

Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism*

Study Questions**1. Context: Criticisms of Existentialism**

1. What is Sartre trying to achieve? What is his purpose?
2. How has existentialism been reproached?

2. Definition of Existentialism

1. What is existentialism?
2. What are two different kinds of existentialists, and what do they have in common?
3. What exactly do we mean by 'existence comes before essence' or 'we must begin from the subjective'?

3. The Paper-Knife Example

1. Summarize the paper-knife example

4. The Human Condition

1. What is the human condition?
2. What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence?

5. Responsibility

1. What are some of the implications of the idea that 'existence is prior to essence'?
2. Does that mean that we do not have responsibilities to others?
3. What are the two ways in which subjectivism must be understood?
4. Why does subjectivity imply freedom?
5. What is the importance of interconnectedness?
6. How can existentialism respond to the critique that it is ego-centric?

6. Anguish

1. Why does the existentialist frankly state that man is in anguish?
2. What about the fact that people don't seem to be in anguish?
3. What question should we ask ourselves when we act?
4. What is self-deception?
5. What does the example of Abraham teach us?
6. What two questions does Sartre think anyone in such a case would wonder?



7. What does the story of the hallucinating woman teach us?
8. Who, then, can prove that I am the proper person to impose, by my own choice, my conception of man upon mankind?
9. Where does the anguish come in?
10. What ought every person ask?
11. What is the moral status of 'following orders'?
12. How is anguish 'a condition of action itself'?

7. Abandonment

1. What difference does it make if there is no God?
2. What did Dostoevsky write about God which provides the starting point existentialism?
3. What implication does this have on freedom?
4. If freedom is a good thing, why does Sartre say we are 'condemned to be free'?
5. What does the existentialist believe about the 'power of passion' and 'signs'?
6. What does the example of the student teach us?
7. What were the two kinds of moralities he was hesitating between?
8. Could the Christian doctrine help him choose?
9. Could the Kantian ethic help him choose?
10. Is Sartre saying we should do what our feelings tell us to do?
11. How does one estimate the strength of a feeling?
12. What does the example of the Jesuit teach us?
13. What does 'abandonment' imply?
14. What goes well with this abandonment?

8. Despair

1. Why does Sartre think that when Descartes said, "Conquer yourself rather than the world," what he meant was, at bottom, the same — that we should act without hope?
2. What is the Marxist objection and Sartre's reply?
3. Does that mean that I should abandon myself to quietism?

9. Metaphysics of Existentialism

1. How does Sartre go beyond a rejection of quietism?
2. How could some people be horrified by this view?
3. What does Sartre mean by 'the sternness of our optimism'?
4. What would people prefer?
5. What counts, in the end?

10. Subjectivity

1. What do Sartre and Descartes agree on?
2. Why does Sartre think that this theory alone is compatible with the dignity of man?
3. What is the aim of this view?

10. (again?) The Other

1. What do Sartre and Descartes disagree on?
2. Why does Sartre say, 'I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of another.'?
3. How is the other indispensable to any knowledge I can have of myself?

11. Inter-subjectivity (and the Human Condition again)

1. How should we understand our role and the role of others in the human condition?
2. What is the 'human condition'? (how does it differ from the human situation?)
3. Is it possible to understand and value something about all people given this idea?
4. How does Sartre categorize man's purposes?

12. Bad Faith

1. What are some implications of the existential emphasis on freedom?
2. What is the difference between free being and absolute being?
3. What is the difference between being as an absolute, temporarily localised being and a universally intelligible being?
4. What are the implications of the existential emphasis on freedom for human behaviour?
5. Sartre says people make choices 'without reference to any pre-established value', but it is unjust to tax him with caprice. Do you agree?
6. What does Sartre compare to making a moral choice?
7. Is what Sartre says about art true?
8. Is he propounding an aesthetic morality?
9. How does Sartre say we make ourselves?
10. Why would it be absurd, in Sartre's view, to reproach someone for irresponsibility in our choice?

13. Freedom

1. In what sense is it both true and false to say, about existentialist “You are unable to judge others.”?
2. What would Sartre say to the person who asked: “And what if I wish to deceive myself?”
3. What is so great about consistency?
4. What is the goal of freedom and of people of good faith?
5. How can the existentialism form judgments of others?
6. What is the difference, for Sartre, between cowards and scum?
7. What is the form of this morality that is universal?
8. How is it that two clearly opposed moralities (as in the examples from the books) can be thought of as equivalent?
9. Sartre claims 'One can choose anything, but only if it is upon the plane of free commitment.' But do you think he really means *anything*?

14. The Invention of Values

1. What is Sartre's response to the objection: “your values are not serious, since you choose them yourselves.”?
2. Are there other alternatives which Sartre fails to take into consideration?
3. What are the two very different meanings the word humanism has, and which one does Sartre have in mind when he says Existentialism is a Humanism?
4. What does Sartre mean by 'Transcendence' , 'transcendent aims' and 'self surpassing'?
5. How can man(kind) realize itself as truly human?

15. Conclusion: the optimism of Existentialism

1. Would it make any difference to Sartre if god existed?
2. How is existentialism a 'doctrine of action'?