

**Jean-Paul Sartre**, (1905-1980) a brief historical sketch:

1. He is born in Paris and dies there.
2. He attended the Ecole Normale Superieure, for the best and the brightest, *the cream of the crop* of the French intellectual system. He stays in education for a time and then moves on.
3. He is enormously influenced by Nietzsche. Sartre was an atheist. His writing was very abstract.
4. He's probably the most famous philosopher of the 20th Century. *This may be a surprise to many.*
5. He was a paradigmatic figure: play write, novelist, social commentator and philosopher.
6. He was involved in resisting the Nazi's.
7. His greatest work is "*Being and Nothingness*."
8. His book *Existentialism is a Humanism*, explains his existentialism as his central idea.

**The classical of view of how Essence precedes Existence which Sartre explains and then denounces.**

1. What does this mean that essence precedes existence? Or to ask it another way: what does it mean to be human? Sartre explains the classical view as how one's essence is that which has been given to them and the person must (needs to) conform to this because essence precedes their existence.
  - a. There is a system of ideas, patterns, ideals and forms that govern individuals and society. (*There are other voices that give us patterns, etc., that we conform our lives to as well.*)
  - b. This system is presented by the philosophers and theologians of the state.
  - c. These representatives of the state tell the person who and what they are.
  - d. Sartre says this is the individual bringing their essence in line with their existence. The individual subjects their self and freedom to this system.
2. What is an example of this?
  - a. A child is learning to be a responsible adult. Many people will tell him what this will look like. He learns that he needs to bring his existence in line with his essence.
3. Why would a person do this?
  - a. Because essence precedes existence. These essences are already in place.
  - b. Therefore essence has a superiority over existence.
  - c. So one is to humbly accept the objectivity of these essential principles.
  - d. Sartre explains that this is the classical understanding of how things work.
4. This is the drama of life: to bring my existence (my freedom and individual self) in line with the already essence that others are telling/prescribing/dictating to me. One needs to follow these essential prescribed principles of essence. This occurs both chronologically and ontologically.
5. Sartre will reject all of this.
  - a. It is important to note that Sartre saw Christianity as embracing the classical view of reality: essence precedes existence. Sartre rejects the Christian world view of reality.
6. *For Sartre, Christ is not "the measure of all things," man is.*
7. *What is the drama of life for Christians?*

**Jean-Paul Sartre — his view:**

1. Sartre's says that existence precedes essence.
2. He compares this change that he is bringing as being akin to a Copernican revolution:
  - a. He proclaims to be turning things upside down.
3. He declares a plague on this system of ideas, patterns, ideals, and forms imposed on people.
4. He declares that existence comes before essence.
5. Sartre states that his individual self and especially his freedom is the determiner of who he will be. This is the basis for his position: that his existence (*that he determines*) precedes any essence.
6. Sartre declares that he will determine the pattern and form of his life.
7. *It is vital to see that Sartre follows Nietzsche in denying objective truth and value.*
8. *It is also important to see the vestiges of Nietzsche's superman:*
  - a. *asserting your will;*
  - b. *a clashing of the wills in order to come to power;*
  - c. *become your own superman and determiner of your essence.*

**Jean-Paul Sartre — on Being and Nothingness:**

1. Sartre sees being and nothingness as being like a blank canvas. I can do my own painting.
  - a. This for Sartre, is not negative or oppressive. It is an opportunity for creativity.
2. Sartre says that he can now invent his own life:
  - a. "I determine who I am: my sexuality, my gender, my human nature, my morality, my moral system, etc. I use my liberty to assert my existence."
3. Therefore, Sartre asserts, that all social constructs (*the myriad of voices*) are nothing more than the inventions of other people asserting their wills onto you.
4. So what do you do in the face of this: you overturn all of this by employing the heroic self assertive freedom that you have by determining it so by willing it so. Note the power grid.
5. *Like Nietzsche's death of God philosophy that opened up the space so the will to power could assert itself, so now in Sartre's philosophy, he opens up space for the existence of the self to assert its' freedom and to say:*
  - a. "This is who I am!" "Here's who I am!" "Here's what I am about!"
6. Thus on the basis of that freedom in asserting your existence, Sartre states:
  - a. "I determine who I will be!"
  - b. "I determine the form and pattern of my life."
  - c. "You don't tell me how to live.!"
  - d. Thus, no institution, no society, no church tells me how to live.  
I will decide how to live.
7. This is what is meant when Sartre states that existence precedes essence.

**Jean-Paul Sartre and atheism:**

1. *Marx and Nietzsche are atheists but Sartre is aggressively atheist. How come?*
2. Sartre creates a formula that existentialism is a humanism. (The title of one of his books.)
3. This is Sartre's syllogism:
  - a. If God exists then I cannot be free.
  - b. But I am free.
  - c. Therefore, God does not exist.
4. Sartre asserts that God is the ultimate limit and threat to his freedom.
  - a. It is God that proposes to us the essential form of life that we should conform too.
  - b. So as I discover the primacy of my freedom, God therefore does not exist.
  - c. *Does this sound at all like Nietzsche's, God is dead diatribe?*
5. What did this classical view of essence precede existence rest upon? Sartre explains:
  - a. Political structures, family and culture can all be what the classical view rests on.
  - b. Family can be a form of this.
  - c. Culture can be a form of this.
6. What is the primary and ultimate avatar of essence over existence in the classical view?
  - a. Sartre says that it is God. He tells me how to behave and who I am.
  - b. Sartre of course emphatically denies this.
  - c. *Is their ground for critiquing Christianity in Sartre?*
  - d. *Has Christianity and the Church embraced any of Sartre's philosophy?*