

# Philosophy 103

Philosophy



According to Sartre, a philosopher from the World War II and Cold War eras, people will create the world around them, thus manipulating their lives. By doing this, they create certain limitations, while also creating more possibilities. Sartre created his philosophical theory at a time in history when more people were able to afford more amenities and luxuries for themselves. More and more industries, companies, and manufacturers were popping up around the world.

This created a global human interest in possessing more amenities, especially in a democratic society. People were now able to not only afford the items they needed in order to sustain a normal lifestyle, but they could own things that could entertain them and bring them happiness. This is a lifestyle that has continued on through today. Many people argue that the habit of buying unnecessary items as opposed to buying those that are vital has become worse over time. Many of us wonder why this is the case. Sartre states that people “ may not become what they wish to be” because they are too busy focusing on their material possessions instead of focusing on improving their moral selves. It is the responsibility of the person to decide what is really important in their lives.

Sartre also makes a few more important notations towards his theory. First, many people think that they will only be defined by the items in which they possess. People think they will only be accepted socially if they possess items that are considered to be attractive to others. People also think they are only defined by what they have, not by who they are as people.

However, Sartre also says, in reality, the world in which we live in is not

composed of all the material possessions. But we tend to feel complete when we do possess these. It is our way of “ escaping responsibility”.

A free market constantly manipulates us, and it is easy for us to fall into its trap. When choosing whether or not to splurge on luxury items, we tend to evaluate our lifestyles and consider what are values truly are. When we evaluate our lifestyles, we fulfill ourselves in which we think will improve our overall lifestyle. Our values become our material possessions, therefore forgetting what is morally significant in our lives. It is all up to the way in which we evaluate things and our ability in attempting to resist our negative and insignificant assumptions of ourselves and the lifestyles we choose to maintain. When doing this, we usually create standards for ourselves to abide by. We only will invest in the most expensive items because we believe it will make us appear more superior to everyone else.

By doing this, we forget about what is important: our consciousness of our spending habits with our money. For example, when it comes to buying a car, we forget about the role a car is meant to play in our lives. As opposed to focusing on its ability to get us from place to place, we only focus on the way it looks, how fast it can go, how good the sound system is, how high we can have it lifted, etc. By doing this, people lose sight of what is morally important like shelter, food, and one’s own livelihood. We see this a lot in our everyday lives. You see this on billboards, over the radio, in magazines, in movies, and especially on television. According to dictionary.

om, a “ Marketer” is defined as “ A person whose duties include the identification of the goods and services desired by a set of consumers, as

well as the marketing of those goods and services on behalf of a company. " This means that the job of the marketer is to convince the average consumer that they need their product, and this is where more often than not people confuse Luxuries versus needs. First lets start by defining " need. " In the strictest sense of the word, a " need" is something that you have to have to get by in this world - a necessity. You need food, shelter, clothing, medical care, which are all examples of the basics. You will probably experience physical suffering of some sort if you don't have your needs met. On the other hand, a " Luxury" is something that you desire -- something you would like to have.

But by no means will you suffer in any way except perhaps mental anguish, if you don't get the thing you want. " Wants" quite often fall into the category of Luxuries, nice to have, but the world won't end without them. The hard part comes when you live in a prosperous capitalistic society, like ours. The " western" standard of living is so high that even many of our poor tend to live above the level of basic needs. In 1998, 97% of " poor" Americans (as defined by the Census Bureau) owned a television -- something that could definitely be considered a luxury. In many third-world countries, less than 30% of the population even has access to electricity, which most westerners would consider an absolute necessity. My intention is not to make anyone feel guilty -- it's simply to point out that the distinction between want and need is often relative.

It depends on the area in which you live, the company you keep, the lifestyle you choose, and the expectations of the society around you. We are influenced, every day, by the popularculturearound us. Television,  
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magazines, movies, and advertising have all done a splendid job of programming us to think that we need a lot of excess consumable goods. Pretend that you are watching TV or flipping through your favorite magazine and see an ad for something awesome. Suddenly, your heart speeds up, and you get a tingly feeling in your gut. It's perfect, how had you ever lived without it before? You rush right to the store, what?! You don't have any left in stock?! Your heart sinks and you feel a rush of disappointment. You spend the rest of the day moping because you couldn't find it anywhere.

Now, this might be a bit of an exaggeration, but it's not far off the mark for some people. How often have you learned of a new product and were certain that you absolutely had to have it? What if you had never seen the ad? Would your life be any worse off? It's as if the knowledge that something exists causes the need for it. Thus brings up the age-old saying of keeping up with the Joneses. With the advent of the " global society," the Joneses are not just the people next door anymore. They include movie stars and billionaires and imaginary people on TV that don't even really exist. But we hold these folks up as the standard against which we should measure our own lives. Just because Bill Gates has a multi-million dollar house, we think ours is too small.

Certainly, no one is suggesting that one gives away everything they own and become a monk, but it is important that one strikes a balance between those things that they have to have and the things that they would like to have. It is also important that people be able to prioritize their spending. The goal is to focus on those things that will really improve one's quality of life, rather than just look flashy. Here's a perfect example of prioritizing between two "

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wants. " Wouldn't it be nice to retire early? Not have to work, spend your time doing what you want? And let's say that while you are thinking about retiring early, you are also looking to buy a house. You could choose the \$500, 000 home with 10 bedrooms, or you could choose the smaller, less-expensive house that meets all of your basic needs. If you choose the expensive home, you can probably kiss retiring early goodbye.

But, if you decide that retiring early would improve your quality of life more than having a huge flashy house, the choice is simple. This coincides with Sartre's theory of self-responsibility. He defines it as " individuals are responsible for their choice, i. e. , they are the incontestable author of their act. " This means that whatever decision a person makes, whether it be good or bad, is their own personal responsibility. For example, when a professional athlete is caught cheating by using steroids, throwing a fight, or betting on themselves, etc.

they are personally responsible for the actions that take place thereafter. This also applies to Sartre's theory on responsibility for others. He states that, " in choosing for one's self, one is thus also choosing for others and is to that extent responsible for the others. " So by having the professional athlete cheat, he or she is also affecting others, such as fans, the team's image, and their teammates, with their actions. Sartre's teachings on existentialism are a perfect example for the topic of Luxuries versus necessities. His idea of personal responsibility and the responsibility of others shows that in Sartre's eye's every consumer is responsible for themselves and if their actions cause a negative reaction on the rest of society they person responsible for this change be held accountable. When

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choosing between necessities and luxuries its up to one's own moral judgment to decide what is considered a necessity or what is a luxury.

So next time your out buying something think to yourself what kind of effect could this it have on society?