

Bad faith

1. As discussed in the previous video lecture, existentialism represents a first person subjective approach to human nature, that seeks to understand human behavior as motivated by chosen goals rather than causally determined by instinctual genetic programming and/or material forces. Human beings are located not in an objective environment of things, but in a meaningful situation where things are seen as good or bad in terms of how they contribute to or obstruct an individual's freely chosen goals. In this video we shall explore strategies for trying to deny or evade our freedom, what Sartre calls "bad faith."
2. Thus whereas Freud had modeled the human self in terms of the steam locomotive and the evolutionary psychologist models human identity in terms of an organic computer, existentialism proposes a literary models of the self in terms of an author writing the story or the lives. (1) Freedom is not an illusion for the existentialist. (2) Rather freedom is an unavoidable or "existential" fact. Our identity is the story of how each of us deals with that fact, as well as the other existential facts of (4) our birth and (5) inevitable death, (6) that we have the body we do, and (7) that there are other people, too, other people forever judging us. We do not get to choose whether we are born, or whether we die, whether we have a body, or whether there are others. But like with freedom, it is up to us to decide what all these existential facts will mean for our own lives.
3. Thus whereas evolutionary psychology studies human beings as a species like any other species, existentialism studies human beings as individuals, each with their own unique story. Rather than ego, id and superego, or genes and environment, existentialism (1) analyzes our subjectivity or consciousness into (2) a foreground and (3) a background or (4)...a (5) foreground and (6) a horizon. Both are always present in our awareness, but the foreground is the focus, the object of our consciousness, while the background or horizon provides the setting against which the object appears or our activity takes place, what gives them their meaning and value for us. Our ultimate fundamental goal or project, is never unconscious, let alone some program operating behind the screen, but neither is it often in the foreground of our awareness. Usually we are engaged in the particular object or activity we are doing. But we can always choose to step back and reflect over what is motivating our behavior, or why the situation before us appears as it

does, why a particular that bears the meaning and value that it has for us. Thus our fundamental project is not another particular object or concrete action.

4. Rather our fundamental project is how we choose to live our lives, how we choose to be in the world. For example, (1) having a million dollars would not (2) (3) be a fundamental project, but (4) wealth could be, seeing everything in terms of profit and loss, believing everyone has a price, and that my value is my net worth. For someone whose fundamental project is wealth, everything and everyone ultimately appears in terms of making money.

(5) Other fundamental projects could be (6) power, approaching every relationship in terms of who has the most power, or (7) love, seeing everyone as more or less lovable, everything as contributing to or detracting from love in the world, or (8) status, seeing the world in terms of popularity, in terms of winner and losers, or (9) religiously, in terms union with the divine, seeing everything that happens as a miracle of God's grace for which to be grateful. (10) Indeed, in terms of our earlier social history of technology, our fundamental project is what we hold sacred.

5. Now freedom also means we are free to decide whether or not to be honest with ourselves about the choices we are making or with the fact our decisions are indeed free. (1) But why would one ever want to deceive oneself?

(2) To avoid the anxiety that comes with responsibility, (3) the feeling of abandonment that comes from recognizing that no one can make your decisions for you, (4) the despair that comes from recognizing that the value of what you do does not lie with what others think or do, but only with what your action says about you, and (5) finally the uneasiness in the pit of your stomach, the nausea that arises when you realize that you have nothing other than your own choices to guide you, that any guide or yardstick you might use to make a decision is itself your choice, and your choice alone. In looking for help outside yourself, you cannot avoid the fact that it is your choice who you ask or which measure you use.

- a. (6) But how can we deceive ourselves? Won't we know we are lying to ourselves, at least in the background of our awareness? How pull this off?
6. By exploiting the logic of freedom. (1) For freedom means both that we are our decisions: what we choose to do. (2) But it also means that we can always transcend what

we have done up to now, and choose anew. (3) That what we have chosen in the past does not determine what we choose to do next. Or in other words, (4) freedom lives in the tension between (5) our facticity and (5) our transcendence.

7. My facticity are the facts about me, what an external third person observer could learn:
 - i. (2) My genes that evolutionary psychology thinks is key to who I am.
 - ii. (3) What I have done in the past, my history which Freud thinks is key
 - iii. (4) My appearance, my body, my looks
 - iv. (5) My reputation, what others think of me, my social status
 - v. (6) My social roles, my job, my position in society
 - vi. (7) And of course those existential facts of my birth and eventual death,
 - vii. (8) the presence of others, family and friends, neighbors and colleagues
 - viii. (9) and ultimately the fact of my freedom itself.
 - b. (10) My transcendence on the other hand, is what I make of those facts, what I do with them, what they mean for me. (11) My transcendence can only be learned by seeing how things look from my point of view. It requires adopting a first person perspective, the perspective of the acting subject. Thus my transcendence includes (12) my goals, (13) my purposes, (14) the meaning I give my actions, (15) how I think and feel, (16) my imagination and creativity.
8. Now I can deceive myself, or in Sartre's terms, be in bad faith, by focusing (1) exclusively on only one side of this opposition, keeping the other side in the background, out of conscious awareness, pretending it does not matter.
 - a. (2) I can focus only on my facticity. I can pretend that (3) my facticity has a meaning all its own independent of my choice, (4) that my past determines my future. In other words I can paint myself (5) as a victim or (6) my behavior as something that I can't change. For example,
 - i. I can say, "Don't blame me for drinking too much, I can't help it. I grew up in an alcoholic family. Its in my genes.
 - ii. Or I do nice things, so that means I am objectively a nice person. I do not have a mean bone in my body. Nice people do not do mean things.

- iii. But being nice today does not mean I will continue to be nice tomorrow. I have to choose tomorrow whether to still be nice in the new situations I will face tomorrow.
 - b. (7) On the other hand I can also deceive myself by focusing exclusively on my transcendence. (8) I can focus on my goals as if they were already accomplished facts, or (9) on my intentions to discount my actions. In short, I can live in my head and ignore reality. For example:
 - i. I am not an alcoholic. An alcoholic can't stop drinking. But I can stop whenever I want.
 - 1. Prove it. Prove you can stop drinking
 - ii. Or I want to be a nice person, so that means I am a nice person. After all it's my goals that matter.
 - 1. But is it really your goal or is it that you just want to believe it is your goal. Prove it by doing nice things.
 - iii. Or I did not *mean* to hurt you. So don't blame me for your being hurt by what I said.
 - iv. (10) In short I can fool myself about what my goals really are. I can ignore the facts and live in an ideological world of "alternative facts".
- 9. Even sincerity can be a form of bad faith, if one treats your feelings as facts rather than due to the choices I make. (1) "I am sorry, that is just the way I feel" as if that means I am not responsible for it, it's just a fact about me, like my height.
 - a. But Sartre argues that we are responsible for how we feel in a situation. (3) He argues that feelings are snap judgements, made in light of how things appear to me in the moment. Feelings can seem irrational because the judgement it expresses is not critically thought through. (4) But how a situation appears to me depends on what I believe and value. How a situation appears depends on my freedom.
- 10. For example, I wake up one morning, pour some cereal, look outside and my car is not in the driveway. I panic. Someone has stolen my car! Or I get angry. One of my roommates has taken my car without asking me first!

- a. But then the roommate sitting across from me says, no one took your car. (1) You were so drunk last night you left it at the bar and took an Uber back home. Don't you remember? You were too drunk to drive back.
 - b. What happens to my panic, or anger now? It's gone, in a flash, replaced by embarrassment perhaps. Has my biochemistry changed in that instant? No. I may still be jittery with adrenaline, but it does not feel like panic or anger any more. It's my judgment of the situation that has changed. My situation has changed. Not my environment, but my situation, how the environment *appears* to me, what it *means* has changed.
 - c. Again, emotions are irrational not because they are physical forces seeking discharge or hormones in my brain, but because they are snap judgment, made in an instant, without reflection.
11. Being honest with oneself is not about being sincere, it's about being authentic. (1) Sincerity means honestly reporting what you feel. (2) But authenticity adds taking responsibility for those feelings. (3) "Authenticity" comes from "author." (4) Being authentic is about recognizing yourself as the author of your life. (5) To be authentic is to live in good faith.