

## **Outline of Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism"**

*Page numbers are for the CourseWare Package for 34-110 (02)*

1. Opening remarks (254-55)
2. What is existentialism? (255-56)
  - a) Two formulations (255)
    - i) Existence precedes essence
    - ii) Subjectivity is the starting point
  - b) Explanation of "Existence precedes essence" (255-57)
    - i) Essence precedes existence in manufactured objects
    - ii) Humans not analogous to manufactured objects if there is no God
    - iii) Humans must define themselves by deciding what they want to be ("man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" – p. 256)
  - c) In defining myself, I choose for all men, since I affirm the value of what I choose (p. 257)
3. Objections turning on the "pessimism" of existentialism (257-62)
  - a) Anguish (257-58)
    - i) The need to choose for all humans 257)
    - ii) The need to take responsibility for our choices (257-58)
  - b) Forlornness (258-60)
    - i) "If God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct. So in the bright realm of values, we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuses." (258)
    - ii) We are condemned to be free (258)
    - iii) There are no moral guidelines to give us concrete guidance (258-60) - the young man who must decide whether to stay with his mother
    - iv) We have to decide for ourselves what our situation means (260) – the young Jesuit
  - c) Despair (260- 61)
  - d) Why existentialism horrifies people (261-62)
4. Objections turning on subjectivity (262-67)
  - a) That we are "immuring man in his private subjectivity" (262-64)
    - i) We must start from subjectivity (i.e., from "I think, therefore I am") because we must base our philosophy of what is certain (262-63)

- ii) If we don't start with the fact of conscious we will reduce humans to mere things (263)
- iii) In beginning from the "I think" we don't start with the isolated individual as Descartes did, because we begin with "the self in the presence of others" (263)
- iv) We do recognize a universal human condition (263-64)
- b) "You can do anything" – human actions are capricious (264-65)
- c) You have no basis for judging others (265-66)
- d) For existentialism, values aren't serious (266-67)

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