

# Life of pi existentialist examination

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Is Life of Pi Existentialist? There are two views of existentialism, that of the more popular atheistic view, and that of the theistic view (Sartre Lecture). In the book Life of Pi, by Yann Martel the main theme of the book is religion, with the main character being of multiple religions: Hinduism, Christian Catholicism, and Islam. (Martel). Life of Pi is both Existentialist and non-existentialist, in both the atheistic and theistic views because of specific religious beliefs, abandonment of religion, despair, and the ultimate use of human instinct for survival.

I would first like to begin by giving brief explanations of both sides of existentialism, because both do apply to this book, even though the main theme is religion. The main idea of existentialism is that of “existence before essence” (Sartre Lecture). By this, they mean that we define ourselves as what we are by our own actions and free will. We exist before our essence, or our determined character, because we determine it for ourselves by our own doings. “In the book Life of Pi, by Yann Martel the main theme of the book is religion.

The theistic view of existentialism can basically be summed up by this quote: “When we think of God as the creator, we are thinking of him, most of the time, as a supernal artisan” (Sartre Lecture). By this, they mean that theists view god as the all powerful creator. He created man with a specific idea in mind, and he knew what we would do and create. “God creates he knows precisely what he is creating” (Sartre, Lecture. ) He knows the past, present, and future, and will not allow us to be defined by our human nature.

Human nature was simply a side effect, to allow us to understand possibly why and how we are, but we can't let it define ourselves as humans. Our

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intellect and creations define us as who we are, not our natural instinct. Therefore, we cannot blame something on instinct and human nature, because god did not create us to do that. He created us to innovate. And as intellectuals, it is our job to realize what we are here for, and to fulfill god and ourselves as human and not to let petty biological needs hinder our knowledge.

It is our job to differentiate ourselves from one another, because we all have the same human nature and basic needs, and if we did not use our minds to create an image for ourselves, we would all be the same. On the other hand, the atheistic view, "Atheistic existentialism, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man or the human reality" (Sartre Lecture).

This is saying that there is no human nature, because there was no god to conceive humans, or the idea of human nature. Man just simply is, and there is no meaning to life or existence unless they give meaning to it. They decide who they are and who they want to be, or if they are anything at all, and there is no god to have decided what humans will be because he does not exist himself. "Man will only attain existence when he is what he purposes to be. Not, however, what he may wish to be" (Sartre Lecture).

Man does not have existence unless he creates it for himself, therefore counteracting the theistic view, and saying that essence is before existence. Your essence allows you to exist. Within Life of Pi, there are many things that point to it being possibly theistically existentialist. For example, one of the <https://assignbuster.com/life-of-pi-existentialist-examination/>

three religions he believes in is Hinduism, which the aspect of reincarnation and karma are greatly important in. Reincarnation is the belief that your soul is passed down through many physical forms, and karma determines what physical form your soul will take on in the next life.

This follows with existentialism because it is the thought that you are not tied down by your physical attributes, but you are defined by what you do in life and what image you create for yourself, and gods ultimately decide what physical form you will take on. Therefore, you cannot be defined by what physical form you have or human instinctual needs. It is your job to see beyond that. Another thing that Pi does that coincides with theistic existentialism is that of when he is abandoned on the boat, he still continues to pray five times a day (Martel).

Yes, other actions that he committed on the boat proved otherwise to be non-existential, but he remained hopeful by praying on the boat for quite a while, feeling that he was not yet abandoned by god and did not completely succumb to his human needs and solely focusing on survival. Moving on to ways that the book is non-existentialist, I believe that the book was far more non-existentialist from the theistic view. One of the ways was how Pi was the denomination of Catholicism (Martel), which is a denomination of Christianity that does not believe in free will.

They believe that free will is a denial of grace, or the denial that God created humans in the image of himself, which is pretty much the exact opposite of existentialism itself. Existentialists believe that god gave man the power of free will because he knows what they will do with their free will, and there is no denial of the image of god. Another way that Life of Pi is not existentialist <https://assignbuster.com/life-of-pi-existentialist-examination/>

is when he is on the boat, and commits acts of human instinctual survival. He goes against his beliefs to survive.

An example of that is when he goes against his vegetarianism and love of animals to drink the turtles blood (Martel). This is abandoning your beliefs and self image to survive, and just giving into human instinct, which brings me to another topic of atheistic existentialism: anguish, abandonment, and despair (Sartre Lecture). " Anguish" is basically describing that, when a man decides for himself, he is not only deciding something for himself, but that of all mankind because he is representing them all as a whole because all of our decisions define us (Sartre Lecture). Abandonment" is saying that we cannot depend on god to give us moral guidance. We have to have our own moral, and not look to god and holy books to decide what we do in life (Sartre Lecture). " Despair" basically means that there should be no despair, because there is no limit as to what we can do. If there is no god, there is no all-powerful being, and then there is no one to decide our limits for us. Therefore, we cannot be in despair, for the possibilities are endless (Sartre Lecture). They all seem to counteract the belief in god, so in the atheistic sense, Life of Pi isn't existentialist at all.

He became a bit absorbed with himself, and not mankind while he was on the boat. He did not care about the animal he killed, and went with human instinct, thus only caring about himself. He depended on his multiple gods for guidance, and also expected them to help him while keeping up with prayer five times a day (Martel). In conclusion, I believe that Life of Pi is non-existentialist as a whole. Too many things point to it being non-existentialist

in the theist sense, and pretty much all things point to it being non-existentialist in the atheist view.

Reincarnation and Karma seem to coincide with that of existentialism, as well of his perseverance with faith. But that same perseverance counteracts that of the atheistic view, with anguish, abandonment, and despair. He also showed true human instinct by going against his instincts to survive. I believe that the non-existentialist aspects definitely outweigh the existentialist ones. Works Cited Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc. , 2001. Print. Sartre, Jean Paul. Philip Mairet, trans. " Existentialism is a Humanism. " Lecture given in 1946. Web. 11 December 2012.