

# [Evaluation of simone de beauvoir’s the ethics of ambiguity](https://assignbuster.com/evaluation-of-simone-de-beauvoirs-the-ethics-of-ambiguity/)

Prompts 3: The Ethics of Ambiguity

In Simone de Beauvoir’s The Ethics of Ambiguity, Beauvoir discussed with several philosophical concepts, which are freedom, human’s choices, responsibility, ethics, and the meaning of life. In order to understand the significance of these concepts, an understanding of existentialism is needed. Existentialism focuses upon the analysis of existence, and how individuals recognize themselves as existing in the world. Existence precedes essences. Human beings create and discover meanings in their lives through free wills, personal responsibilities choices and subsequent actions. Human beings cannot avoid making choices, even doing nothing is still regarded as a choice. The believe is that individuals aim to find out who they are through their lives as they made choices based on their own experiences, believes and moral laws. “ Freedom” is one of the main concepts that is essential to existentialism. In The Ethics of Ambiguity, Beauvoir brought up several archetypal ways of being, each related to a way that human beings either turn away from their freedom or fail to understand the meaning of their freedom. Existentialists believed that every individuals’ moves and choices are weighted upon the ethical exercise of freedom; even if they try to escape of misunderstand the meaning of freedom. As Beauvoir claimed, the views on freedom work as the base of moral and ethical obligation.

Beauvoir claimed that the principle of freedom is the foundational premise of the discussion of the exercise of ethical theories. By explaining this, Beauvoir mainly brought up six archetypal ways of being in which each refers to a way of freedom. These archetypal ways of freedom could be divided into two categories. One is that people failed to understand freedom, and they claimed that life is not in itself meaningful and free, they do not take up the responsibility that comes with our human freedom, which may lead to misuse of freedom; the other is that it should plays as the role of understanding the ethical exercise of freedom, but beings may have turn away from what their freedom stands for.

The first type of being is the child. The base of childhood is characterized by the process of the child finding himself casting into a universe, which he has not helped to establish, and appears as an absolute to him. Being a child, the world appears as something which has already made for them; since in the children’s view, human inventions, words, customs, and values are all given facts. They lived in a serious world, but it does not mean that they are serious (Beauvoir, 35). The children are allowed to do whatever they like and to expend their existence freely without paying any responsibility under the ceiling built by human generations; since nothing can ever happen to them. Their actions mean and engage nothing, even if they escape from the anguish of freedom (Beauvoir, 36). Since the children have no connection to the past or the future, they are considered as neither moral or immoral. As a result, it is easier for them to misuse their freedom engaging in both ethical or unethical acts, because they are in a state of security. This is quite a compelling glimpse of moral life, because it is true that children would receive less or even no punishment when they act unethically, since they are too young to be taught. All of their values are given, instead of chosen by themselves individually. However, they will be taught by their parents or the society during the process as they grow up. Each person was once a child, it is not to say that children live in bad faith, since they are not aware of their subjectivity.

Once one mature in one’s subjectivity, and are able to acquainted with one’s freedom, the desire for freedom and the denial of one’s responsibility constitute bad faith. As soon as children realized their existence, ethical actions are possible. The individual is able to feel free and would not be defenseless before obscure powers which directed the course of things (Beauvoir, 39). This may make people feel anxious, because they step into the world which they have to face without any security from childhood; which they may be nostalgic after. This brought up denial or made individuals turn away from freedom. Beauvoir mentioned several types of bad faith and put them into a hierarchy.

The sub-man is those who refuse to have any positive engagement with the world. He takes no responsibility for himself, and have no desire to feel. He manifests a fundamental fear in the face of existence, in the face of the risks and tensions which it implies. The sub-man is far from freedom due to his refusal to take his ownership of his existence of the world. He believed that the less he exists, the less is there reason for him to exist, since reasons are created by existing (Beauvoir, 42). The sub-man is afraid of engaging himself in a project, or being in a state of danger before the future or with other beings in the word; he rejects them completely. Thus, this lead him to take refuge in the ready-made values of the serious world. Although we define the sub-man as a denial and a flight, he is not a harmless creature. The sub-man realized himself in the world as a person who can easily controlled and recruited by anyone. The sub-men are the group who do the actual dirty work (Beauvoir, 44). They turn away from their freedom, since they try to denial their existence. Therefore, the meaning of life under their perspective is ambiguous, because meanings of actions are brought from the existent’s spontaneous act of choice. However, it is impossible to get rid of his existence, which means that he cannot efface the agonizing evidence of his freedom. This brought up the issue of the misuse of freedom, since the sub-men are grown-ups, who can make their own choices individually. Although they deny their existence, they cannot deny that they are engaging in unethical behaviors. Denying is just a way for them to run away from their responsibility of the consequences or guilt from the dirty work. They are aware of how they should operate freedom, but they still misuse it. It is compelling to moral life, because sub-men do exist in our society, which some do engage in unethical and inappropriate acts because of their misuse of freedom. it is hard to find fulfillment being sub-men. It seems that the sub-men are always trying to avoid disappointment, engagement, etc., meaning that if they do not try, they would not fail. This reminds us it is important to try, to find other possibilities of being a being, and use our freedom appropriately; so that we act morally and contribute to the world.

The attitude of the sub-man passes logically over into the serious man, which he forces himself to submerge his freedom in the content which the latter accepts from the society (Beauvoir, 45). The serious man gets rid of his freedom by claiming to subordinate it to values which are unconditioned, external and absolute. He fulfills themselves as a being who escape from the stress of existence and responsibility. Beauvoir claimed that the thing which matters to the serious the most is not the nature of the object which he prefers, but the fact of being able to lose himself. Since all actions lose meaning if it is not willed from freedom, so that setting up freedom is the serious man’s goal. By achieving the goal, the serious men sacrifice themselves, and others. They ignore the value of subjectivity and the freedom of others, and persuade themselves that what they sacrifice are nothing. However, this breaks the serious man, because he is forced to acknowledge the subjectivity which undermines his understanding of existence (Beauvoir, 46-49). The serious men’s freedom is always remained, not denied. It is compelling to the moral life, because as being powerless and ignorant individuals, human can know the truth of existence and raise themselves to a proper moral life. The serious man is turned away from freedom. In order to live authentically of freedom, people should not set up the end and goals of actions as absolute. This goes against the rule of serious man, so that they lose the meaning of their lives. Thus, they treat everything as a threat threatened by the whole universe (Beauvoir, 51). They misuse their freedom that their actions towards other are so absolute that would cause immoral and unethical actions on others. Sacrificing themselves and others put all of them into an end.

Serious man who is unable to be anything can decide to be nothing. Beauvoir defined this as nihilism. The nihilist is close to the spirit of seriousness, but instead of realizing his negativity as a living movement, he conceives his annihilation in a substantial way. They wish to be nothing, but this nothing is still a sort of being. Nihilism is disappointed seriousness which has turned back upon itself. They would reject everything around them, and destroy the object of their goal. When rejecting his own existence, the nihilist should also reject the existences which confirm it (Beauvoir, 52-55). In order to deny the existence, they annihilate themselves and others who present the prove of existence, referring to all mankind. It defines man as a lack at the heat of existence, and freedom is not fulfilled in this case of rejection. The nihilist rejects existence without managing to eliminate it, and denies any meaning to his transcendence (Beauvoir, 57). Nihilism is not an authentic choice, since it does not assert nothingness in freedom, but in the sense of denial. Therefore, they realized their freedom, though it is different from the reality of freedom mentioned by Beauvoir, claiming that they are turned away from it; and what they deny is the meaning of the world. It is compelling to moral life, since the negation of aesthetic, spiritual and moral values have become an ethics even if they are denied by the nihilist. They did not misuse freedom, because they are aware of it; but it brought up considerations towards the ethical exercise of freedom. The meaning of actions, either ethical or not, are granted from existence. If the nihilist denies the existence and meaning of all mankind, it is not possible for them to act genuinely towards freedom.

An adventurer is one who throws himself into life, and likes actions for its own sake. He finds joy in spreading through the world a freedom which remains indifferent to it content. He needs leisure, fortune, etc. to maintain freedom to any end. It always implies that freedom is realized as an independence regarding to the serious world. Any man could define himself as an adventurer after adolescence (Beauvoir, 58, 62). The movement of the adventurer engaging freedom is quite close to the attitude of a genuinely free man, but he thinks that he could assert his own existence without taking into account of others. According to Beauvoir, the adventurer is the first among the hierarchy to experience freedom, meaning that it is also the first to be able to make moral choices as an existentialist. The reason is that the adventurer deliberately makes himself a lack of being, which he aims expressly at existence; thought engaging in his undertaking, he is detached from the goal at the same time. The adventurer can be genuinely free only by seeking to expend himself through the freedom of others. Thus, they must respect others’ freedom, and help them to be free (Beauvoir, 59-60). However, the adventurer only care his own freedom, causing him to embodied a selfish and probably tyrannical attitude. It is compelling to moral life. The adventurer devises a sort of moral behavior when he assumes his subjectivity positively (Beauvoir, 63). This brought issues in ethical exercise of freedom, since the adventurer asserts his freedom quite forcefully, because having his freedom at the expense of others brought oppression to them. Therefore, in order to justify their existence, the adventurer may act unethically to others. They have the foundation of ethical exercise, which is freedom, what they need is to adjust their of justifying their existence morally.

The antithesis of the adventurer is the passionate man. Unlike the adventurer, whose content is not genuinely fulfilled; it is the subjectivity which fails to fulfill itself genuinely in the passionate man. Passionate man who, like the adventurer, treated others as things on their way to achieve freedom; but instead of destroying everything that gets in the way of freedom, they attempt to give themselves a full realization of the object. The passionate man seeks possession to attain being, believing he could confirm his existence (Beauvoir, 63-65). Beauvoir claimed that the passionate man inspires a certain admiration and horror at the same time, making the realization of freedom in a distance; and himself a potential tyranny. Not intending his freedom for men, the passionate men does not recognize them as freedom. The passionate man is the closest to freedom, who must accept the eternal separation from the thing which he aims to possess. Passion is converted to genuine freedom only if one destines his existence to other existences through the being (Beauvoir, 67). It is compelling to moral life, because the object the passionate man follows could disclose and provide meanings to lives, and the world. However, this contains a negative aspect, that if the passionate man keeps perusing the object in this way, it means that he will be withdrew by himself from the rest of the world; claiming that his freedom is being alone, and is separated from others. In this case, it is relatively not an ethical exercise of freedom, since “ no man is an island”, meaning that every person in the world is related; therefore, they should not be separated. Depending and working with one another creates ethical freedom.

Beauvoir mentioned and distinguish between the ethical exercise of freedom, whether each type of beings is acting morally in life towards freedom; and the “ misuse” of freedom, which is when beings misunderstand the way to maintain their existence and operate choices, causing the result of turned away or fail to achieve freedom and to live a meaningful life. It is compelling to moral life, since meaning and freedom can only be disclosed through other, meaning that to will oneself free is will others free. Freedom acts as the basis for Beauvoir ethical theory, and she claimed that to will oneself moral and free, and to will that there be being are one and the same choice, which man makes of himself as a presence in the world (Beauvoir, 70).

## References

* Beauvoir, de Simon. The Ethics of Ambiguity, Part II, pp. 35-70