

# Existence precedes essence essay



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**Existence Precedes Essence**

According to metaphysics, essence precedes existence. This means that any object, if it has to come into existence its idea should exist in the mind of the creator. For example, if we want to build a house, an idea of how the house will look like, its features and location must take place in our mind; its essence should be there before it can come into existence. However Jean Paul Sartre implies that existence precedes essence in human beings. Sartre believes that the self or body or in other words, the existence comes into being first and then after the human being has entered this world; he defines or makes up his essence or nature by his interaction with the surroundings, people and opportunities around him. According to Sartre, every human being is defined or made essentially by development of his character through his time and interaction with the world and its people.

Sartre also argues that because each human being is free to interact and make their own choices, the onus of these choices comes in the form of radical freedom and responsibility. Every human being is responsible for their own actions and its consequences through the decisions that have been made by him. Behavior, whether good or bad cannot be justified by making it a part of a human being's nature or essence (Cline, n. d). People make their own choices and decisions and act accordingly and therefore any results that their actions might bear are the sole responsibility of the qualities that have been developed by that person. According to Sartre, the proverb, as you sow, so shall you reap; defines his main idea of existentialism

The implication for this comes to the fact that individually we are responsible for our own actions but collectively as a mankind our actions shape the world

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around us and the future generations will learn from these and shape their characters or nature.

Friedrich Nietzsche also believed that people can only be truly free when they free themselves from religion and faith in God. His famous remark ‘ God is dead’ echoes this ideology. The Christian church preached that all human beings were equal and that the after world was essentially of more importance than the present world, this according to Nietzsche undermined a human being’s ability to excel and placed him in the same line as a common individual. He was highly influenced by Darwin’s theory survival of the fittest and believed that this kind of preaching undermined human being’s true potential. According to Nietzsche anything that gave power to man and the will to power to deliver those actions was good and any form of weakness which according to him came by being moral and faithful was bad. In this case, since Christianity instilled in its believers moral values and the spiritual way of living, Nietzsche declared that the only way to achieve true potential and endure pain in the real world and truly live life was to detach from God (Crowell, 2004)

Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs which consists of five levels namely physiological, safety, belonging, esteem and self actualization which is also the highest level of needs a person can achieve (cited in Burger, n. d). This relates to Sartre’s thesis that human beings exist and then define themselves by developing their nature and interacting with their surroundings. Maslow is essentially saying the same thing that a person who exists in this world moves towards fulfillment of his personal goals through decisions at varying levels of what he needs from the society in terms of

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food, shelter and a place among friends and family which helps him achieve the last stage of fulfillment of self actualization where he is able to give back to the society in terms of his experiences and the knowledge and development of ethics and character that has led him to lead a successful life essentially and give back to mankind.

### **References**

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