

If you're glancing at this right now, that means you're alive. Also, it can be interpreted that you've decided to learn a philosophical view. You could have been busy with abundant of other activities but you chose to do this, just at the moment.

Life is based on making decisions as you make right now. However, you've better ask yourself: Do you decide on the right thing in all situations and enjoy your independence to experience only what you want? Or all you live are written in a certain script and you only play it?

Expectedly, these questions are hard to answer because they're highly related to the ethic of human existence. This summary exactly deals with it. Based on a classic work written in 1947, that aims to help you to obtain a practical insight from the existentialist thought. Thus, you will be able to figure out the ways of living your life.

Chapter 1 - Human existence is profoundly confusing.

What's the meaning of being a human?

Do we have unsteady minds that like to contemplate the secret of existence? Or are just ordinary animals driven by instincts? Is there anything such a rational individual or are we just social beings who can only be identified with their groups?

Answering the question of the meaning of human existence isn't easy at all.

Since the very ancient ages, numerous philosophers have thought about the human reflections on their existence, but the great majority of those thoughts are far from being comprehensible and consistent. Some of them attempted to reduce humanity to a small definite unit. So, humanist thinkers reduced human beings to rational animals while Christian theologians preferred to define human beings as immortal souls.

Although every explanation made so far can shed light on one part of humanity's character, all these simple answers ultimately fail to cover the whole situation, like an ill-fitting costume that we want to get rid of immediately.

However, existentialism tackles the question of human existence with a unique method. What's its difference? This approach doesn't reduce limit the of humanity into a sole explanation.

Existentialists don't ignore the complexity of human nature, instead, accept this as it is -ambiguous and unclear. So, according to existentialists, humans don't have a single, unchangeable identity. In another saying, the ways how humans consider themselves constantly change and there is a complete fluidity on the meaning that the humans assigned to their lives.

So, right now, you could be defining yourself as a partner, but one minute later, you'll begin to think of yourself as a mother or father to your child. Now, you're probably a worker in cooperation, and one minute later you'll think of yourself as a world citizen.

That's why, existentialists argue that humans represent no identity, more accurately -a complete nothing. Since humans always change while things are inclined to stay the same, human beings are different than things.

This might irritate some scholars of theology, philosophy, and any other sciences if they want to have a clear answer that completely explains human nature. However, having a fluid identity might be good, given that it lets human beings to have a sort of freedom.

According to this point of view, our existence is not limited to a single mode of being. Also, it means that we can transform ourselves. It's possible by determining goals and working to realize them. In this way, we can change what we are currently.

Chapter 2 - Existentialism focuses on personal freedom to set the rules and principles of your life, other doctrines don't.

As concluded in the previous chapter, humans can change their lives and improve themselves. But the thing is, where should we begin to change things? To put differently, what goals we have to set to get a better life?

Most of the religious or philosophical approaches have created many simplified explanations for these kinds of interrogations. For example, you would hear from a Christian that you should be charitable to strangers, whereas a Utilitarian would probably advise you to maximize satisfaction

Although they develop different approaches to the question, all the moral doctrine share one similarity: They all try to reduce human nature to a draft of rules and principles that can be used in every moment. However, Existentialism doesn't do that.

There is no simplicity in life. And, even we had an ethical guideline, it would still stay unclear how we should take action in a given situation. Instead of ignoring the ambiguous character of humanity and the complexity of life experiences, as moral doctrines recommend doing, existentialists encourage us to face that complexity.

So, according to existentialists, no rules for action works in life. They suggest that the best thing to do is considering each situation exceptional and meticulously thinking before we act.

Since moral doctrines that set particular rules for actions prevent people from thinking about their lives, they could be dangerous and immoral. If people followed these guidelines, they could do hateful things for the sake of morality – as once Nazis did by taking the party's doctrine at face value.

Let's think of another ethical dilemma. Imagine that one of your good friends who's a drug addict wants you to lend money to him so he can buy some drugs. You don't want to help him to buy harmful drugs by giving him money. But in other respects, you think if he can't make enough money from you to buy drugs, he may involve in a crime and cause himself more damage.

In such situations, moral prescriptions that ask being charitable or maximize pleasure won't lead you to take a proper decision about what you have to do. For an Existentialist, doesn't matter if there is a concrete solution to this situation. The thing is that you're in charge of your actions, so you have to carefully assess each choice you have before you determine what you do.

Chapter 3 - The great majority of us don't profit well from our freedom.

When we're children, they taught us oversimplified world views and moral rules, and our naivety deceits us about their value. However, as we become adults, we surprisingly realize that our parents aren't always reliable, the rules that they set don't work all the time, and the values once we learned aren't absolute. Life is more complicated than we're told.

Simone de Beauvoir, the author, uses a moral taxonomy of people, which suggests that the extents of the people maturing differ. People who become more mature are more aware of their freedom. But unfortunately, not many people completely mature. So, a few of us take full advantage of our potential.

When escalating the ladder of the human taxonomy de Beauvoir made, the first person we'll meet is the "sub-man." Being lazy, indifferent, and lacking imagination, the sub-man lives without doing any meaningful thing. He isn't aware of his freedom at all, so he can't use that freedom. All he does is degrading his life to nothing, so he has no difference from a lifeless object.

Secondly, we'll meet the "serious man" who is more aware of his freedom. This is the category that most people get stuck in. The serious man attempts to develop his conditions and set goals that he believes. However, he can't realize the subjectivity of his moral codes, considers them as the absolute truth. So, he transforms into only a follower who doesn't think, or if we're to be more honest, a sheep.

Next up, the "nihilist" will be waiting for us, the man who is aware of the subjectivity of human values. But nihilist believes that subjective values mean nothing comprehensive, so all human projects are random and worthless in deep. Because of this worthlessness, he, the nihilist, chooses to use his freedom for doing nothing constructive.

The adventurer is the more rational version of the nihilist. She recognizes the mentioned subjectivity of human values and interprets this positively, so decides to lead her life by using her freedom. The adventurer goes happily into various projects that are under her direction.

She's unprincipled, which means that she doesn't care about the possible damages of her actions on other people because her concerns are only about herself.

In a world where everybody acts selfishly, humans cannot have their freedom. Many essential things like our culture, the capital for embarking on new projects, and our existence relies on the freedom of people around us. So, the adventurer takes full advantage of her freedom if she manages to combine her eagerness for living with a concern for others.

Chapter 4 - It is impossible to have a completely unbiased perspective.

Let's think one of your good friends suggests you watch a certain movie or listen to a certain song. And you decided to give it a try even though it doesn't suit your usual pleasures.

This attitude is similar to what most of the professional critics do. By ignoring their things, prejudices, and biases, they try to be honest and objective while they are looking at the pieces of art.

Aesthetic philosophy has a term to describe it, which is disinterested contemplation. The secret is putting all your interests aside to enjoy art as exactly what it is. However, it doesn't work as expected.

Disinterested perspective is the attitude that many intellectuals, scientists, and innovators assert to have when observing political issues or global developments. They seek asylum from their work while the events are evolving around them. They claim to be impartial and to maintain their non-partisan position, usually, they don't move and take an action. In the eyes, they are not involved in anything.

During the Nazi occupation of Paris, the attitudes of many intellectuals and influential figures of the society were the same. They didn't pay attention to the regime change, pretended as if nothing exceptional had happened - after all power had been changing since the ancient eras. By doing this, many of them wanted to continue their works.

That inactiveness of the French elites made de Beauvoir surprised and disappointed. She refused the idea that there is a disinterested perspective, neither in art nor in politics. Also, she denounced these people for pretending not to see the occupation.

Disinterested perspective is something unreachable because we're so attached to our subjective positions that it is impossible to keep away from them. If you claim that you have a disinterested perspective, you probably pretend you've escaped from your position to a fantasy outside world.

Since the tension is rather low in the area of criticism, it could result in a biased review in a magazine if we're to think the worst scenario. However, in the political sphere, it could cause serious consequences.

Asserting to develop a disinterested position is indeed related to taking a clear position. It's just another saying of being complicit for the regime or just avoiding the responsibility. To put it differently, in the world where we live, what we don't do has consequences as well as our actions do.

Chapter 5 - We have to refuse oppression no matter where it comes from.

Other thinkers often condemn Existentialists for exaggerating the limits of the freedom that humans have. After all, our freedom has a limit, doesn't it? You cannot change the weather for example, or stop an occupation just because you want to?

Well, existentialists wouldn't oppose this argument. The human freedom they depict can be considered as extreme free will, on the other hand, extremely constrained power.

While our freedom let us make all the choices we want at a subjective level, it isn't adequate to declare these choices to other people. However, even though your complete free will can't overthrow a dictator, that doesn't discharge you from responsibility.

The expression of human freedom has two types of restrictions. The first one is physical limitations caused by the natural process, and the second is socially caused limits that other people set for us.

For instance, an earthquake could cause you damage, which would limit your freedom indeed, but you probably wouldn't complain about the immoral actions of the tectonic plates. However, if a human set limitation to our free act, your reactions would be different.

According to existentialists state that oppression occurs when a group of people intervenes in other groups' fate to maximize their interests and dictate this vision upon them. As we've discussed in the previous pages, in this way, the humanity of the oppressed group is violated. Their existences are degraded to things because their freedom to determine their futures and the capacity for improvement are taken away from them.

Since it's on the behalf of the ruling group, other people are oppressed. But still, there's always a chance to get rid of that rule, although they may seem low. Oppressors endeavor to destroy this change by trying to persuade the oppressed group that their rule is just a normal development during the natural process.

For example, the argument that colonists used to justify the oppression of indigenous people was the superiority of their civilization. Similarly, they used to be suppressed women because of a groundless inferiority theory.

By observing how much energy the ruling group put to prove this inferiority story, we can understand how groundless this argument. Let's think, society put so much effort to exclude

women and indigenous people from education, the working life, or political representation and self-determination. Because all of them would make them mature and realize the oppression they were going through.

Finally, oppression establishes both the reasons and justification for itself. In all the cases of oppression, people who enduring it have the right to be outraged because this isn't a natural part of the human process.

Chapter 6 - Individuals are concrete ones, so they should come before abstract ideals.

Claiming doing the natural thing isn't the only justifying argument that oppressors use to convince oppressed people. They also argue its usefulness as a common strategy to justify their oppressing rules.

In such situations, oppressors usually show some false piety to the so-called miserable conditions of the oppressed group. By doing this, they could make the oppression look like a necessary process to reach some "higher value" etc.

Each uses different arguments to appeal to people. For example, fascist states use national culture and identity, on the other hand, socialist states promise an upcoming communist utopia. Recently, we see capitalist countries are appealing the economy. All of them, people seem to have no place.

In the years of 1950s, the fascist dictator of Portugal, Antonio Salazar initiated a grand public works project, or more accurately, a project that was against the public. Although it cost greatly to the public, he had restored all the ancient castles of the country.

In Óbidos, a Portugal town, he allocated the funds of the local maternity hospital to his projects, and later that hospital was obliged to shut down. In a similar vein, in the town of Coimbra, the planned children's community couldn't be opened because he insisted on the building in the traditional style which required so much money, so the result was enough to house only four kids in total.

Salazar must have mistaken about his priorities. He claimed that these public works were done in the name of culture, tradition, and national interest, however, they were constructed at the costs of people. It may seem awkward, because if culture and tradition were valuable, so they would be valuable only in the eyes of real people, wouldn't they?

This logic fits also into other concepts like the economy or the ideal future. Such generalizations only have meanings only if real people can benefit from them. So, when Soviet rulers defended the oppression and violence in the name of an ideal socialist world, or when US leaders try to normalize the poverty of some groups of people in the name of economy, they sound illogical. Because these arguments don't make sense at all.

When oppressing rulers degrade real individuals to simplified concepts, those concepts mean nothing and only function just like the lie that perplex the people and establish their oppression upon them.

Chapter 7 - Some situations can justify violence, but they are so peculiar.

We've stated earlier that concepts should have less importance than real people. If we prioritize the concepts, we'll probably end up in a situation where a socialist dictator killed innocent people for the sake of revolution or a despotic fascist leader, on behalf of the nation, violate the people for fulfilling a greater goal.

As we would be all agree, this version of oppression couldn't be justified. But what we should do to prevent it? The first thing that comes to mind is forbidden: The use of violence. Many people believe that using violence will transform us as cruel as the oppressors. However, the author thinks that violence is required in some circumstances.

When oppression occurs, there is two possible way that the oppressed can choose. They either let the oppressor continue their actions, or they employ a violent way to get rid of the oppression. More accurately, the slaves have to either remain to be silenced or decide to revolt.

To get something better or to have a simple cause, usually requires giving up the safety and the security of living people for the people's good, to bring them a better future. This is how slavery was abolished. People sacrificed their lives during the American Civil War to get this achievement, they succeeded.

But it entails a dilemma with it. To prevent oppression, you have to disseminate it- even though it lasts for a while. The thing is that political uprisings to get rid of oppression have the potential to become another oppressing power just like the one they're trying to overcome.

John Dos Passos's book, *Adventures of a Young Man* provides helpful clues to distinguish the situations that require violence from the ones that don't justify the violence. In that book, many miners who engaged in a strike are condemned to death. The main character of the book has to make a hard decision: He can choose to either save the miners' lives by negotiating with the judges or to sacrifice his their lives because this brings a public concern that would help them to receive what they want.

In the end, he preferred to save his comrades' lives. And he did the right thing. Because they would have been only non-concrete propaganda for an uncertain result if he had decided to use their martyrdom.

The point is that if an oppressed group has to apply violence to overthrow oppression, it has to be extremely attentive about the limits where they'll stop. Violence can be justified only if it is used as the final option to serve real human beings and concrete goals.

The Ethics of Ambiguity by Simone de Beauvoir Book Review

As a highly developed ethical philosophy, Existentialism suggests that humans improve only if they're considered like adults. So, this approach encourages personal reasoning, self-determination as well as self-improvement. The key point of existentialist ethics is its emphasis on individuality. Although it doesn't argue that people are different, it encourages people to be aware of their uniqueness. Finally, it considers real, living human beings as the basis of the principles and the meaning of life. To put it bluntly, any political or moral concept or social rule that is interested in goals above the real individuals is ethically dubious.

Think a bit about existential housekeeping.

Maybe it sounds awkward to approach your important life expectations as you'd account for your budget or make a list, but existential housekeeping from time to time suits your plans for a long period. So, give some moments to list everything you value and also determine some goals to carry these values into life. As the following step, reformulate your life by eliminating all the unnecessary activities that don't help you to realize these goals. Besides, putting some extra structures up would enhance the process. These could be a group of people who have similar goals. By doing these, you'll be so close to the person you envy to be!

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