

Existentialism

6.5-6.7

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Acting in Good Faith

A choice has value when it is made in good faith. One has full awareness of the responsibility and freedom that comes with this choice



It's not what you choose, it's why and how you choose it.

Ex: A heartfelt gift vs a expensive gift bought out of duty

- The value rests on the intention of the gift rather than the material worth.
- Sincere acts show genuine choice and responsibility
- Aligns with the meaning good faith

Existentialist take on Good Faith

Existentialists want to take it a step further and claim that the mindset behind the action is most important and that all possible attitudes must be taken into consideration when making a decision

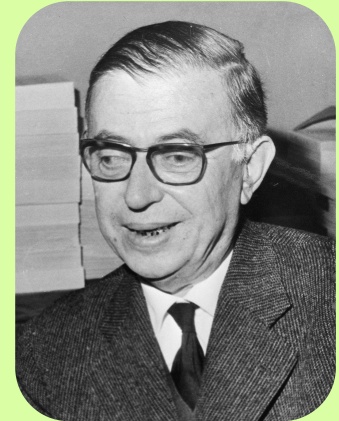
Resorting to a person's culture or genes to explain an individual's personality is an error according to an existentialist. Our choices determine who we are and to pretend otherwise is considered bad faith

Must recognize our fundamental freedom to be self determining to truly practice good faith



The Creation of Value

- Main Idea: Existentialists say that values are not discovered, but are created by individuals through authentic choice and commitment
- **Søren Kierkegaard:** The value or truth of Christianity comes from a deeply personal and subjective commitment — a “leap of faith”
- Values such as Religious Faith come from an inward and personal belief
- **Jean-Paul Sartre:** “If I have excluded God the Father, there must be somebody to invent values.”
- Without God, humans are radically free and that freedom includes the burden of creating values without guidance.



The Creation of Value

- There are two interpretations of how value is created:

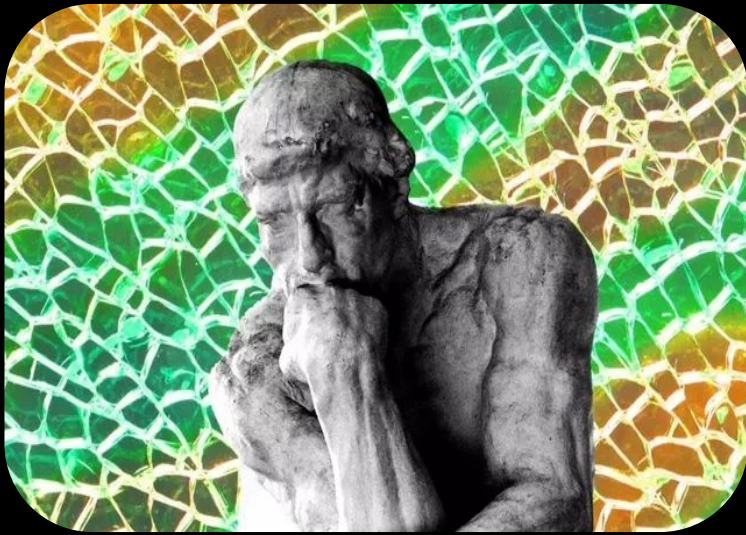
Cultural/Group-Based:

- Values are created by society and culture
- Form of relativism, the idea that what counts as valuable is always historical, cultural, or social context
- Rights and wrongs depend on societal norms
- Ex: polygamy, legal in Saudi Arabia, but not in England

Individual-Based:

- Individuals create value through personal decision – free, sincere choices
- Leads to the idea that freedom and responsibility are at the heart of value creation





Radical Freedom

The Paradox of Radical Freedom

Existentialist Claim: “We are condemned to be free”(Sartre)- Radical freedom means we must choose our own values without external absolutes.

The Paradox: While existentialists argue everything is possible for us to accept, reject, or avoid, real-world constraints exist:

- **Logical Limits:** “If I eat my cake now, I am not free to have it later” - past choices create present limitations
- **External Constraints:** When someone buys “the last stereo system in stock,” our options are physically restricted

Beyond Logic: The textbook challenges pure existentialism by pointing to legal, prudential and moral constraints

- ❖ A country where free speech is legal offers more freedom than one where it isn't
- ❖ “You can't invest in that!” may reflect financial wisdom, not just logical possibility



Examples:

Degrees of Freedom: Rather than absolute freedom, we experience graduated levels of choice

- A student facing parental pressure about career choices remains free to choose differently, but with consequences
- An employee can challenge workplace norms but faces potential social or economic repercussions

The Existentialist Response: “Freedom from one point of view is not freedom from every point of view”

- The absence of divine law doesn't eliminate all constraints
- True freedom may lie in recognizing our constraints while still exercising choice within them

Taking Away Freedom

- Before you are born, your parents plan out your entire life. What school you'll go to, what job you'll get, who you'll marry; everything has been decided for you. If you chose to follow the path laid for you, would you be acting in "bad faith"?
- If you grow up in a country where everything is controlled and a government controlled life is all that you know (i.e. North Korea), do you have freedom?

A Good Life according to Existentialism

- From an Existentialist viewpoint, a good life is a life filled with choices made with “good faith”, in other words, choices made freely and with total awareness of the consequences.
- If this is true, then is a choice still made in “good faith” if, at the end of your life, you would no longer make the same choices?

Good Faith Nazi

Existentialists believe that it is better to act in good faith than bad; we should make choices based on sincere beliefs.

Is it better to be a sincere Nazi than a delusional one?

How can we interpret the explanation that good faith Nazi's life is "objectively bad but subjectively good" (Graham, 70)



Radical Freedom

Existentialism, as mentioned before, believes in Radical Freedom. The only constraints are logical ones.

Is the concept of freedom useful if non-logical constraints (e.g legal constraints) are irrelevant?

If freedom is POV specific, then are different “freedoms” incomparable? Analysis often define types of freedom (e.g economic, political)

