

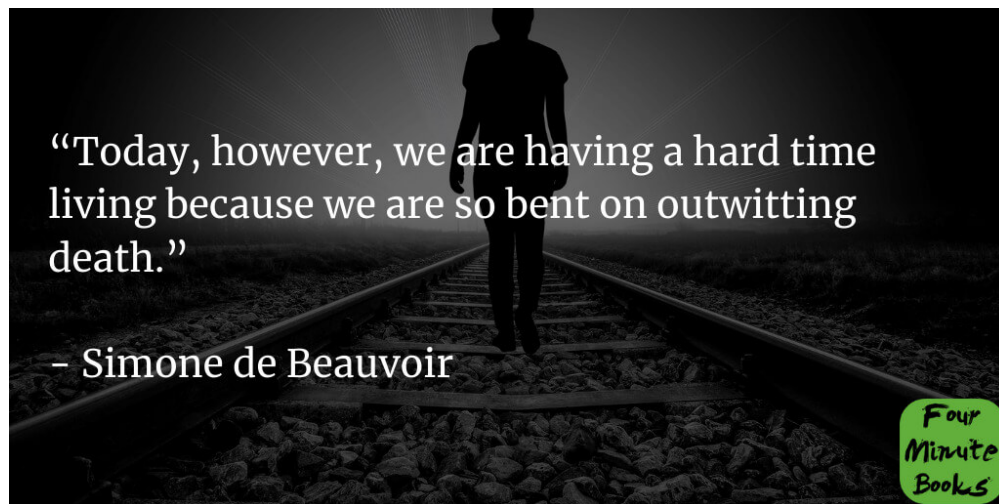
# The Ethics Of Ambiguity Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *The Ethics Of Ambiguity* explains what existentialist philosophy is by identifying its tenets and what they meant for our world in the post-World-War-II era and will also show you how they apply today even more than you might think.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



If you're reading this summary that means you exist. It may sound obvious, but how often do you actually *think* about your existence? By nature of existing, you have the freedom to choose what you want to do. Right now you could be doing any infinite number of things, but you are choosing to read this.

Each and every minute you make these sorts of decisions. Most small choices we make without much thought. But some choices may make you wonder, am I really making the best choices and living the life I want to? Or am I just playing a part in someone else's play?

These are just a few of the deep ethical questions that come as part of being human. And they are the central ideas in Simone de Beauvoir's classic though-provoking novel *The Ethics of Ambiguity*.

Though it was written more than half a decade ago, it remains important today and is considered a foundational text of existentialist philosophy. In reading the book and thinking about being human, you will feel compelled to take advantage of the best part of existence: freedom.

Here are just 3 of the many useful and eye-opening lessons I got from this book:

1. You're freer than you think and you should take advantage of it.
2. There is no such thing as a completely neutral perspective.
3. Abstract ideals aren't as important as real people, but our government messes this up all the time.

Are you ready for an interesting read that's going to make you think? Let's dive right in!

## **Lesson 1: You should take advantage of all your freedoms, even those you don't realize you have.**

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As kids, we don't realize that we learn world views and moral codes that are not our own. But as we grow older, we realize that those who give the rules aren't perfect, and the things people taught us aren't indisputable truths.

According to de Beauvoir, people mature to differing extents. The more mature we become, the more aware we start to be of our freedoms. **The sad part is that many people don't fully mature, and this means there are many of us not reaching our full potential.**

There are different types of maturity levels in de Beauvoir's taxonomy of people. First is the sub-man. Maybe he's lazy, doesn't have much of an imagination, or is indifferent, but he avoids doing meaningful things with his life. This is because he doesn't realize the freedom he has.

Next is the serious man, where most people are. He tries to make his situation better and works towards goals he thinks are good. His problem lies in his inability to recognize that moral codes are subjective. This makes him prone to being an unthinking follower

Next is the nihilist, who realizes that human values are subjective. But because she sees this subjective nature of values, she sees that all human projects are meaningless and worthless. Because she sees it as worthless, she chooses not to use her freedom constructively.

Lastly, we have the adventurer, she sees that values are subjective, but sees it as a positive because she has the freedom to choose her values. But her fault is that she becomes overly concerned with her own projects and ideas and doesn't care how her actions affect those around her. However, if the adventurer becomes concerned with others as well as her own passions, she will finally find true freedom.

## **Lesson 2: You can never have an entirely neutral perspective, it's impossible.**

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Have you ever heard someone say they are giving an "unbiased opinion"? Did you know that this doesn't actually exist? In philosophy, this is known as disinterested contemplation. It means you separate your interests to enjoy something just for the sake of enjoying it. But the

problem is that it doesn't work.

Scientists, creatives, and intellectuals may pretend to take a disinterested perspective when it comes to things like global events and politics. They engage themselves in their work while the events unfold around them and say they won't take sides in the name of being unbiased.

This is what many elite figures did when the Nazis occupied Paris. They were willing to basically ignore the new regime based on being non-partisan. In truth, they simply didn't want their work to be disrupted. De Beauvoir condemned the elite French for taking to position and being complicit when they could've done something.

The truth is that we can't ever have disinterested contemplation because it is impossible to truly detach ourselves from our own opinions. **Saying you can do this is basically pretending you are able to actually step out of yourself and dwell in an imaginary world outside your own.**

This may not be too big of a deal when it comes to something like criticizing art, but when it comes to politics, it can literally be life or death. Choosing to be disinterested is taking a stance. It is taking the stance that you would rather do nothing when you have the responsibility to do something.

### **Lesson 3: Real people are more important than abstract ideals, but good luck trying to tell our government that.**

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One of the strategies oppressors use to justify their actions is that they appeal to its usefulness. They may argue that it's a necessity of achieving a higher value.

One example of this is when fascists states appeal to national identity. Democratic capitalist countries like to appeal to the need to save the economy. Socialists appeal to the need to build a utopia. Whatever the case, people sadly come last in importance.

Why can't we place real people before abstract ideas? The idea that we can have a better economy or a utopian future only really carry the value that they can benefit real live people.

For example, when Soviet leaders said their repression and genocide was in the name of becoming a utopia, the logic didn't add up. And when US leaders justify an entire class of people living in poverty in the name of a healthy economy, this is similarly absurd. **When we put human beings below our abstract ideals, these ideals ironically become worthless.**

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## **The Ethics Of Ambiguity Review**

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What an eye-opening book! *The Ethics Of Ambiguity* had me a little lost at times but after doing a little deep thinking it made more sense. It helps to understand that this was written right after World War II, but that doesn't make it any less applicable to our day!

## **Who would I recommend The Ethics Of Ambiguity summary to?**

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The 31-year-old activist that's looking for motivation to make the world a better place, the 48-year-old that loves philosophy, and every politician who thinks that the "economy" is more important than the starving and suffering people all across the world.