

Others

1. Welcome to our next video lecture on existentialism. Today we are going to explore how Sartre understands interpersonal relationships.
2. If the situation we are in at any given moment appears in light of our goals, how do other people appear in that situation?
 - a. (1) Like everything else, we will interpret them in light of our goals too. (2) And they will be judging us in terms of their goals. Thus Sartre argues that (3) all interpersonal relationships are power struggles, which each judging the other, and each trying to get the other to do what they want them to do.

But how do I get another free person to choose to do what I want them to do? (4) Sartre identifies two strategies:

- b. (5) Domination: I can try to dominate the other's freedom, (6) by intimidating the other person into deferring to my judgments. (7) I can objectify them before they objectify me. That is, I can try to get them to ignore their transcendence and identify with their facticity, accepting my opinion of them over their opinion of themselves. (8) I can subject them to my freedom.
 - c. (9) Seduction: (10) Or I can try to seduce their freedom by appearing to value their freedom over my own. (11) Rather than being overtly aggressive, I can use *passive* aggression to manipulate the other's freedom
3. However both strategies: domination and seduction, intimidation and manipulation are inherently fragile and ultimately self-defeating:
 - a. (1) Dominating the other only works if the other submits, (2) if they choose to do what I say, to become the object of my desire. (3) Thus my success in the relationship is ultimately dependent upon *their* choice.
 - b. Similarly, (4) Seduction only works by my (5) being what they want me to be, surrendering my freedom to them. (6) I simply mirror them back to themselves, fearing rejection if the other learned the "real" me. (7) So too my manipulation of them only works if they respond to it. (8) Thus again, my success in the relationship is dependent on them.

4. Thus relationships with others are inevitably conflictual. For Sartre a relationship is like a teeter-totter. Each tries to get the upper hand, alternately seeking to dominate when seduction fails, and seducing when domination fails. And both are in bad faith, as it both I look to another to affirm my value.
 - a. Or as Sartre closes his play “No Exit”: “Hell is other people.”
5. Depression results when I give up. (1) Its not fueled by repressed instinctual energy from my unconscious. (2) Nor is it some evolved program to communicate a need for help. (3) Rather depression is a way of being in the world informed by a series of judgments:
 - a. (4) That my life is a failure. I have not succeeded in accomplishing my goals so I am worthless.
 - b. (5) That others are judging me with pity or contempt. I am ashamed.
 - c. (6) That I should submit to others.
 - d. (7) That I should withdraw from others to protect myself
 - e. (8) Ultimately that I should withdraw from consciousness altogether and just sleep.
6. How can I fight back? How do I fight against my own judgment of myself?
 - a. (1) I have to re-assert myself. (2) Give myself small goals at first. (3) Proceed by baby steps, to rebuild my self-confidence. (4) Force myself to get out of bed in the morning. (5) Force myself to get some exercise so that I can feel my power and agency again. I have to fight against what I most want to do...which is to do nothing.
7. How does religion figure into this vision of humanity? Sartre argues that religion is an act of bad faith. The idea of God for Sartre is of an all powerful Other, (1) who judges us all, and demands that we submit to his will, (2) that the meaning of our lives is not our own choice, but up to God since he created us in the first place. So believe in God is just another effort to evade my own freedom and the responsibility that comes with it.
8. From this perspective then, a Christian existentialist would be a contradiction in terms. (1) However arguably the historical founder of existentialism, Soren Kierkegaard, was himself a devout Christian. In fact he argued that you are only a true Christian if and when you freely (2) decide for yourself to commit to Christ as your Lord and Savior. He argued that the existence of God cannot be proven, whether by a logical demonstration or

scientific experiment. Belief in God was a decision, a decision that reason or science cannot make for you. Kierkegaard argued that deciding for Christ was like deciding to marry your beloved. (3) Reason cannot make that decision either. There is no logical argument or scientific experiment you can do to prove that this is the person you should commit your life to. Your love of another is also ultimately a choice rather than simply a fact. Sure falling in love may be out of your control, but whether you trust that feeling, whether you place your faith in that immediate judgment in another, and, even more, whether you work on staying in love depends on you...and the other person.

9. As we saw with the design argument in the Enlightenment, the existence of God is not a scientific fact but a commitment of faith. God is not an object of science, any more than freedom is. Thus the religious question is (1) not whether or not to believe *that* God exists. Even the devil believes *that* God exists. The religious question is (2) whether or not to believe *in* God. (3) Whether or not to choose union with God as the most important relationship in my life, as my fundamental project, as what I hold most sacred.
10. Now one consequence of such a view of religious faith, is that it co-exists with doubt. One can only make a decision (1) when you have more than one live option to choose from. Faith in Christ does not mean you never doubt Christ, anymore than love means you never doubt your beloved. Rather faith means you trust, that you believe, even in spite of occasional doubts. (2) The marriage vow is not a prediction *that* your relationship will continue till death do you part, the marriage vow is a commitment *to* the relationship, to work together on your relationship till death do you part. Like Sartre's student who Sartre tells to make his choice the right choice by working to make it the right choice. So too committing to Christ is not a factual prediction that I will remain a Christian throughout my life, it's a commitment *to* remain a Christian throughout my life, (3) a commitment that I re-affirm in every action I take.
11. In fact Sartre never did get married. (1) He had a lifelong lover, the feminist existentialist Simone de Beauvoir. But both thought that marriage would restrict their freedom. (2) They had what they called a "free relationship", a love they refused to turn into a binding, legal contract. (3) Now there were a couple of times when Sartre wavered, a couple of times when Sartre did ask De Beauvoir to marry him. But de Beauvoir always refused, recognizing that Sartre was simply anxious or depressed and would regret it afterwards.

Now for some such a “free love” was a scandal, an expression of Sartre and de Beauvoir’s inability to make a commitment to each other. (4) But they did remain committed to one another part. Even death could not part them. How many marriages can say the same?