

# Kant and the autonomous individual assignment

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My purpose in this essay is to provide evidence that freedom and autonomy are linked, as well as subjectivity and morality. This essay will also show why existentialism is the only medium sufficient enough to obtain these ideals. This evidence will be provided through the works of Sartre and De Beauvoir, and will give us a basis to discuss why freedom cannot exist without an individual first being autonomous, as well as why subjectivity is necessary to form a correct moral code. Objections to this form will also be discussed and refuted.

Within De Beauvoir's introduction to her book *The Second Sex*, she introduces a very important question: " what is a woman? " This question is important to our link between freedom and autonomy because in order for an individual to be self-sustaining and free, the individual must first be defined and be known to exist. De Beauvoir proposes a few explanations as to what a woman is and why these definitions fail: a woman is a womb, women must be feminine, biological femininity and other definitions of the like.

These definitions fail because, as De Beauvoir explains, what if a woman does not use her womb? What about women who are not feminine, and how is feminine defined? These definitions instantly become self-defeating, and De Beauvoir moves to another practical definition of woman: woman is defined as the man's Other. The Other that De Beauvoir speaks of may seem to be detrimental to the goals of a feminist project, but all of these projects are forced to start from the position that men have power. Because the woman is defined as " the sex," she is defined as the Other.

She is apart from the man, and she cannot think of herself without man like man can think of himself without woman. This duality is what creates the Self and the Other. Women do not pursue a subjective attitude as they refer to themselves as “ woman,” not as “ we. ” Those who wish to grant women “ equality and difference” as “ the Other sex” are inherently acknowledging inequality of the sexes. Without women defining themselves in a subjective manner, the feminist project will never continue. Women who refer to themselves as “ woman” are only strengthening the implied status of the Other.

Without referring to themselves in a subjective manner (as “ we”), women will never advance the feminist project and obtain autonomy, and thus freedom. Women live in a world dominated by man. Men try to stabilize women as objects, and without women having the option to engage in freely chosen projects, they will never transcend and obtain liberty. This is where subjectivity, autonomy and freedom become linked together and become important for the feminist project as well as existentialism. Using Sartre’s Existentialism is a Humanism, we can define the relationship between autonomy and freedom.

Existentialism seeks to obtain freedom and autonomy through transcendence. As Sartre states, existence comes before essence. We must start from the subjective in order to define anything. Man exists, finds himself, and then defines himself afterwards. Without existing first, there is no way to define something. We cannot define anything that does not already exist. Subjectivism, to the atheist existentialist, literally means freedom. In order to be free, we must be able to define ourselves after we

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discover our existence. When man chooses for himself, he chooses for all men.

This human subjectivity cannot be surpassed, and is the only way to obtain true freedom. This true freedom is the only way to obtain true morality, since it is dependent upon how man is defined. This is also where existentialism and feminism link, because without first defining woman, there is no way to produce or push a feminist project forward. Much of what feminism entails relies on existentialism for a sense of subjectivity and definition, and this helps us understand the connection between the autonomous, free and moral individual. We cannot blame our existence on parents, society, or religion.

We are ultimately the ones who decide what we are, and that is the meaning of existence before essence. Existentialism, however, comes with a sense of complete responsibility and anguish. When a man chooses a path and also chooses what he will be, he is choosing for all of man. In this moment of choice, man must become anguished with the extreme sense of total responsibility. Man must ask himself what would happen if everyone acted the way he acts; a concept that relies heavily on Kant's analysis on morality and maxims. This notion is important because it establishes a moral layer within existentialism.

Man must define himself in a way which all of man will be satisfied. This connects morality with freedom. There are many objections to existentialism, however. Existentialism is a view that many people consider to be anti-happiness. They see existentialism as closely related to nihilism, and they

believe that nothing is important or life-changing to the existentialist thinker. This could not be farther from the truth. Many of the objections made against existentialism stem from the inability of people to understand the moral and mental reasoning behind this way of thinking. The reason that value must be stripped from the external world is so we can gain value from within ourselves, which is greater than external value because nothing in the outside world can take it away from us. This is generally overlooked by those who oppose existentialism, and may be seen as a response to those who ask how happiness is defined within existentialism. A common objection against existentialism is a question which is very general: “ how must we act? ” This question can be defeated in several ways.

As stated before, morality stems from acting how we would wish others to act. This links back to Kant’s idea of a maxim (acting as if our “ maxim” would become universal. ) This simply means that we are choosing human nature for all of humanity, and if we want to act freely, we must not be controlled by any of our own personal desires. We must desire the freedom of others, and respect their freedom as well. If we treat another person as a mere object, we are treating ourselves as an object as well. This may be answered by the objector with another question: “ are all these actions then arbitrary? Even though we define ourselves and humanity through our actions, we are still held within a framework that consists of others actions. Just as a worker is constrained by the medium of his work and other things, we are kept in check by the actions that we and others have made. This is what creates morality, and ultimately freedom, for the existentialist. One of the most important objections that existentialism is faced with is defining

freedom. Many people wonder how the existentialist can be free if all our actions and experiences are already determined.

The answer to this question lies in the fact that although our actions and experiences may already be determined, we can arrange them however we want and do with them what we will. After presenting answers to these questions, we can easily see that existentialism creates an individual who is autonomous, moral, free, and recognizes the subjective in order to obtain freedom. We also realize that all of these ideals are connected, and they all rely on each other to exist. Existentialism provides us a clear and concise way to obtain autonomy, and realizing the subjective is the clear way to become free.

Morality comes through participating freely in projects that we would wish others to undertake as well. The answers to these objections and the analysis provided on De Beauvoir, Sartre and Kant proves that freedom, autonomy, subjectivity and morality all exist within each other. Without one, none exist, and without all, not one exists. De Beauvoir provides excellent analysis as to how this applies to the feminist project, and Sartre (as well as Kant) provides us with the form necessary to create the autonomous and moral individual. Within us, there is a desire to become full and robust human beings.

Without the proper tools and frame of mind, it is not possible to obtain the ideals we want to obtain. Within Sartre and De Beauvoir, we find not only excellent analysis on existentialism and how it applies to feminists and humans in general, but we find a mode of thinking that all must become a

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part of. Existentialism is the only medium in which to obtain the ideals of autonomy, morality, freedom and subjectivity. When we do not recognize the importance of this thought process, we will not only lose the ability to define ourselves, but we are not able to participate fully in the human forum.

When this medium is not recognized, our membership within the human race is partial, and we will never fully obtain these ideals. Our status as humans becomes lifeless without these ideals, and our purpose destroyed. This concludes my view on existentialism and its importance. Works Cited De Beauvoir, Simone. " Conclusion to The Ethics of Ambiguity. " Marxists. org. 14 Apr 2009 <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/ambiguity/ch04.htm>. De Beauvoir, Simone. " Introduction to The Second Sex. " Marxists. org. 14 Apr 2009 <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm>.