**JEAN PAUL SARTRE - "Existentialism and Humanism" - 1977**

**Intro:**  
6-The reality of every one’s existence proceeds thus from the “inwardness” of man, not from anything that the mind can codify, for objectified knowledge is always at one or more removes from the truth. “Truth,” said Kierkegaard, “is subjectivity.”

7-Three resolutions of the problem of passion are explored in his writings – the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious – sufficiently and systematically to give form and unity to his work as a whole.

9-Nietzshe…was an existentialist in his almost romantic emphasis upon the passion, anxiety and decision of individual man, and had a similar sense of the tragic predicament of humanity in modern civilization.

11-…Jaspers’ early prime, he foresees a “decline of the west,” and to Jaspers the fatality inherent in this culture is its effect upon the minds of individuals: the surrounding world grows so dense with objective and mechanistic systems of thought that the will is progressively stifled. The surrender of man’s thinking to rationalism and of his artifice to technics have consequences which console a man with the feeling that he is progressing, but make him neglect or deny fundamental forces his inner life which are then turned into forces of destruction.

11- “The sclerosis of objectivity is the annihilation of existence.”

12-Phenomonology is a highly scientific branch of psychology, not, like psycho-analysis, concerned with the effective and emotive aspects of the mind, but based upon the study, largely experimental, of its perceptual faculties.

13-If we draw, for example, a black maltase cross upon a white square, we can perceive either the cross itself, or the spaces between its limbs, as the statement that is being made, but we cannot perceive it both ways at once. In the latter case – taking the black as spaces between – we see the figure as a conventionalized four-petalled flower in white upon a black ground.

13-Perception depends upon the pre-existent element of choice, which determines the form in which we perceive not only all the varieties of geometrical figures but every phenomenon of which we become aware.

14-…the intensity of man’s anxiety to feel and know that he exists and that this is the root of all his anxieties. If – as phenomenology demonstrates – we do not now object, nor do we know ourselves the subjects, if we know only phenomena which are the transitory and contingent products of the inter-action of the two “unknowns” – then to be born into this life to find oneself pitches into the drift of phenomena, “abandoned,” – “responsible” for our existence and yet ever more clearly realizing to our “anguish” that the whole is meaningless.

14-Not many are capable thus of authenticating their existence: the great majority reassure themselves by thinking as little as possible of their approaching deaths and by worshipping idols such as humanity, science, or some objective divinity.

15-The variety of testimonies, whilst it confirms existentialism as a spontaneous movement in contemporary European thought, does less than nothing to clarify its political and religious ambiguities. But its very indeterminism in this respect is what has enabled existentialism to provide a forum and a language in which various religious, secular idealist and anti-religious advocates can and do meet to discuss human problems of primary importance and common concern.

15-To originators of that tradition man was born “good” or at least was ethically neutral until corrupt philosophy and inequitable institutions perverted his will – a conception that is untenable since the epoch of psycho-analysis and unthinkable in terms derived through Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidigger.

15-The humanism of the contemporary existentialists is decidedly disillusioned and of a profound ethical tension not least in the case of M. Sartre whose ethic of action is the Kantian one of universal validity insofar as the agent can estimate it.

16-…M. Sartre working criterion of the unethical is very near to the religious description of sin. Unethical action, he says, is always characterized by that contradiction of the self by itself which he calls ‘muavaise foi’[self-deception].

17-A doctrine resting upon individual subjectivity whose existence is prior to its essence, needs descriptions of such subjectivities to substantiate its theme; and except so far as the existential subject himself supplies these – as Kierkegaard does, and Marcel and others to come degree – they can only be completely substituted by the intuition of artists.

18-A philosophy in which “choice,” in the sense of a crisis of the subjectivity, plays a dominant role, is philosophy of conversion.

18-It is as a philosopher of freedom that M. Sartre’s contribution to existentialism is most brilliant and does most honour to the enlightened traditions of his country: but he has not yet worked out for himself the political implications of a philosophy of absolute freedom.

19-It is at least evident that he is raising precisely the questions which so many of this age are anxious, in the name of dogmatic scientism, to suppress.

*Philip Mairet*

**Existentialism and Humanism:**  
24-Everyone can do what he likes, and will be incapable, rom such a points of view, of condemning either the point of view or the action of anyone else.

24-…we can being by saying that existentialism, in our sense of the word, is a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environmental and a human subjectivity.

25-It is, however, the people who are forever told of some more or less repulsive action, say “How like human nature!” – it is these very people always harping upon realism, who complain that existentialism is too gloomy a view of things. Indeed, their excessive protests make me suspect that what is annoying them is not so much our pessimism, but, much more likely, our optimism.

25-For at bottom, what is alarming in the doctrine that I am about to try to explain to is – is it not? – that it confronts man with a possibility of choice.

25…“The Existentialist,” and, indeed, the word is now so loosely applied to so many things that it no longer means anything at all.

26-[two types of existentialists: Atheist / Theist] What they have in common is simple the fact that they believe that *existence* comes before *essence* – or, if you will, that we must begin from the subjective.

26-[paper knife] Let us say, then, of the paper-knife that its essence – that is to say the sum of the formulae and the qualities which made its production of the formulae and the qualities which made its production and its definition possible – precedes its existence.

27-Here, then, we are viewing the world from a technical standpoint, and we can say that production precedes existence.

27-…we always imply that the *will* follows, more or less, from the understanding or at least accompanies it so that when God creates he knows precisely that his creating. Thus, the conception of man in the mind of God is comparable to that of the paper-knife in the mind of the artisan.

27-Thus each individual man is the realization of a certain conception which dwells in the divine understanding.

27-Man possesses a human nature; that “human nature,” which is the conception of human being, is found in every man; which means that each man is a particular example of an universal conception, the conception of man.

27-…the essence of man precedes that historic existence which we confront in experience.

27-Atheistic existentialism…declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it.

28-That being is man or the human reality.

28-What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself.

28-Thus, there is not human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is.

28-Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism. And this is what people call its “subjectivity,” using the word as a reproach against us.

28-Man is, indeed, a project which possesses a subjective life…

28-Before that projection of the self nothing exists; not even in the heaven of intelligence: man will only attain existence when he is what he purposes to be. Not, however, what he many wish to be.

28-for what we usually understand by wishing or willing is a conscious decision taken – much more often than not – after we have made ourselves what we are.

29-If, however, it is true that existence is prior to essence, man is responsible for what he is. Thus, the first effect of existentialism is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders.

29-…when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that his responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men.

29-Subjectivism means, on one hand, the freedom of the individual subject and, on the other, that man cannot pass beyond human subjectivity.

29-When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men.

29-For in effect, of all the actions a man may take in order to create himself as he wills to be, there is not one which is not creative, at the same time, of an image of man such as he believes he out to be.

29-If, moreover, existence precedes essence and we will to exist at the same time as we fashion our image, that image is valid for all and for the entire epoch in which we find ourselves. Our responsibility is thus much greater than we had supposed, for it concerns mankind as a whole.

30-…I decide to marry and to have children, even though this decision proceeds simply from my situation, from my passion or my desire, I am thereby committing not only myself, but humanity as a whole, to the practice of monogamy.

30-The existentialist frankly states that man is in anguish. His meaning is as follows – When a man commits himself to anything, fully realizing that he is not only choosing that he will be there, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind – in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility.

30-There are many indeed, who show no such anxiety. But we affirm that they are merely disguising their anguish or are in flight from it.

31-But in truth, one out always to ask oneself what would happen if everyone did as one is doing; nor can one escape from that disturbing thought except by a kind of self-deception.

31-The man who lies in self-excuse, by saying “Everyone will not do it” must be ill at ease in his conscience, for the act of lying implies the universal value which it denies. By its very disguise his anguish reveals itself.

31-An angel commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son…But anyone in such a case would wonder, first, whether it was indeed an angel and secondly, whether or not I am really Abraham…if I hear voices, who can prove that they proceed from heaven and not from hell, or from my own sub-consciousness or some pathological condition? Who can prove that they are really addressed to me?

31-If a voice speaks to me, it is still I myself who must decide whether or not the voice is or is not that of an angel.

32-So everyman ought to say, “Am I really a man who has the right to act in such a manner that humanity regulates itself by what I do.” If a man does not say that, he is dissembling his anguish.

32-All leaders know that anguish. It does not prevent their acting, on the contrary it is the very condition of their action, for the action presupposes that there is a plurality of possibilities, and in choosing one of these, they realize that it has value only because it is chosen.

33-…nothing will be changed if god does not exist; we shall re-discover the same norms of honesty, progress and humanity, and we shall have disposed o God as an out-of-date hypothesis which will die away quietly of itself.

33-the existentialist, on the contrary, finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven.

33- “If god did not exist, everything would be permitted”; and that, for existentialism, is the starting point.

34-He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse. For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one’s action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words, there is no determinism – man is free, man *is* freedom.

34-…man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world his responsible for everything he does. The existentialist does not believe in the power of passion.

34-…the man himself interprets the sign as he chooses. He thinks that every man, without any support or help whatever, is condemned at every instant to invent man.

35-…two kinds of morality; on the one side the morality of sympathy, of personal devotion and, on the other side, a morality of wider scope but of more debatable validity.

36-The Kantian ethic says, Never regard another as a means, but always as an end.

37-But how does one estimate the strength of a feeling? The value of his feeling for his mother was determined precisely by the fact that he was standing by her. I may say that I love a certain friend enough to sacrifice such or such a sum of money for him, but I cannot prove that unless I have done it…I can only estimate the strength of this affection if I have performed an action by which it is defined and ratified. But if I then appeal to this affection to justify my action, I find myself drawn into a viscous circle.

37-Feeling is formed by the deeds that one does; therefore, I cannot consult it as a guide to action. And that is to say that I can neither seek within myself for an authentic impulse to action. And that is to say that I can neither seek within myself for an authentic impulse to action, nor can I expect, from some ethic, formulae that will enable me to act.

38-You are free, therefore choose – that is to say, invent. No rule of morality can show you what you ought to do: no signs are vouchsafed in this world.

39-For the decipherment of the sign, however, he bears the entire responsibility. That is what “abandonment” implies, that we ourselves decide our being. And with this abandonment goes anguish.

39-Whenever one wills anything, there are always these elements of probability. If I am counting upon a visit from a friend, who may be coming by train or by tram, I presuppose that the train will arrive at the appointed time, or that the tram will not be derailed.

39-I remain in the realm of possibilities; but one does not rely upon any possibilities beyond those that are strictly concerned in one’s action. Beyond the point at which the possibilities under consideration cease to affect my action, I ought to disinterest myself. For there is no God and no prevenient design, which can adapt the world and all its possibilities to my will.

39- “Conquer yourself rather than the world,” what he meant was, at bottom, the same – that we should act without hope.

40-In reality, things will be such as men have decided they shall be. Does that mean that I should abandon myself to quietism?

41-Quietism is the attitude of people who say, “let others do what I cannot do.”

41-…there is no reality except in action.

41- “Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is.” Hence we can well understand why some people are horrified by our teaching for many have but one resource to sustain them in their misery…

41-But in reality and for the existentialist, there is no love apart from the deeds of love; no potentiality of love other than that which is manifested in loving; there is no genius other than that which is expressed in works of art.

42-In life, a man commits himself, draws his own portrait and there is nothing but that portrait. No doubt this thought may seem comfortless to one who has not made a success of his life.

42-On the other hand, it puts everyone in a position to understand that reality along is reliable; that dreams, expectations and hopes serve to define a man only as deceptive dreams, abortive hopes, expectations unfulfilled; that is to say, they define him negatively, not positively.

42-Nevertheless, when one says, “You are nothing else but what you live,” it does not imply that an artist is to be judged solely by his works of art, for a thousand other things contribute no less to his definition as a man.

42-But the existentialist, when he portrays a coward [person, attribute, etc.], shows him as responsible for his cowardice. He is not like that on account of a cowardly heart or lungs or cerebrum, he has not become like that through his physiological organism; he is like that because he has made himself into a coward by his actions.

42-Whereas the existentialist says that the coward makes himself cowardly, the hero makes himself heroic; and that there is always a possibility for the coward to give up cowardice and for the hero to stop being a hero. What counts is the total commitment, and it is not by a particular case or particular action that you are committed together.

43-…but because we seek to base our teaching upon the truth, and not upon a collection of fine theories, full of hope but lacking real foundations. And at the point of departure there cannot be any other truth than this, *I think, therefore I am,* which is the absolute truth of consciousness as it attains to itself.

44-Before there can be any truth whatever, then, there must be an absolute truth, and there is such a truth which is simple, easily attained and within the reach of everybody; it consists in one’s immediate sense of one’s self.

44-In the second place, this theory alone is compatible with the dignity of man, it is the only one which does not make man into an object. All kinds of materialism lead one to treat every man including oneself as an object – that is, as a set of pre-determined reactions, in no way different from the patterns of qualities and phenomena which constitute a table, or a chair or a stone.

45-He recognizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense in which one says one is spiritual, or that one is wicked or jealous) unless others recognize him as such. I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the meditation of another.

46-And, diverse though man’s purposes may be, at least none of them is wholly foreign to me, since every human purpose presents itself as an attempt either to surpass these limitations, or to widen them, or else to deny or to accommodate oneself to them.

47-What is at the very heart of and center of existentialism, is the absolute character of the free commitment, by which every man realizes himself in realizing a type of humanity – a commitment always understandable, to no matter whom in no matter what epoch – and its bearing upon the relativity of the cultural pattern which may result from such absolute commitment.

49-Does one ever ask what is the picture that he ought to paint? As everyone knows, there is no pre-defined picture for him to make; the artist applies himself to the composition of a picture, and the picture that ought to be made is precisely that which he will have made as everyone knows, there are no aesthetic *a priori*, but there are values which will appear in due course in the coherence of the picture, in the relation between the will to create and the finished work.

49-What has that to do with morality? We are in the same creative situation. We never speak of a work of art as irresponsible; when we are discussing a canvas by Picasso, we understand very well that the composition became what it is at the time when he was painting it, and that his works are part and parcel of his entire life.

50-Man makes himself; he is not found ready-made; he makes himself by the choice of his morality, and he cannot but choose a morality, such is the pressure of circumstances upon him. We define man only in relation to his commitments; it is therefore absurd to reproach us for irresponsibility in our choice.