

Lecture 1

1. Sartre's lecture

Title – 'Existentialism is (a) Humanism'

Positive message:

'We show that that it is not by turning back upon himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realisation, that man can realise himself as truly human.' (EH 45)

Context: Paris 1945 – postwar liberation

Contrast: (i) *Being and Nothingness* (1943)

'It amounts to the same thing whether one gets drunk alone or is a leader of nations' (p. 627)

(ii) *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960)

No escape from the 'practico-inert'; failure of any collective liberation

J-P. Sartre (1905-80)

1905-20 Extraordinary childhood (*Words*)

1924-8 Student of Philosophy at Ecole Normale Superieure

1930-3 Taught Philosophy at Le Havre

1933-4 Studied in Berlin (esp. Husserl's phenomenology)

1938 *Nausea*

1940 *L'Imaginaire*

1940 War Notebooks

1943 *Being and Nothingness*

1943 *The Flies*

1944 *No Exit*

1945 'Existentialism is Humanism'

(1947-8 Notebooks for Ethics)

1948 *What is Literature?*

1954 *Kean*

1957 *The Question of Method*

1960 *Critique of Dialectical Reason*

1971 *The Idiot of the Family* (about Flaubert)

1980 Died – extraordinary funeral procession

Philosophy

Husserl – Phenomenology

'intentionality' of consciousness

consciousness (*Erlebnis*) as 'bestowal' of meaning - *Sinngebung*

inner 'contents'

'transcendental' idealism

Sartre's version

No inner contents of consciousness

So 'realist' version ('being-in-itself')

Still 'intentionality' and bestowal of meaning
Hence 'freedom' is always 'situated' (BN 506)

'Existentialism'

Sartre's attitude to the word: contrast Heidegger's rejection of it

Sartre: Existentialism is that for man: 'Existence precedes essence' (EH 27)

What is being denied?

- that essence precedes existence. But this is true of -

Artefacts

Religious concepts of man

'Human nature'

Natural Kinds?

So: it involves the denial of any 'external' determination of human life.
Instead, human life/existence is 'self-determined', i.e. 'free'.

'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' (EH 32)

This is the positive content of Sartre's slogan:

cf. 'Indeed by the sole fact that I am conscious of the reasons (*motifs*) which inspire my action, these reasons are already transcendent objects for my consciousness; they are outside. In vain shall I seek to catch hold hold of them; I escape them by my very existence. I am condemned to exist forever beyond my essence, beyond the reasons and motives of my act. I am condemned to be free.' (BN 439)

(compare Merleau-Ponty (Husserl): 'We are condemned to meaning')

Choice

'Every one of us must choose himself' (EH 29)

'Choice and consciousness are one and the same thing' (BN 462)

But 'the question here is not of a deliberate choice' (BN 461):

- for 'what is usually called my will is a manifestation of an original spontaneous choice' (EH 29) - the 'original choice' of a 'fundamental project'.

(This is problematic)

Responsibility

For oneself? – no excuses.

But if the 'choice' was not deliberate?

And is one also responsible also for one's world?

'Thus I am absolutely free and absolutely responsible for my situation' (BN 509)

For its existence and meaning?

‘man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders: he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being’ (BN 553)
(cf. context of the war: ‘there are no innocent victims’ – BN 555).

Hence: ‘anguish’

Morality?

EH: Atheism/Abandonment

Our freedom/responsibility includes the necessity of constructing morality –

Thus we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free.’ (EH 32)

Compare: *War Diaries* pp. 108-9:

‘But if human reality is for its own end, if morality is the law that regulates *through* the world the relationship between human reality and itself, the first consequence is that human reality is obliged to account only to itself for its morality. Dostoevsky used to write: ‘If God does not exist, all is permitted.’ That’s the great error of transcendence. Whether God exists or does not exist, morality is an affair ‘between men’ and God has no right to poke his nose in. On the contrary, the existence of morality, far from proving God, keeps him at a distance, since it’s a personal structure of human reality. The second consequence is that there’s no way to determine the prescriptions of that morality, except by determining the nature of human reality. We must take care here not to fall into the error which consists in deriving values from facts. For human reality is not a fact.’

‘I must say that for me (in this a Spinozist) morality has *never* been distinguished from metaphysics’ (WD p. 82)

Morality, rules and choices

Any choice I make is, implicitly, a choice for all

(e.g. whether to have children - EH 41 ?autobiographical?)

Moral dilemmas and Sartre’s young friend (EH 33)

The inescapability of individual judgment (EH 43)

Comparison with art (EH 41-2)

Are any choices better than others?

Avoid self-deception?

Respect for others?

Enlightened choice as ‘authentic’?

‘When I recognise, as entirely authentic, that man is a being whose existence precedes his essence, and that he is a free being who cannot, in any circumstances, but will his freedom, at the same time I realise that I cannot not will the freedom of others.’ (EH 43)

Why is existentialism (a) humanism?

What is humanism?

(i) Comtean humanism

Nausea: - ‘the humanist philosopher who bends over his brothers like an elder brother who is conscious of his responsibilities; the humanist who loves men as they are, the one who loves them as they ought to be, the one who wants to save them with their consent, and the one who

will save them in spite of themselves They all hate one another: as individuals, of course, not as men' (*N* p. 169)

(ii) Existential humanism

'It took two centuries of crisis – a crisis of Faith and a crisis of Science – for man to regain the creative freedom that Descartes placed in God, and for anyone to suspect the following truth, which is an essential basis of humanism: man is the being as a result of whose appearance a world exists'. (*Literary and Philosophical Essays* p. 184).

From metaphysics to morality

'This is humanism, because we remind man that there is no legislator but himself; that he himself, thus abandoned, must decide for himself'. (*EH* 45)

Problems so far:

Radical choice

Are we that free? (Sartre and cigarettes: *BN* 596-7; self-deception!)

Does radical freedom actually sustain any determinate morality?

The problem of the other

Cogito and intersubjectivity

In what sense are others 'indispensable to my existence' (*EH* 39)

B&N: Other-as-object vs Other-as-subject

(example: 'peeping Tom' *BN* 260-1)

Circle of attitudes:

Love – Appropriation (desire) – Hatred (*BN* 360ff.)

'Respect for the other is an empty word' (*BN* 409)

(cf. *No Exit*, *Kean*)

Radical Conversion?

BN 412: fn. 14

'These considerations do not exclude the possibility of an ethics of deliverance and salvation. But this can be achieved only after a radical conversion which we can not discuss here'

Here is an original structure of authentic love ... : to unveil the Other's being-within-the-world, to take up this unveiling, and to set this Being within the absolute; to *rejoice* in it without appropriating it; to give it safety in terms of my freedom, and to surpass it only in the direction of the Other's ends. (*NE* p. 508)

But we start from a 'primitive alienation'

All of History has to be comprehended as a function of that primitive alienation that mankind cannot get out of. Alienation is not oppression. It is the predominance of the Other in the pair Other and Same, the priority of the objective, and consequently the necessity of all behaviour and ideology to project itself into the element of the Other and to return to their promoters as alienated and alienating. (*NE* p. 413)

An alternative position: the fundamental intersubjectivity of human life, or 'diasporitic existential reality'?

Sartre's example: helping another person onto a bus by holding out one's hand to the other; as their hands grip each other, each person 'realizes the unity of two freedoms in a single perception. But this unity, of a unique type, is not a fusion of the two of them, any more than it is the enslavement of the one by the other. It is an existential reality of a diasporic type of reflective units. Each freedom is wholly in the other one.' (*NE* pp. 287-8)
(This is the position expounded by Merleau-Ponty)

The roots of the problem in Sartre?

The Cartesian foundation?

Being-for-oneself and language?

Heidegger's Letter (1949)

Context: Beaufret's letter (1946)

Heidegger's reply (written 1947)

Extraordinary influence in France

Martin Heidegger

(1889-1976)

Controversial life –

1889 Born in Messkirch – son of the sacristan

1909 Candidate for Jesuit order (rejected on grounds of ill health)

1909-15 Studies Philosophy at Freiburg

1915-23 Assistant at Freiburg; works with Husserl

1923-28 Associate Professor at Marburg

1924 Begins affair with Hannah Arendt

1927 Publication of *Being and Time*

1928 Professor at Freiburg

1933 Nazis seize power; Heidegger joins party

1933-4 Rector of Freiburg

1936 'The Origin of the Work of Art'

1939-40 Nietzsche lectures

1945-9 Banned from University teaching

1949 'Letter on Humanism'

1951 Permitted to teach again

1976 Buried at Messkirch.

.Philosophy

Two main periods

(i) *Being and Time* (1927)

Focus on 'Dasein', 'existence', authenticity

(ii) From c. 1935 onwards ('the turn' – *die kehre*)

Against: metaphysics, subjectivism

For: 'pre-Socratic thinking',

'Letter on Humanism' summarises much of this later philosophy

H. on 'the turn'

'Above all, however, the path taken terminates abruptly at a decisive point. The reason for the disruption is that the attempt and the path it chose confront the danger of unwillingly becoming merely another entrenchment of subjectivity; that the attempt itself hinders the decisive steps; that is, hinders an adequate exposition of them in their essential execution.'

Being

Being (*Sein*) vs. beings/entities (*seiendes*)

Being as the being of beings? (BT 29)

But Being itself? – not a being (not God) (LH 255)

Being so/ being true

Being as: the possibility of something (some being) being so/being true?

Being as the possibility of truth?

Language

Language is the house of being (LH 239)

Language, animals and world (LH 247-8)

Language as home (LH 274)

Ek-sistence

Ek-sistence as human essence (LH 247)

Ek-sistence and 'existence': existence as the 'being'/essence of man (*Dasein*)

'Existence precedes essence' in Heidegger (*BT* 68);

contrast with Sartre re: 'existence' (LH 248ff)

But 'ek-sistence' as intentionality?

Deeper contrast: concerns 'subjectivism'

Sartre: 'we must begin from the subjective' (EH 27)

Heidegger: against the idea of the 'subjective' (BT 86-90) and the idea of a subject/object contrast as fundamental (LH 240);

especially hostile to 'dominance of subjectivity' (LH 243)

Instead: Ek-sistence as being-in-the-world (LH 266)

with Man as 'shepherd' of being (LH 252)

(contrast with Sartre on this: LH 250-1)

Authenticity

BT: 'because *Dasein* is in each case essentially its own possibility, it *can*, in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only 'seem' to do so. But only insofar as it is essentially something which can be *authentic* (*eigentlich*) – that is, something of its own – can it have lost itself and not yet won itself. As modes of Being, *authenticity* and *inauthenticity* ... are both grounded in the fact that any *Dasein* whatsoever is characterised by mineness' (*BT* 68)

LH: the mark of inauthenticity is attention to beings, not being (LH 253).

Hence: the 'homelessness' of modern man (LH 257-8); which can be ended only by 'authenticity' as attentive thinking of being (LH 253)

Contrast here with BT

BT: Angst reveals to each of us that we are fundamentally *not-at-home* in the world and helps to bring us to an authentic recognition of our responsibility for ourselves. To be inauthentic is to take it that the world teaches us what we are and what we should do.

LH: whereas in LH authenticity is achieved precisely by the kind of 'thinking' which enables us to be 'at home' in the world.

Against (Scientific) Metaphysics

Metaphysics, beings and Being (LH 246)

Scientific thinking (LH 242)

'*techne*' – Plato and Aristotle (LH 240)

Philosophy: as science? or as thinking (LH 240; 275-6)

‘Humanism’

Humanism and metaphysics (LH 244-5)

A new humanism? (LH 261, 263)

What is Heidegger against?

Logic, God, Values (LH 263)

Logic – against representations (LH 265)

God: being/holy/divinity/God? (LH 267)

Values: neither objective nor subjective (LH 265)?

Ethics?

Heracleitus’ story (LH 269ff.)

Thinking which is antecedent to the fact/value distinction? (LH 272)

Thinking as ‘healing’ (LH 272)

‘More essential than instituting rules is that human beings find their way to their abode (ethos) in the truth of being’ (LH 274)

Language as ‘house of being’ and ‘the home of the human essence’. (LH 274)
(making sense of one’s life?)

Summary

‘Metaphysics closes itself to the simple essential fact that the human being essentially occurs in his essence only where he is claimed by being. Only from that claim ‘has’ he found that wherein his essence dwells. Only from this dwelling does he ‘have’ ‘language’ as the home that preserves the ecstatic for his essence. such standing in the clearing of being I call the ek-sistence of human beings. This way of being is proper only to the human being. Ek-sistence so understood is not only the ground of the possibility of reason, *ratio*, but is also that in which the essence of the human being preserves the source that determines him.’ (LH 247)