

Sartre's Components of Action and Their Connection to Radical Freedom

CAS PH 248 Existentialism

Jean-Paul Sartre's existential philosophy emphasizes the concept of radical freedom and its relation to our actions. His theory of action provides us with a distinction between the components of our actions, offering a framework to understand the role each component has in shaping human behavior.

The first component of this theory would be the act itself. The act refers to the physical or mental execution of an action. Action is turning nothingness into something. It is the tangible manifestation of one's decision to do something. This is crucial because it produces value through realizing something that would otherwise not have any. It translates one's intentions, motives, and goals into a real-world outcome. It is the main element that connects the other three components. To understand the rest, we can take a look at an example of mowing my yard. The act would be simply mowing the lawn. But there must be a reason for my action, which brings us to the cause.

The cause is the underlying circumstances that push one to perform the specific action. These circumstances can be internal or external. It could be because of personal desire or belief or because of outside expectations and conditions. In our example, the grass has to be cut simply because it is overgrown. But there lies something deeper within this reason. The situation of the long grass demands a response to restore the yard to a desired outcome, the end. This brings us to the third component of action, the motive.

This dives deeper into one's personal reasons for performing the action. It is closely linked to our freedom. Our motive is only constituted by our values and desires. The motive is consciousness of the current situation, or the cause, not being the same as the end. It is the realization that the world is not what it ought to be and the action is the step one takes to bridge that gap. The motive can and probably will vary from person to person. In our example, my motive would be that I do not like having an unkempt lawn and would prefer it to look clean. I understand that the current state of the grass is long and it does not align with my personal wishes of a tidy yard.

Finally, the last component of action would be the end. This is equally as important as the act itself as it is the drive behind one's motive. To break it down, the end represents the desired outcome or objective that one seeks through their action. It provides direction to the action as it outlines the intended result and also represents a measure of success. This connects the cause to the motive. The end is what the world ought to be in our eyes. Our motive is our consciousness of it which is driven by the cause, which is the world not being what we want it to be.

Sartre's theory of action and the components that constitute it shed light on the complexity of human behavior and our choices. These components are interconnected and influenced by our individual values, beliefs, and desires. But how are these influences related to the fact that our actions have causes?

While causes provide a reason for our actions, they do not directly determine our choices. Sartre believes that our radical freedom allows us the ability to choose how we respond to these causes. His concept of radical freedom asserts that we are entirely free to make our own choices and determine the course of our lives, emphasizing that there is no predetermined

meaning or purpose for us. We exist first then define our essence through our actions and choices.

This theory has some implications though. It declares that we are responsible for all aspects of our lives, including our thoughts, emotions, and actions. Since there is no higher power dictating these aspects of our lives, we must bear full responsibility for our decisions and their consequences. This level of responsibility can be both empowering and overwhelming, as it highlights the significant impact our choices have on shaping our lives and the world around us. It also implies that we create our own values and morals. With the absence of predetermined values, we are left to develop our own moral systems based on our own choices and experiences.

For instance with our example, my value in having a short and tidy lawn can be exclusive to me. I am not bound to mow the lawn. My neighbor can have differing values and let his lawn grow out as long as he wants. The cause of the grass being long can matter to me more than it does to him. The cause only presents the current situation but our radical freedom remains sturdy as we are the ones who decide how to address it.

It is important to understand that our actions are the result of our choices and not directly determined by the causes that surround us. While causes serve as catalysts for our actions, we are still free to choose our response, our motives, and ultimately, the ends we seek to achieve which influence the former. This freedom is crucial in clutching our radical freedom. It allows us to shape our lives in accordance with our beliefs and desires.

In conclusion, when faced with various situations or causes, we have the power to choose our response and the motives that drive us. This freedom of choice determines the direction of our actions and the ends we wish to achieve. Our motives, derived from our personal values, guide us towards our desired outcome and enable us to act with purpose and intention. Sartre's theory of action highlights the connection between our radical freedom and the choices we make. By exercising our freedom and taking responsibility for our actions, we can create value out of the nothingness of our lives. Embracing our radical freedom allows us to make conscious choices that reflect our authentic selves and contribute to a more fulfilling life.