of one’s choices, or actions

the result of this view is that man is burdened with a great responsibility:

“existentialism’s first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him” (293)

Sartre next advances the notion that each individual

is not only responsible for his own individuality,

but also that he is responsible for all men

this was an attempt to respond to the criticism that existentialism,

with its radical emphasis on the individual, on individual human subjectivity,

could not advance any valid ethical position, any account of social responsibility

(this problem would be central to much of Sartre’s later work):

Sartre distinguishes two senses of “subjectivism”

one is the freedom of the individual subject

the other is the idea “that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity”
Sartre identifies existentialism with the latter meaning (thus trying to distance existentialism from a radical individualism that would leave no basis for human solidarity)
he further develops this notion
in making the choice that defines oneself
one is also choosing for all men (293)
what could Sartre mean by this?

Thus for Sartre our responsibility is much greater than simply defining our individual essence:
we are responsible for all mankind
our actions, he goes on to suggest, involve a commitment on behalf of all mankind

This aspect of Sartre’s thought has been much discussed and criticized
Is it really possible on the one hand to deny any universal human essence
and then on the other hand to say that in fashioning myself I fashion mankind?

next Sartre moves on to discuss what is meant
by such terms as “anguish,” “abandonment” and “despair”

anguish (anxiety)

what do the existentialist mean in saying that “man is anguish”?
“the man who involves himself and who realizes that he is not only the person he chooses to be, but also a lawmaker who is, at the same time, choosing all mankind as well as himself, cannot help escape the feeling of his total and deep responsibility” (294)
compare this with Zarathustra’s speech “On the Way of the Creator”

many show no sign of this anxiety,
Sartre accuses such people of disguising their anxiety,
of hiding it from even themselves, of fleeing from anxiety

“What would happen if everybody looked at things that way?” (294)
here we see most clearly how Sartre tries to bring something of Kant’s categorical imperative into his existentialist ethics

Sartre ties this with Kierkegaard’s account of the anguish of Abraham
If a voice speaks to me and tells me to sacrifice my son,
I am the one who has to decide if the voice is really from God

I am also obliged at every instant to perform actions which are examples
everything happens to every man as though the whole human race had its eyes fixed on him

Sartre then uses the example of a military commander who takes on the responsibility of ordering an attack and sending a number of men to their death

abandonment (forlornness)

a word Heidegger was fond of (*verlassenheit*)

here Sartre is merely drawing out the consequences of the death of God

man feels abandoned, alone

Sartre is critical of a tendency of late 19th century moralist who would re-discover

all the same norms of honesty, progress, and humanity even if there is no God

the existentialist, on the contrary, find it very distressing that God does not exist,

for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven

What about Nietzsche's cheerfulness in the wake of the death of God?

Was Sartre much more of a pessimist than Nietzsche?

Sartre identifies Dostoevsky's remark as the starting point of existentialism:

"If God didn't exist, everything would be possible"

Sartre emphasizes that if God doesn't exist, then man is responsible

and thus one cannot make excuses

this is one of Sartre's main themes: no excuses

reminds me of Stendhal's joke that Nietzsche liked so much:

"God's only excuse is that he does not exist"

If God does not exist humans have no excuse...they can't blame God anymore...

Sartre next draws the conclusion that identifies existentialism with freedom

"man is condemned to be free" (296).

What does Sartre mean when he says that man is condemned to be free?

In the wake of the death of God we are responsible

there are no excuses

from the moment he is thrown into the world

he is responsible for everything that he does

passion is no excuse

one is responsible for one's passion

gives an example of a former pupil faced with a dilemma during the war

stay with his mother or join the resistance

faced with a choice between two moralities

if God is dead there is nothing to help him decide

"the only thing left for us is to trust our instincts" (297)

is Sartre putting too much weight on instincts?

has he abandoned reason altogether?

how could one respond to Sartre here?

Sartre further elaborates on the vicious circle of choice:

"I can neither seek within myself the true condition which will impel me to act, nor apply to a system of ethics for concepts which will permit me to act" (298)

Sartre's advice to the young man: "You're free, choose, that is, invent" (298)

another example of the young man he once knew who made the choice to become a Jesuit
Sartre, the atheist, seems to approve of the fact that this man made this choice
"Who can help seeing that he alone decided what the sign meant?" (298)

despair

Sartre defines what he means by despair:

"It means that we shall confine ourselves to reckoning only with what depends upon our will" (299).

Sartre emphasizes again that the individual is alone in deciding
there are no guarantees that the decisions one makes today will turn out vindicated tomorrow
no guarantees that the future will be progress

Sartre is questioning the Enlightenment notion of providing foundations that will guarantee the progress of man

"Given that men are free and that tomorrow they will freely decide what man will be, I cannot be sure that, after my death, fellow-fighters will carry on my work to bring it to its maximum perfection" (299).

There are no guarantees that fascism will not in the end triumph
think of the Orwell's *1984* or countless other visions of a bleak future

Sartre does not think that this despair should lead to a quietism
instead, existentialism, as he understands it is the opposite of quietism:

Sartre suggests that the reason some are horrified about existentialism is not for its pessimism but for its "optimistic toughness" (301).

there are no excuses for disappointed dreams and unrealized hopes
one doesn't have the recourse to say "if only this had happened...."

Sartre emphasizes that "the coward is responsible for his cowardice" (301)

again one must keep in mind the context of this essay written just after the war
the issue of who collaborated with the Nazis and why was still very much a central concern

is this "optimistic toughness" too hard?

Does it not take into account the extent to which social conditions shape individual behavior?

Sartre thus sums up his response to the charges that existentialism is pessimistic and leads to quietism

he answers that it is not a philosophy of quietism for it defines man in terms of action
and not pessimistic since it holds that man's destiny is within himself

has he adequately responded to these charges?

The radical individualism, or subjectivism of existentialism

Sartre next turns to respond to the charge that existentialism understands man too much in terms of “private subjectivism”

this is indeed why Heidegger distanced himself from Sartre’s existentialism

Sartre emphasizes his starting point is the Cartesian subjectivity

I think, therefore, I exist

to some extent he holds on to a Cartesian dualism

on the one hand Sartre wants to distance himself from the Cartesian standpoint

“We definitely wish to establish the human realm as an ensemble of values distinct from the material realm. But the subjectivity that we have thus arrived at, and which we have claimed to be truth, is not a strictly individual subjectivity, for we have demonstrated that one discovers in the *cogito* not only himself, but others as well” (302).

“the other is indispensable to my own existence, as well as to my knowledge about myself. This being so, in discovering my inner being I discover my knowledge about myself” (302).

Sartre emphasizes “intersubjectivity” rather than private subjectivism

Is Sartre really successful in developing this notion of intersubjectivity

or is his understanding of existentialism too embedded in Cartesian private subjectivity?

(perhaps Merleau-Ponty develops this notion of intersubjectivity better)

Sartre emphasizes that there is no given universal essence of man

“In this sense we may say that there is a universality of man; but it is not given, it is perpetually being made. I build the universal in choosing myself” (303).

the charge of relativism, or is existentialism a nihilism?

Sartre attempts to respond to the charge that existentialism is a kind of anarchy (nihilism)

three charges against existentialism:

1) you’re able to do anything? (Nothing is true, all is permitted)

2) “You’re unable to pass judgment on others, because there’s no reason to prefer one configuration to another”

3) “everything is arbitrary”

Sartre does not think these are serious objections

tries to distance his understanding of existentialism from André Gide’s theory of arbitrary action

Gide (1869-1951) is best known for the novel *The Immoralist* published in 1902

this novel was very much influenced by Nietzsche’s thought

he won the Nobel prize for literature in 1947 (about the same time Sartre published this essay)

Sartre wants to emphasize that his notion of action is not one of mere caprice

to make this point he draws an analogy with a work of art

moral choice is to be compared to a work of art

does an artist paint merely capriciously if he does not work from a set of *a priori* rules?

“What art and ethics have in common is that we have creation and invention in both cases?” (305).

Sartre thinks that even if there are no *a priori* values this doesn't preclude the ability to pass judgment for one, Sartre is ready to pass judgment on those who seek some sort of excuse, who attempt to deny or escape the human condition of radical freedom (being condemned to be free)

Sartre derives an ethics that emphasizes freedom even though man is inescapably free in this sense that he is free to choose how to respond to whatever situation he is thrown into, he also desires freedom in the sense of the freedom to think for oneself and wants this freedom for others thus implying an emphasis on political freedom

We want freedom for freedom's sake and in every particular circumstance. And in wanting freedom we discover that it depends entirely on the freedom of others, and that the freedom of others depends on ours. Of course, freedom as the definition of man does not depend on others, but as soon as there is involvement, I am obliged to want others to have freedom at the same time that I want my own freedom. I can take freedom as my goal only if I take that of others as a goal as well. Consequently, when, in all honesty, I've recognized that man is a being in whom existence precedes essence, that he is a free being who, in various circumstances, can only want his freedom, I have at the same time recognized that I can want only the freedom of others. (306)

Sartre thinks the content of ethics is variable but the form is universal by this he means there is no standard that can determine what is ethical in any particular case but that all ethical decisions are the result of some choice (this is what is universal)

Sartre sums up his existentialism in this way:

“Moreover, to say that we invent values means nothing else but this: life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing; it's up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning you choose” (307).

Existentialism and humanism

Sartre concludes the essay by turning to turning to the issue of humanism in *Nausea* he had said that the humanists were all wrong in what sense is existentialism thus a humanism?

Sartre distinguishes two senses of humanism:

1) a theory which makes man as an end and as a higher value implies ascribing a value to man based on the highest deeds of certain men Sartre finds this notion of humanism absurd there can be no over-all judgment about man

existentialism can never consider man as an end (Nietzsche's *last man*?)
because he is always a work in progress
he thinks this notion of the man as an end leads to fascism

2) humanism in the sense that there is no law-maker other than man
this is the humanism embraced by Sartre's existentialism
"There is no universe other than a human universe, the universe of human subjectivity"

"Humanism, because we remind ourselves man that there is no law-maker other than himself,
and that in his forlornness he will decide by himself..." (308).

In the final paragraph Sartre concludes that existentialism is nothing else but an attempt to draw
out the consequence of a coherent atheistic position
trying to work out the consequences of the death of God

"Existentialism isn't so atheistic that it wears itself out showing that God doesn't exist. Rather, it
declares that even if God did exist, that would change nothing. . . . Not that we believe that God
exists, but we think that the problem of His existence is not the issue" (308).

Being and Nothingness

Sartre's phenomenology of consciousness

like Heidegger in *Being and Time*, Sartre aims to answer the question, "what is Being?"
 also employs a phenomenological approach in *Being and Nothingness*
 like Husserl and Heidegger he thought that with a proper phenomenological method
 he could avoid the troublesome forms of dualism that have plagued modern philosophy since
 Descartes

like both Husserl and Heidegger he maintains we should avoid presupposing
 duality of subject and object
 start instead with characterizing being-in-the-world as a totality
 just as Heidegger wants to say that there is no separation between *Dasein* and the world
 Sartre will say there is no separation between consciousness and the world

the idea here is to begin with the phenomena, or appearances
 without presupposing any dichotomy between appearance and reality
 or between what is purely mental or purely physical
 in the introduction to the text Sartre puts it this way:
 "the being of an existent is exactly what it appears. . . . The phenomenon can be studied and described as
 such, for it is absolutely indicative of itself. . . . The appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it
 is the essence."¹

Compare with Nietzsche's attempt to dismantle the appearance-reality dichotomy in
 "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable" in *Twilight of the Idols*

Sartre hopes to avoid traditional forms of dualism
 where appearances are taken simply as sense data
 he wants to avoid both the idealist thesis that to be is to be perceived
 and the realist view that to be is to be a physical object (or property of a physical object)

to some extent Sartre is trapped in a philosophical problem that results
 from on the one hand being embedded in the Cartesian framework which posits
 an opposition between consciousness and the world
 and on the other hand trying to incorporate Heidegger's view that there is no separation

at least the point of Sartre's philosophy is clear: freedom and responsibility

Sartre's conception of human existence
 borrows two fundamental conceptions from Husserl's phenomenology
 1) intentionality: whenever one is conscious, one is conscious of something
 consciousness is always directed toward some object
 2) consciousness is always a meaning-giving activity

¹Jean-Paul Sartre, Introduction to *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1966), p. 5.

consciousness is not just passively representing some object in the world
 in consciously intending an object, I endow that object with a meaning
 perception itself is active
 I always perceive something as something
 this *perceiving as* involves an activity on my part
 human being is the “being which is compelled to decide the meaning of being—within it and everywhere outside it” (260)

most of us are not aware that we are endowing the world with meaning
 most of us assume we are just seeing things as they are

to make his account plausible Sartre thus does two things:

- 1) gives an account of being that shows the active role of consciousness in constituting the world that show up for us
- 2) explains how it is that we normally do not consider ourselves accountable for the meaning of things in our experience
 we are disinclined to believe that we are responsible

regarding the first task—Sartre’s view of consciousness as meaning-giving activity
 and his view of being as it is “in-itself,” independent of human consciousness

Sartre does thus introduce a form of dualism
 in the distinction between *being-for-itself* and *being-in-itself*
 this is the distinction between consciousness itself: “for-itself” (*pour soi*)
 and what consciousness is of: the “in-itself” (*en soi*)

consciousness endows the world with meaning

to be presented as an object of consciousness is to be presented as a mere thing
 a *being-in-itself*
 which is not free but part of the causal order
 being-in-itself is just undifferentiated stuff
 similar to the unformed matter of Aristotle or prime matter of Aquinas
 there is no “non-being,” no “not” within the totality of being-in-itself
 does not admit of any distinctions
 Sartre characterizes being-in-itself as a bloated overflow, a superabundance
 the experience of being-in-itself is nauseating
[echoes of the Dionysian *abgrund*??](#)
[the nausea experienced by Hamlet and the Dionysian man in *The Birth of Tragedy*??](#)
 Sartre’s *Nausea*—the experience of Roquentin

how does differentiation arise?

in addition to being-in-itself, there are conscious beings (ourselves)
 who care about their own existence (notion drawn from Heidegger)
 who, given this concern, make distinctions in their dealings with the world
 determinate reality arises with the appearance of consciousness into the totality of what is

human consciousness shapes the world through questioning
this questioning is not our normal, everyday condition of being-in-the-world
in our everyday activities we are not detached
but instead are absorbed in doing things in a pre-reflexive way
thus another crucial distinction important to Sartre's analysis is between
pre-reflective and reflective consciousness
there is consciousness prior to reflection
the self or ego is constructed by reflective consciousness
thus consciousness is not the self or ego

our questioning is a specialized, reflective mode of consciousness that is first made possible
by modifying our pre-reflexive way of being-in-the-world

questioning shows us something about what human consciousness introduces in the world
in the act of questioning, I open up a space in which the "not" can arise in the midst of being
questioning presupposes an expectation of a certain sort
to ask how it stands with things
is to be open to the answer that it is *not* such and such
the question "What is X?" assumes the possibility of a determinate answer
[to the Socratic question](#)
to give an answer and say it is so and so
is to say it is not so and so
the very act of questioning introduces a "not" into being
human consciousness is the source of the "not" or "nothingness" in our experience
if there were no consciousness there would be no distinctions, no differentiation
this preoccupation with the theme of negation is drawn from Spinoza and Hegel

Human consciousness cuts up the world
in accord with its concerns and projects
this activity is the metaphysical foundation of the existence of distinctions

Sartre's claim that distinctions require consciousness
is opposed to scientific realist position
according to which the world is carved into natural kinds independent of consciousness
according to which everything has its identity without consciousness
for Sartre, distinctions are *made*, not *found*
our *creations*, not *discoveries*
they are produced by our introducing nothingness into the realm of being-in-itself

Sartre claims that the existence of nothingness can be grounded phenomenologically
nothingness is something we encounter in the world
his famous example of not finding his friend Pierre in a café
he grasps the *absence* of Pierre only in contrast to the expectation of his *presence*

Sartre makes use of figure-ground distinction to clarify the experience of perceiving an absence

(Heidegger had made use of this gestalt figure-ground distinction in “The Origin of the Work of Art, Merleau-Ponty also frequently relied on this distinction)

The appearance of a figure is possible only against a background that recedes
 again the comparison with Nietzsche’s thinking of the Apollonian
 as the art drive that makes possible all figuration
 the form-giving art

in looking for Pierre, Sartre describes the experience of looking around the room
 the being-in-itself of the café retreats to the margins of consciousness
 where it functions as the ground upon which the figure of Pierre is expected to appear
 in this experience, everything in the café keeps receding into the background
 the absence of Pierre flickers against that backdrop
 from a phenomenological standpoint, one directly apprehends
 a certain lack or “not”
 the absence of Pierre
 “a flickering of nothingness”

another example of how a “not” or “negativity” can appear
 is the experience of destruction
 for Sartre, without consciousness there is no destruction
 a storm or earthquake only redistributes matter
 it is only if there is a consciousness who cares about these events
 that this rearrangement of matter can count as “destruction”
 consciousness is what first makes possible negation within being-in-itself

what is it about consciousness that makes it possible for it to introduce nothingness?
 Sartre’s answer is that consciousness at its core is itself a nothingness

being-for-itself, consciousness, is a nothingness

one significant difference between *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself*
 is that consciousness, *being-for-itself* cannot be aware of itself
 in the way that consciousness is aware of anything else
 consciousness always separates itself from its object
 and thus cannot become its own object
 we can grasp the being of consciousness only negatively

and the reason for this is that consciousness is not a thing, but a nothing
 the “upsurge” of consciousness in the midst of beings introduces a lack
 or gap in the heart of being
 consciousness opens a fissure or absence
 in which the “not” is first introduced into the world

human beings are both *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself*
 they are what they are—that is, their *facticity*
 facticity: the sum total of facts that are true about us

but also they are what they are not yet—their *transcendence*
transcendence (unfortunate term here)
sometimes means outside of the world (Plato's notion of the transcendent world)
or outside of experience (Kant speaks of the world as it is in-itself as transcending our
experience)

Sartre means by “transcendence” the ability to transcend our facticity
what I want to be determines what I am in a profound way

for humans, their own being is in question for them
humans have an ability to see their own lives as mattering or as being at stake for them
because our being is in question
our facticity is always encountered not as something fixed and unchangeable
but as presenting a task or undertaking
we have to make something out of our facticity
we do so by endowing our lives with a meaning that is defined by the projects we choose
to be human is not just to be in-itself, but also “for-itself”
our being is something that is *for* us
insofar as we are always taking some stand on our existence
and making something of our lives in what we do

I always transcend my being as an in-itself
thus there is always a gap—a “nothingness”
between my being as in-itself and my being as for-itself
it is this fissure within consciousness that first makes possible
the kinds of self-detachment found in questioning, doubting, abstaining from belief
and other forms of reflective consciousness

it is precisely because consciousness, *being-for-itself*, is a nothingness
that consciousness is free, outside the causal order
a thing is bound by the causal order and is thus not free
because consciousness is not a definite thing
but an indefinite nothingness
then there is freedom

but this freedom means that consciousness is undefined
it cannot be determined in advance
this is because consciousness is self-defining
its identity is to be determined
no fixed identity
it *may* be what it is not now and *need not be* what it is now

freedom and anguish

since our freedom is the result of the nothingness of consciousness
that freedom is experienced as anguish

“it is in anguish that man gets the consciousness of his freedom, or if you prefer, anguish is the mode of being of freedom of consciousness of being; it is in anguish that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself” (325).

Sartre distinguishes anguish from fear
a situation provokes fear if there is a possibility of my life being changed from without
my fear is directed toward something outside of me
when I experience myself as a thing among other things
as something passive to which things might happen then there is fear
but anguish comes into play when I realize that I have several possibilities of action open to me
none of which is determined in advance
my anguish is my experience of myself as a being which is capable of freely choosing
from among a number of possible choices
drawing from Kierkegaard Sartre says
“fear is fear of beings in the world whereas anguish is anguish before myself” (325).

there are two forms of anguish that result from this freedom:

1) anguish because the self is undetermined
and thus might not be what it is now
“I *am* not the self which I will be” (328)

2) because we are completely free to decide what is valuable
there is no justification, no solid ground for values
this is ethical anguish

at the end of this discussion of anguish
Sartre draws out some conclusions about human existence
on the one hand, the experience of anguish shows
that “I am indeed already there in the future”
because I am concerned about the being that I will be in the future
I exist as a projection into the realm of future possibilities
“I am the self which I will be”

but, on the other hand,
“I am not the self which I will be”
my present being is not the foundation of my future being
nothing actual in the present can determine where I am going in the future
thus “a nothingness has slipped into the heart of this relation” within myself
I can never be completely determined by my facticity
Sartre’s notion of ontological freedom has radical consequence
that we can always transform our situation through our free choice of projects
it is because of this that “we are condemned to be free”
each of us carries the weight of the world upon our shoulders
each of us is responsible for the world and for himself

Sartre's example of the experience of finding oneself in a situation where a war has broken out
it is my war, Sartre contends, because I could always get out of it by suicide or desertion
or resistance, as in the case of an unjust war, something Sartre doesn't envisage
the point is that by taking a stand on the war
I simultaneously confer a meaning on the context I find myself in
there are always other ways of interpreting the situation
what the war is to me is a product of the stand I take on it

there is always the "ultimate possible" in every situation: suicide
if I decide to go on living, I have chosen to be engaged in the world
in doing that I have chosen an attitude that makes the world show up for me in a specific way
I am thus responsible for that war
i.e., the war that shows up for me is the result of my choices
it is in this sense that "We have the war we deserve" (354)

to show the extent of our responsibility for the world as we encounter it
Sartre says that "I choose being born"
not in the sense of choosing my parents, etc
but in the sense that I am responsible for what the fact of my birth means to me
i.e., for how it counts in my life
I can always change my interpretation of the life I am living
the way that I project the meaning of my birth determines what the events of my life mean to me

Sartre says the "facticity is everywhere"
and yet "I never encounter anything except my responsibility"
we can never gain access to facticity as it is in itself
but only as it shows up in a specific way as a result of choices I have made
the only thing we are not free about is whether or not we are free

bad faith

the typical response to anguish is flight
in that flight one denies the freedom that causes us anguish
think of the grand inquisitor's view that freedom is too terrible a burden

psychological determinism is a way that many conceal their freedom from themselves
to say it was just "human nature" and I am not responsible
by adopting this psychological state we are reduced, according to Sartre,
to "never being anything but what we are"
we think of ourselves as no more than an *in-itself*

this attitude of trying to hide something from myself Sartre calls *mauvaise foi* (bad faith)
bad faith is self-deception: lying to myself about who I am

there are two sorts of bad faith

1) denying some aspect of one's being-for-itself—one's freedom
bad faith occurs when a conscious being denies the freedom to choose
claiming to be just my facticity

2) denying some aspect of one's being-in-itself—one's facticity
lying to myself by ignoring the facts
denying an aspect of one's facticity
denying, for instance, certain choices made in the past
or just living in wishful fantasies

but hiding something from ourselves implies also somewhere knowing what it is we are hiding
thus bad faith can never fully succeed as a way of coping with anguish
for we can never be fully successful in hiding our anguish from ourselves
thus bad faith is difficult to comprehend
it is something "we can neither reject nor comprehend"

Sartre offers some illuminating examples of some patterns of bad faith
example of the waiter in a café
insofar as the waiter thinks that he *is* a waiter
thus taking himself as a being-in-itself, he is thus deceiving himself
he is denying his transcendence
if he is to avoid bad faith, he must see that a waiter is just a role that he plays

example of a Nazi officer ordered to shoot children
I am just a soldier following orders
this is confusing one's essence with his facticity
denying one's freedom, one's transcendence
and thus one's responsibility

Sartre gives an example of the other sort with the case of a young woman on a date
(no doubt there are several confusions or problems with this example)
she is acting as if she is just an intellectual companion
she does not acknowledge her companion's desire
here she is disowning a fact about her facticity
one sort of attempt to avoid bad faith is the pursuit of *sincerity*
trying "to be what one is"

Sartre's example of the homosexual
in Sartre's view no person is a homosexual in the same way a table is a table

in all these examples Sartre is taking on Freud
for Freud says essentially
there is a sense in which we cannot do certain things
Sartre wants to say instead that we will not do certain things
when we are in bad faith

we are misjudging ourselves
we are not wanting to take responsibility thus we identify with our facticity

In Sartre's view, no one can ever simply *be anything*
this is because being something in particular is always a matter of assuming a particular identity
but, as our identity is something we make, it is not something we ever really are
as there is always a gap or a *not* between ourselves as for-itself and what we are in-itself
trying to be what you are always results in bad faith
thus sincerity itself seems to be a form of self-deception
since if we are a *for-itself* we are always more than what we are *at present*

thus it is very difficult to avoid bad faith
the question arises whether it is even possible to avoid bad faith
since it is a pervasive feature of human beings as a result of the structure of consciousness
the conception of bad faith places the identity of the self in question
who are we?

in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre doesn't talk about how one can avoid bad faith and be authentic
Simone de Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* develops such a notion of authenticity
would involve first a lucid awareness of the structural ambiguity in a person
between being-in-itself and being-for-itself
the authentic person is lucidly aware of her past actions and what they add up to
but does not view these past actions as determining what she will be
but clearly sees herself as being able to freely choose from among the possibilities that open up
the authentic person *assumes* her freedom as opposed to fleeing it
she does this by being *actively engaged* in her projects
and in rejecting all forms of oppression

being-for-others

for Sartre I can be aware of my own existence only if other people exist
the problem of solipsism doesn't arise
for consciousness arises only as a social phenomenon

Sartre thus introduces a third characteristic of human existence: *being-for-others*

accepts Hegel's notion that we only know ourselves in relation to other people
we become self-conscious only in confrontation with others
we get to know ourselves only in our relationship with others

like Hegel Sartre sees a permanent tension between the way we see ourselves
and the way others see us
according to Sartre, the other, as an object of consciousness, is always reduced to an *in-itself*
this explains what Sartre meant when he said:
"While I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me"
for I see the Other as *in-itself* and the Other sees me as *in-itself*

in that tension there is the problem of freedom as a social struggle
my freedom is in conflict with the gaze of the other
and the other's freedom is in conflict with my gaze

uses example of being looked at
experience of shame
noticing the other's gaze upon us
in that gaze we are objectified
the example of person at the keyhole
no self-consciousness until he hears a creak on the stairs
and realizes that he is being watched
moral education is basically the result of being caught in the other's gaze

in *being-for-others* we are being pinned to a particular identity, objectified
a voyeur for example
pinned like a butterfly to a display

tendency to fight off this objectification by the other
to assert our own identity
emphasis on radical individualism in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche
Sartre argues that we cannot be indifferent to what others think
what other people think of us is a clear determination of who we are

thus there is a three way tension
between our *being-in-itself*, our *being-for-itself*, and our *being-for-others*
this adds another dimension to bad faith
defining ourselves in terms of how others see us

Sartre uses this account of social interaction to explore various aspects of human psychology
such as love, sexual desire, masochism, and sadism

ethics

Sartre has been criticized for developing a view of human existence
that seems to undermine ethics
like Nietzsche, Sartre believes that if God is dead there are no transcendental bases for values
values can only be human creations
all values are products of individual choices
any criteria by which we might evaluate values are also products of our choices
thus "we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuses"
nothing, absolutely nothing justifies me in adopting this or that particular value
from this standpoint it seems that if someone were to choose racist or genocidal values
then there would be no way to criticize such a choice

there would be no way to criticize such a choice from some transcendent, or objective point of view—but that does not mean that we cannot criticize such a choice?
but our position from which we criticize such a choice is also clearly our choice

Sartre's account of human relations in *Being and Nothingness* makes it hard to see how genuine respect for others could arise since human relationships are characterized by a struggle for self-assertion will never result in stable and tranquil co-existence

this struggle for self-assertion is vividly described by de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*
the project of self-affirmation
or realizing and manifesting one's own being as "for-itself"
generally takes the form of lording it over another person
whom one treats as mere "in-itself"
historically this is evident in the way men have treated women

perhaps because of this rather pessimistic view of human relations
Sartre tried to present a basis for an ethics in "The Humanism of Existentialism"
essay takes a Kantian turn to the extent it emphasizes universalizability
in choosing for oneself one chooses for all
"in choosing myself, I choose man"
"We always choose the good, and nothing can be good for us without being good for all"

tangle of problems here perhaps explains why Sartre later repudiated the essay
given Sartre's picture of the individual self as the source of all values
it is not at all clear why I should have any regard for the good of others
or why others are implicated in the value-choices I make

existential psychoanalysis

the last part of *Being and Nothingness* is a sketch of an existential psychoanalysis
in Sartre's view an identity that is freely chosen by the individual
should be the foundation for a psychological explanation of the personality
one's identity involves a "project"
this project involves establishing one's values
one's reason for being