



**Simone de Beauvoir:
A Very Easy Death**

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Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*

- **Phenomenological Testimony:** method for interpreting our ordinary, everyday experience of phenomena (such as guilt and anxiety).
- Ordinary feelings bear **Phenomenological Witness** to fact that, as we make choices we actualize one possible self at the expense of many other possible selves.
 - Guilty indebtedness to those other selves is a feature of existence that reveals our own "finitude": we cannot be all that we can be. (de Beauvoir 76)

Existential Structures



Public, shared, transmissible.



Affectivity: the *past* filters how things matter to us through our moods.
 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*: "The world of the happy is quite another than the world of the unhappy."
Telling: things are made manifest in the *present* through our use of language to articulate the meaning of our situation. (de Beauvoir 98)
Understanding: the horizon of the *future* shapes the way things show up for us because the projects that define us (our choices) extend into the indefinite future, thus running ultimately up against death, the final horizon.
 "...six weeks of an intimacy rotted by betrayal" (96).
Good Faith / Existential Courage: I am the self which I will be, in the mode of not being it. (101)

Existentialism via Sartre & de Beauvoir



Philosophy of religious belief.

Absolute Individuality and Absolute Freedom.

Since we are all ultimately alone, isolated islands of subjectivity in an objective world, we have absolute freedom over our internal nature, and the source of our value can only be internal.



Situated Meaning:

Our capacity for agency & meaning-making & whether or not we are identified as agents & meaning-makers is constrained, though never determined, by the conditions of our situation.

Existence precedes essence.

We have no predetermined nature or essence that controls what we are, what we do, or what is valuable for us.

We are radically free to act independently of determination by outside influences.
 Ex: You come to class, but I am not here.
 Absence reveals choice.

We create our own human nature through these free choices.
 We also create our values through these choices.

Existentialism does **not** support any of the following

- The good life is one of wealth, pleasure, or honor. (de Beauvoir 36)
- Social approval and social structure trump the individual. (42)
- Accept what is and that is enough in life. (91, 92)
- Science can and will make everything better. (57, 79)
- People are good by nature, ruined by society or external forces.

The Human Situation

- Facticity:
 - We are not the source of our existence, but find ourselves thrown into a world we don't control and didn't choose. (de Beauvoir 33, 34)
 - Death demonstrates this more than anything. (78, 88, 105)
- Anxiety:
 - Faced with the lack of any external source of value and determination, we face the responsibility of choosing our own nature and values. (14, 35)
 - In doing so, we must face the awesome responsibility of choosing human nature and values for all people in our free choices. (52, 66)

And in the end...

- Despair:
 - In seeing the contrast between the world into which we are thrown and cannot control and the absolute freedom we have to create ourselves, we must despair of any hope of external value or determination and restrict ourselves to what is under our own control. (68, 106)

The Ethics of Ambiguity (1947)

- Intentionality
 - "We will never succeed in fully revealing the meaning of the world, never fulfill our desire to impress our meaning on the world."
 - Meaning-disclosing, meaning-making & meaning-desiring activities of consciousness are both insistent and ambiguous.
 - Insistent: spontaneous and unstoppable.
 - Ambiguous: preclude any possibility of self unification or closure.
 - "As radically free I need the other. I need to be able to appeal to others to join me in my projects."
- De Beauvoir identifies our ambiguity with the idea of failure.
 - Rejects ethical systems in favor of ethical projects that acknowledge our limits & recognize the future as open.
 - rejects both ideas of God and Humanity. However different they may be in content, both provide an already given ground of, and justification for, our actions. They allow us to abdicate responsibility for creating the conditions of our existence & to evade our ambiguity.
 - Here lies the knot of the ethical problem: How can a radically free being, who is existentially severed from all other human freedoms, transcend the isolations of freedom to create a community of allies? Given the necessity of appealing to the other's freedom, under what conditions is such an appeal possible?