

Denying god's existence

Philosophy



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In this section of the book, Sartre discusses the basis of existentialism. In his view, humans are beings whose existence precedes their essence. Sartre discusses the example of a paper-cutter to show what he means. A person might think to themselves that they need to be able to cut paper. This person needs to cut paper, but doesn't have anything with which to do so. Because of this person's situation, the person decides upon the essence of the item that needs to be created. Once this is done, the person then proceeds to produce an item which we know as a paper-cutter. The paper-cutter is an object whose essence preceded its existence. It was not created, found lying around, and then it was determined that this was an object that would be good at cutting paper. When taking this into consideration, we can see that people are not similar to paper-cutters in that we are not beings who have a specific purpose before we exist. We are brought into existence, and from there we determine what we are, what our essence is.

In a Christian view that includes God, we do have essences before we have existences because this all-powerful creator made us with essences. Because atheistic existentialism denies God's existence, we cannot have an essence. It is not the purpose of existentialism to promote a worldview without God, but it also does not promote believing in something that doesn't exist. It is terrifying to think of a world without God because that means there is no basis for the distinction between good and bad, and in these conditions everything is possible. Because we must choose how we are going to be, this lack of a basis makes existence all the more difficult.