

Sartre argues that  
when we are thrust  
into this world



According to Sartre, man does not possess a 'nature' when born, and therefore the tendency to blame human nature for one's weaknesses and flaws is totally baseless. Religion leads people to think of certain views and actions as good or correct. But Sartre does not believe in any such ultimate categories. Man is born free, and should take responsibility for any act that ensues from this freedom. However, this does not mean that all could behave the way they like. The emphasis on responsibility to one's actions and their consequences could make the concept of individual freedom a burden.

The so-called good acts that people do for the sake of religion are nothing but hypocrisy for Sartre. Because, he believes that there is no God, and the dictates of religion are man-made, for various vested interests. An individual is the ultimate authority to decide what is conventionally termed right or wrong, or simply put, what suits her/him. Universal morality and objectivity are flawed concepts in his view. Each individual has to decide what s/he should do. It is sheer escapism to hold human nature, social/religious norms or even God responsible for any of such acts. Even though Sartre acknowledges influences of genes and environment, they are not the building blocks of one's individuality. Rather, it is defined by what one decides to do, in his own will. The tendency of people to blame their genes and environment for the flaws in their nature are also following a flawed argument, while there are many who try all possibilities in which they can accomplish something from where they stand in relation to their genes and environment. It is more or less obvious that Sartre's perception is that human nature and essence are something that do not pre-exist but evolve out of the independent decisions people take.

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Sartre's existentialism is not compatible on many grounds with religious faith. Unlike the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's view that brings parallels between existentialism and 'faith', Sartre's views are deeply rooted in the autonomy of decisions that define individuals and the world. According to him, man is "condemned to be free". Whatever one does may not be justified on all counts because of this view. Individuals have to be aware that the feeling that their acts are okay proclaims the fact that anyone is free to do the same act. In short, the visible freedom will lead them only to those kinds of acts that they would expect from others. If adultery is okay for one person, s/he should concede that it should be okay for all the others in the world as well. It is here that a subtle notion of individual morality emerges, which can in some ways be linked to the religious concept of being truthful to one's conscience.