

Jean paul sartre: the main criticisms of the concepts of existentialism

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Jean Paul Sartre: the Main Criticisms of the Concepts of Existentialism

According to Jean Paul Sartre, the main criticisms brought against the concepts of Existentialism are first, that they force man to understand his isolation and thus can never return to solidarity with the rest of his race and second, that they lead to complete caprice because of man's isolation from others. He explains that the basic principle behind existentialism is the idea that "existence precedes essence, or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be the starting point" (13). He then introduces a metaphor of God as the artist and man as the art. In this metaphor, he illustrates how there is a specific idea in mind before, or at least at the same time, that idea is made real - essence precedes existence. Although this is the way he suggests we all tend to view the concept of God, Existentialists suggests that man is capable of existing first and then becomes aware - existence precedes essence. "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (15). This idea would seem to suggest that everyone should be completely selfish and only look out for themselves because it says that each man is responsible for himself, but Sartre says that he is also responsible for all other men. This was a difficult concept to understand for me. Essentially, what Sartre is saying is that when we take responsibility for making ourselves what we want to be, we are obviously making ourselves what we think we should be as a race. If we have the choice to make ourselves the hero or the villain and we understand that the choice is really our responsibility, we obviously would choose to be the happy hero that everybody loves. When we make this choice, we are sending a message to the other people giving them an idea of

what is expected of them, what they can do with themselves and encouraging them to follow this example of greatness. This is how Existentialism is both something that connects us with the rest of our race, providing the solidarity insisted on by the first critics, and maintains a strong load of responsibility, removing the caprice its charged with by the second critics.