PG PH S3 03
(DSC)

# TWO YEAR MASTER'S DEGREE COURSE

## (CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

**SEMESTER-III**

# CONTEMPORARY WESTERN PHILOSOPHY - II

# PHILOSOPHY


Surya Kumar Bhuyan School of Social Sciences

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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## Course Introduction

This course offers a comprehensive exploration of key movements and figures in Contemporary Western Philosophy, focusing on phenomenology, existentialism, and hermeneutic ontology. It begins with an overview of major trends, followed by an in-depth study of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method—emphasizing presuppositionless philosophy, intentionality, reduction, and the concept of the life-world. The course then transitions to existentialist thought, highlighting Søren Kierkegaard's transformative stages and Jean-Paul Sartre's rich analysis of human existence, freedom, choice, and responsibility. It critically examines Sartre's notions of being-in-itself, being-for-itself, and his famous dictum, "existence precedes essence." The final units delve into Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology, with a focus on Dasein, the meaning of Being, and the ontological significance of Time. Throughout, the course encourages critical reflection on human subjectivity, meaning, and the structure of experience, offering philosophical tools to engage with contemporary human conditions.

This course consists of fifteen units. The name of the first unit is "**Trends in the Contemporary Western Philosophy".** It includes the concepts like What is Contemporary Western Philosophy, Different Trends in Contemporary western Philosophy, Conclusion etc..

The second unit is '**'Husserl's Philosophy of Presuppositionless Philosophy".**. This unit deals with issues like Immanent Perception, Formal Ontology and Transcendental Ontology, Transcendental Idealism, Positive Science etc.

The third unit is **"Phenomenological Reduction of Husserl"**. It deals with the issues like Historical Background of the phenomenological reduction, The Epistemological Problem the Phenomenological Reduction Aims to Solve, The Analysis That Disclosed the Need for the Reduction, The Structure, Nature and Performance of the Phenomenological Reduction, How the Reduction Solves the Epistemological Problem etc.

The fourth unit is **"The Idea of Intentionality of Edmund Husserl"**. It basically discusses the concepts like Intentionality: Background and General Considerations, Logical Investigations, Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*:* The Perceptual Noema etc.

The fifth unit is **"Husserl's view of Life-world"**. this unit discusses about the Background of Husserl's view of Life-world, problem of Life-world, Developments after Husserl, Harbermas etc.

The sixth unit is **"General Characteristics of Existentialism"**. The concepts included in this unit are What is Existentialism, General Characteristics of Existentialism, Conclusion etc.

The seventh unit is **"Kierkegaard"**. The topics discuss in this unit are Background of Kierkegaard existentialism, Three Stages of Existential Transformation, Subjectivity, Conclusion etc.

The name of the eighth unit is '**Sartre's Concept of man'.** It deals with the issues like Existence, being-in-itself, being-for-itself, being-for others, subjectivity, consciousness, facticity, givenness, being, subjectivity or consciousness, trans phenomenality, nihilation of the in-itself, freedom, responsibility, anguish, authentic existence etc.

The name of the ninth unit is '**Sartre : Essence and Existence**' It discusses the issues like Meaning of Existence Preceded Essence, Sartre's View, Criticism etc.

The tenth unit is "**Sartre : Freedom"**. This unit discusses about the Meaning of Freedom and Choice, J.P. Sartre's Concept of Freedom, J.P. Sartre's Concept of choice, relation between Freedom and Choice etc.

The elevenths unit is "**Sartre's Concept of Being-in-itself**". This unit will focus on the concepts like Meaning of Being-in-itself, Sartre's Concept of Being-in-itself, Conclusion etc.

The twelfth unit is ""**Sartre's Concept of being-for itself**". After reading this unit, one will understand the concepts like, Meaning of Being for-itself, Sartre's Concept of Being-for-itself, Conclusion etc.

The thirteenth unit is "**Heidegger's Concept of Being**". This unit deals with the issues like Meaning of Being, Heidegger's Concept of Being, Critical Analysis of Heidegger's Concept of Being etc.

The fourteenth unit is "**Heidegger's Concept of Dasein**". This unit discusses topics like The Concept of Dasein, Heidegger's re-interpretation, Origin and inspiration, Critical Comments etc.

The fifteenth unit is "**Time of Heidegger**". The issues included in this unit are Meaning of Time, Heidegger's Concept of Time, Time and Being, Concluding Remark etc.

While going through this course you will come across some boxes which are put on the left side or right side of the text. These boxes will give us the meanings of some words and concepts within the text. Apart from this, there will be some broad and short questions included under Activity and Check Your Progress in every unit. Activities will increase our thinking capacity because questions put in Activity are not directly derived from the text. But answers to the short questions are put in the section Answers to Check Your Progress. Besides, there are some text-related questions which are put in Model Questions. These questions will help you in selecting and mastering probable topics for the examination so that you can prepare for the examination with confidence.

# UNIT 1: TRENDS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

## UNIT STRUCTURE


1.1 Learning Objectives
1.2 Introduction
1.3 What is Contemporary Western Philosophy?
  1.3.1 Historical Background
  1.3.2 Key Characteristics
1.4 Different Trends in Contemporary Western Philosophy
  1.4.1 Analytic Philosophy
  1.4.2 Continental Philosophy
  1.4.3 German Idealism (18th-19th centuries)
  1.4.4 Existentialism
  1.4.5 Phenomenology
  1.4.6 Postmodernism
  1.4.7 Pragmatism and Neo-Pragmatism
1.5 Distinguishing Contemporary Western Philosophy from Modern Traditions
1.6 Conclusion
1.7 Let Us Sum Up
1.8 Check Your Progress
1.9 Further Readings
1.10 Answer to Check Your Progress
1.11 Model Questions


## 1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Know the historical background and key characteristics of contemporary Western philosophy.
- Identify and analyse major trends in contemporary philosophy, such as analytic philosophy, continental philosophy, existentialism, phenomenology, postmodernism, and pragmatism.

- Compare and contrast contemporary Western philosophy with modern traditions, focusing on shifts in thought regarding truth, knowledge, and the self.

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Western philosophy, which began in the early 20th century, marks a distinct period in the development of Western thought. Philosophers in this era began working in academic settings, leading to more specialized and professional discussions. The 20th and 21st centuries brought shifts in the focus of philosophical inquiry, emphasizing language, logic, science, culture, social life, and personal experience. Two primary schools-analytic philosophy and continental philosophy-shaped this era, each with different methods and focuses. While "contemporary philosophy" refers to the philosophy of the 20th and 21st centuries, it is often confused with "modern philosophy" (17th-19th centuries) or "postmodern philosophy," which critiques ideas from the modern period. In contrast to earlier philosophy, contemporary philosophy deals with real-world issues and questions about society, knowledge, and human existence. The world's rapid changes-due to science, technology, wars, and social movements-pushed philosophers to explore beyond abstract metaphysical theories. Philosophers embraced new movements like existentialism, phenomenology, analytic philosophy, and postmodernism, each focusing on different aspects of human experience, logic, and meaning. Key distinctions include the divide between analytic philosophy (focused on language and logic) and continental philosophy (focused on history, culture, and human experience). Contemporary philosophy also became more inclusive, addressing gender, race, class, and identity through feminist philosophy, critical race theory, and postcolonial thought. Philosophers today collaborate across disciplines like psychology, neuroscience, and technology, making philosophy more relevant to solving real-world challenges. Issues like climate change, artificial intelligence, and social justice are now central to philosophical inquiry, highlighting its importance in navigating modern life.

In the next unit, we will delve deeper into contemporary philosophy's definition, scope, and key characteristics.

## 1.3 WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY WESTERN PHILOSOPHY?

Contemporary Western philosophy marks a departure from traditional metaphysical frameworks, whether idealist or materialist. Its emergence is closely linked to logical positivism, advanced by the Vienna Circle. These thinkers rejected the notion that philosophy's purpose is to uncover absolute truths, instead focusing on logical and linguistic analysis of concepts and statements. Philosophical questions, for them, were meaningful only if they could be empirically verified or logically expressed. This shift moved contemporary philosophy away from metaphysical and epistemological concerns that shaped ancient and modern thought. To understand this shift, we revisit the historical evolution of Western philosophy. Early philosophers like Thales and Democritus debated the nature of reality, often balancing materialism and idealism. With Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, philosophy turned metaphysical, introducing concepts such as Plato's theory of Forms and Aristotle's dualism. Metaphysical questions remained central through the medieval period, where philosophy was closely tied to Christian theology. The Enlightenment revived intellectual thought, with figures like Bacon advocating for empirical methods, while Descartes laid the foundation for modern rationalism. However, philosophical inquiry remained constrained by theological assumptions until the rise of science and technology in the 19th century. Karl Marx radically rethought philosophy by grounding it in material conditions, leading to dialectical materialism and critiquing capitalism and ideology. In the 20th century, thinkers like A.J. Ayer and Wittgenstein focused on language and the logical structure of propositions, dismissing metaphysical speculation as meaningless unless scientifically verifiable. Contemporary Western philosophy now emphasizes logic, science, and language, moving away from metaphysical concerns. Today, philosophy is a disciplined method of inquiry, prioritizing clarity, empirical grounding, and practical relevance.

### 1.3.1 Historical Background

The historical background of contemporary Western philosophy dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period marked by rapid social, political, and scientific change. Industrialisation, the rise of modern science, democratic ideals, and major events like the World Wars deeply influenced philosophical thought. Earlier, modern philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, Kant, and Hegel focused on reason, knowledge, and metaphysics. But as the world evolved, so did philosophical concerns and methods. In the early 20th century, two major traditions emerged:

(i) Analytic Philosophy: Developed in English-speaking countries, analytic philosophy emphasizes logical clarity, language analysis, and close ties with science and mathematics. Key figures include Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and W.V.O. Quine.

(ii) Continental Philosophy: Rooted in mainland Europe, it focused on human existence, history, and culture. Influenced by Hegel and Nietzsche, this tradition includes phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, and critical theory. Thinkers like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Paul-Michel Foucault played central roles. Though differing in style and method, both traditions significantly shaped contemporary thought. Later in the 20th century, new philosophical perspectives emerged, feminist philosophy, critical race theory, postcolonial thought, and environmental ethics-challenging traditional views and amplifying marginalized voices.

Thus, it can be said that contemporary Western philosophy's historical roots reflect a shift from classical and modern frameworks to more diverse, inclusive, and socially engaged approaches. It continues to evolve by addressing real-world problems and embracing interdisciplinary insights.

### 1.3.2 Key Characteristics

Contemporary Western philosophy has several important features that make it different from earlier periods of philosophy. These key characteristics reflect the way philosophy has developed and adapted to the changing world in the 20th and 21st centuries. Let's discuss the characteristics:

(i) One of the major changes in contemporary philosophy is the focus on the role of language in understanding the world. Many philosophers began to believe that solving philosophical problems required clear thinking and precise language. This led to detailed studies of logic and how words and sentences are used in everyday and scientific communication.

(ii) Contemporary philosophy is often divided into two broad traditions: Analytic philosophy, which is found mostly in English-speaking countries, values clarity, logical reasoning, and the study of science and language. Continental philosophy, which developed mainly in Europe, focuses on history, culture, human experience, and social structures. It includes movements like existentialism, phenomenology, and post-structuralism.

(iii) Contemporary philosophers are deeply interested in understanding human life, identity, freedom, emotions, and social relationships. They explore how culture, politics, gender, and race shape human experience.

(iv) Today's philosophers often work with ideas from other fields like psychology, sociology, linguistics, neuroscience, literature, and even artificial intelligence. This mixing of ideas helps philosophers ask new questions and offer useful insights for real-world problems.

(v) Many contemporary thinkers focus on ethical issues such as human rights, social justice, equality, environmental responsibility, and technology. They try to understand how people can live better lives and build fairer societies.

(vi) In contrast to earlier philosophy, which was often dominated by European male thinkers, contemporary philosophy includes voices from different genders, cultures, and regions. Feminist philosophy, postcolonial thought, and critical race theory have all enriched the field with new ideas and experiences.

(vii) Contemporary philosophy encourages questioning, critical thinking, and reflection. Philosophers are not afraid to challenge traditions, examine beliefs, and ask difficult questions about truth, meaning, and existence.

Having broadly examined contemporary Western philosophy, we shall now turn our attention to the major trends that define its current trajectory.

## 1.4 DIFFERENT TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

Contemporary Western philosophy encompasses a variety of perspectives and methods, reflecting diverse questions about language, society, identity, science, ethics, and human experience. Over the 20th and 21st centuries, new philosophical movements emerged, including analytic philosophy, continental philosophy, existentialism, phenomenology, pragmatism, feminist theory, and postcolonial thought. Each movement offers a unique approach to asking and answering questions, whether through logic and language, personal experience, cultural context, or social structures. These trends demonstrate the dynamic and diverse nature of contemporary philosophy, providing multiple ways to critically engage with the modern world. Let's explore them one by one:

### 1.4.1 Analytic Philosophy

Analytic philosophy is a major tradition in contemporary Western, especially English-speaking, philosophy, known for its emphasis on clarity, logical rigor, and linguistic precision. It often uses tools such as formal logic, mathematics, and scientific insights

to tackle philosophical problems. A pivotal development was the "linguistic turn," shifting focus to language and meaning, which led to fields like the philosophy of language, science, and mathematics, along with advancements in modern logic. The movement arose in early 20th-century Britain, where thinkers like Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, George Edward Moore, and Ludwig Wittgenstein challenged British Idealism. Russell promoted symbolic logic to clarify the structure of thought, helping to launch this new approach. Later figures such as Rudolf Carnap, Willard Van Orman Quine, Karl Popper, Saul Kripke, and David Lewis further expanded its scope, including a renewed focus on metaphysics. Analytic philosophy evolved through distinct phases: early realism, logical atomism, logical positivism, ordinary language philosophy, and a later pluralistic phase exploring ethics, epistemology, and metaphysics. While often contrasted with continental philosophy, many now view the divide as largely cultural. Analytic philosophy remains rooted in its commitment to argumentative precision and rejection of abstract metaphysical systems like idealism and existentialism.

### 1.4.2 Continental Philosophy

Continental philosophy refers to diverse movements that arose in 19th- and 20th-century Europe, especially in France and Germany. These include German Idealism, Phenomenology, Existentialism, Hermeneutics, Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, French Feminism, and Critical Theory. While varied, they share a scepticism toward the view that science alone can fully explain reality. In contrast to analytic philosophy's focus on logic and scientific method, continental thought emphasizes the roles of history, language, culture, and power in shaping understanding. Influenced by Kant, many continental philosophers argue that knowledge is structured by conditions beyond empirical observation. They highlight the importance of the "lifeworld"-the pre-theoretical background shaped by context. Rather than imitating science, philosophy must explore these underlying conditions. Originally used pejoratively by

English-speaking philosophers, "continental philosophy" now denotes styles and methods distinct from analytic traditions. It is often meta-philosophical, questioning philosophy's aims and foundations. Some traditions seek universal knowledge; others critique culture and power. Figures like Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Foucault see philosophy as transformative, tied to lived experience and historical change.

### 1.4.3 German Idealism (18th-19th centuries)

Immanuel Kant's ideas started a new movement in philosophy called German Idealism. The main thinkers in this group are Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. They all explored what it means for something to be real, especially in connection with human consciousness. Before Kant, philosophers tried to make their ideas match the real world. But Kant suggested something new-he said that the real world actually takes shape based on how our minds understand it. He also said that we cannot truly know "things in themselves"-that is, things as they exist independently of our experience. Still, he believed they exist. Later philosophers like Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel found this confusing. They thought if we can't know something beyond experience, we should stop talking about it. They believed that something is real only if it can be experienced or understood by our consciousness. German Idealism, led by thinkers like Kant and Hegel, deeply influenced later philosophy by emphasizing subjectivity, freedom, and historical development. It shaped movements like existentialism, Marxism, phenomenology, and critical theory, and even impacted analytic and postmodern thought-whether through adoption, adaptation, or critique.

### 1.4.4 Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that explores how individuals can live meaningful lives in a world marked by uncertainty,

confusion, and the absence of inherent purpose. It asks deep questions such as, what gives life meaning? Why are we here? Central themes include freedom, choice, authenticity, anxiety, and the human struggle for meaning. Originating in 19th- and 20th-century Europe, existentialism was shaped by Søren Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Dostoyevsky, who challenged traditional values and emphasised personal truth. Later thinkers like Sartre, Heidegger, Simone de Beauvoir, Karl Jaspers, Albert Camus, Marcel, and Tillich built on these ideas, prioritizing lived experience over abstract theorizing. A key concept is authenticity-being true to oneself. Existentialists argue that individuals are free and responsible for their choices, and meaning must be created, not discovered. Heidegger's idea of Dasein illustrates how existence is always situated within a world of relationships, language, and time. Existentialism opposes deterministic systems and idealism, insisting that life cannot be reduced to science or divine plans. While some existentialists were religious and others atheistic, all emphasised human freedom, emotional depth, and the personal creation of meaning in an often-absurd world.

### 1.4.5 Phenomenology

Phenomenology, founded by Edmund Husserl in the early 1900s, is a philosophical method that explores how we experience the world from a first-person point of view. Rather than assuming truths about an external reality, it focuses on how things appear in our thoughts, perceptions, and emotions, aiming to describe lived experience and uncover the structures of consciousness and meaning. Husserl developed this approach in response to psychologism and physicalism, arguing that understanding experience requires setting aside assumptions and attending to how the world reveals itself in awareness. His method involves suspending judgment, examining how consciousness structures experience, imagining variations to uncover essential features, and comparing experiences to find shared meaning. Phenomenology is

distinct from both introspection and phenomenalism, as it avoids reducing experience to inner mental states or sense data. It emphasizes that consciousness is always directed toward something. Later thinkers such as Martin Heidegger emphasised how our experience is shaped by culture, language, and historical context, while Maurice Merleau-Ponty highlighted the role of the body. Though it has developed in different directions, phenomenology remains grounded in the view that experience is always situated in a world we share.

### 1.4.6 Postmodernism

Postmodern philosophy emerged in the late 20th century as a reaction against modernist ideas rooted in Enlightenment thinking, such as reason, progress, universal truth, and objectivity. Postmodern thinkers challenged these assumptions, arguing that claims to truth and knowledge are shaped by history, culture, and power dynamics rather than being absolute or universally valid. Key figures like Jean-François Lyotard criticized grand narratives-sweeping explanations that claim to offer a complete truth about the world-viewing them as tools that obscure individual perspectives and reinforce authority. Instead, postmodernism emphasizes concepts like difference, trace, repetition, and hyperrea lity to show how meaning is fluid, incomplete, and shaped by context. Rather than accepting binary divisions like good and bad or true and false, postmodernism sees reality as complex and layered. It rejects fixed meanings and encourages critical reflection on how language, power, and culture influence what we call truth. Ultimately, postmodern philosophy invites openness, diversity, and ongoing dialogue, urging us to stay sceptical of final answers and sensitive to multiple viewpoints.

### 1.4.7 Pragmatism and Neo-Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophical approach that judges' ideas based on their practical value. If a belief leads to useful outcomes or

helps solve real problems, it is considered true and meaningful. If not, it can be dismissed. Originating in the U.S. in the late 1800s, pragmatism was first shaped by Charles Sanders Peirce, who introduced the idea, and William James, who popularized it in 1898. John Dewey later expanded pragmatism into education and democracy, emphasizing that learning should be grounded in experience. Though its influence declined in the mid-20th century, pragmatism saw a revival through thinkers like Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam, Susan Haack, Jürgen Habermas, and Cornel West. They applied pragmatist ideas to modern debates in language, ethics, politics, and science.

Neo pragmatism, a modern version of pragmatism led by Richard Rorty, shifts focus from experience to language. It denies absolute truths and fixed meanings, seeing knowledge as shaped by how language is used. It views the self as a network of beliefs, not a fixed core. Neo pragmatists argue that the human sciences differ from the natural sciences and stress the role of language, context, and culture in shaping meaning.

### 1.4.8 Critical Theory

Critical theory is a philosophical approach to analysing society, focusing on how power operates within social, historical, and political contexts. It seeks not only to understand these power dynamics but to challenge and change them. Central to critical theory is the idea that knowledge, truth, and social systems are shaped by those in power, often serving the interests of dominant groups. Emerging in the 1920s with the Frankfurt School, thinkers like Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse expanded Marxist thought by incorporating culture, psychology, and philosophy. They critiqued capitalism and argued that oppression stems not only from economic systems but also from cultural and ideological structures. Influenced by Freud, they emphasised how personal experiences

shape social understanding. Later, Jürgen Habermas highlighted the role of communication in achieving freedom, while Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida challenged notions of objective truth, showing how institutions control knowledge and meaning. Critical theory combines theory with action-praxis-and examines how daily life, education, and collective movements support or resist power structures. Today, it informs diverse fields such as law, politics, economics, psychology, and studies on race, gender, and environmental justice. Critics argue that critical theory leans heavily on Marxist roots, overemphasizes subjectivity, and lacks empirical grounding. However, its strength lies in exposing hidden power relations and inspiring efforts toward a more just and equitable society.

In the upcoming unit, we will study the ways in which Contemporary Western Philosophy breaks away from earlier Modern traditions.

## 9.5 DISTINGUISHING CONTEMPORARY WESTERN PHILOSOPHY FROM MODERN TRADITIONS

Western philosophy evolved significantly from the modern to the contemporary period, reflecting changing views on reality, knowledge, truth, and society. Modern philosophy (17th-19th century) focused on reason, individual freedom, and universal truths. Thinkers like Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant explored the foundations of knowledge and human understanding. Descartes used methodological doubt, asserting the certainty of the thinking self ("I think, therefore I am"). Locke viewed the mind as a blank slate shaped by sensory experience. Hume, sceptical of certainty, argued that knowledge is based on habit, not logical proof. Kant combined rationalism and empiricism, claiming that while we can't know things-in-themselves, the mind shapes experience through innate structures. Modern philosophy emphasised critical inquiry over tradition, aiming to achieve objective knowledge through reason and observation. It laid the foundation for the scientific method and modern thought.

On the other hand, contemporary philosophy, emerging in the 20th century, challenges traditional views of knowledge, truth, and the self. Thinkers like Sartre, Foucault, Wittgenstein, and Rorty emphasised the role of language, culture, and power in shaping understanding. Sartre argued that "existence precedes essence," meaning humans create meaning through actions. Foucault claimed that truth is shaped by social and political forces, not objective reality, and that power is embedded in social practices. Wittgenstein suggested that meaning is derived from social use of language and philosophical problems arise from misunderstandings of language. Rorty rejected the search for universal truths, emphasizing practical problem-solving over uncovering objective truths. Contemporary philosophers argue that knowledge is shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts, rejecting the modernist pursuit of universal truths. They also challenge the idea of an independent, rational self, seeing it as shaped by relationships, language, and social forces.

### 9.5.1 Key Differences between Modern and Contemporary Philosophy

(i) Modern philosophy sought universal truths discoverable through reason and observation, applying to everyone. In contrast, contemporary philosophy is sceptical of universal truths, arguing that knowledge is shaped by social, historical, and cultural contexts, making "truth" variable.

(ii) Modern philosophers understood the world using reason, logic, and empirical evidence. While valuing these tools, contemporary philosophers emphasize the role of language, power, and social context in shaping knowledge, arguing that understanding is not purely objective.

(iii) Modern philosophy viewed the self as a rational, independent agent capable of objective thought. Contemporary philosophers, particularly existentialists and poststructuralists, argue that the self is shaped by relationships, language, and social structures; is more fluid; and is influenced by external forces.

(iv) Modern philosophy focused on universal questions of truth, reality, and knowledge, while contemporary philosophy emphasizes how social and political contexts shape these concepts. Thinkers like Foucault and Rorty highlight the role of power, culture, and language in determining what is true and meaningful.

## 9.6 CONCLUSION

Contemporary Western philosophy is a diverse field that reflects the complexities of the modern world, moving beyond classical and modern philosophical frameworks. It includes various approaches to understanding reality, knowledge, language, power, and the human experience. This philosophy is deeply connected to real-world concerns such as freedom, justice, identity, and power. It does not follow a single method but addresses changes in society, science, politics, and culture. Key trends include analytic philosophy, focused on logic and language analysis, especially in English-speaking countries. Continental philosophy, common in Europe, examines historical, cultural, and existential questions, exploring human experience and social forces. Existentialism addresses individual freedom, meaning, and responsibility in an uncertain world. Phenomenology studies how things appear in our consciousness and perception. Postmodernism challenges universal truth, identity, and objective knowledge, emphasizing the role of power and social context. Pragmatism and neo-pragmatism value practical outcomes over abstract theory, judging ideas by their practical effectiveness. Compared to classical philosophy, which focused on metaphysical questions, and modern philosophy, which emphasised reason and scientific thinking, contemporary philosophy questions the possibility of certainty. It highlights the limits of knowledge, the importance of interpretation, and the need for dialogue, diversity, and inclusion. Today, it engages with disciplines like science, psychology, sociology, and politics, actively participating in social justice, feminism, environmental ethics, and postcolonial thought. In conclusion, contemporary philosophy is not a single way of thinking but a dynamic collection of ideas that encourages critical thinking and reflection on our place in the world.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** What is meant by contemporary Western philosophy?

.....

**Q 2:** How is contemporary Western philosophy different from modern philosophy?

.....

**Q 3:** What are the two main traditions of contemporary Western philosophy?

.....

**Q 4:** What are the main concerns of analytic philosophy?

.....

**Q 5:** Mention any two important movements under Continental Philosophy.

.....

**Q 6:** What is existentialism concerned with?

.....

**Q 7:** What does phenomenology focus on?

.....

**Q 8:** Who are some of the key philosophers of the contemporary period?

.....

**Q 9:** How does postmodernism challenge Enlightenment ideals?

.....

**Q 10:** Name some of the social and ethical concerns addressed by contemporary philosophy.

.....

**Q 11:** How has the concept of the self-changed from modern to contemporary philosophy?

.....

**Q 12:** How does contemporary philosophy engage with other disciplines?

.....

**Q 13:** What influence did German Idealism have on later philosophical movements?

.....

**Q 14:** In what way is contemporary philosophy more practical?

.....

**Q 15:** What is the difference between the analytic and continental approaches to philosophy?

.....



## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

- Contemporary Western Philosophy refers to philosophical thought developed mainly during the 20th and 21st centuries, reflecting new concerns, methods, and perspectives.
- It differs from classical and modern philosophy by focusing more on real-life problems, human experiences, and contextual knowledge rather than abstract metaphysics or universal truths.
- Historical events such as the World Wars, industrialization, technological progress, and social movements significantly influenced the direction of contemporary philosophy.
- Contemporary philosophy moves away from the pursuit of absolute or ultimate truths and emphasizes linguistic clarity, critical analysis, and practical relevance.
- It consists of two major traditions: analytic philosophy and continental philosophy.
- Analytic philosophy is dominant in English-speaking countries and emphasizes logic, scientific alignment, language analysis, and philosophical clarity.
- Continental philosophy, popular in Europe, addresses issues of history, culture, human existence, and power structures.
- Important movements under Continental Philosophy include existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism, and post-structuralism.

- Existentialism explores human freedom, personal responsibility, authenticity, and the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world.
- Edmund Husserl initiated phenomenology, which studies the structures of consciousness and first-person experience without assuming the existence of objective reality.
- Postmodernism critiques Enlightenment ideals like objective truth and rationality, instead highlighting power relations, language, plurality, and social constructs.
- German Idealism, beginning with Kant and developed by Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, proposed that reality is shaped by consciousness and rational structures.
- Key philosophers of the contemporary period include Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Simone de Beauvoir, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Richard Rorty.
- Modern Western philosophy (17th-19th centuries) emphasised reason, individual autonomy, and universal truths, as seen in Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant.
- Contemporary philosophy marks a shift by being sceptical of universality and objectivity and by emphasizing language, culture, power, and social context.
- Analytic philosophy originated as a reaction against British idealism and progressed through logical positivism, ordinary language philosophy, and later pluralistic trends.
- Continental philosophy critiques scientific objectivity and focuses on interpretation, cultural history, lived experience, and social critique.
- Major differences between modern and contemporary philosophy include: (a) Modern philosophy pursued universal truth, whereas contemporary philosophy sees truth as contextual and constructed. (b) Modern thinkers relied on reason and empirical observation, while contemporary ones stress the role of language, power, and sociocultural dynamics.
- Contemporary philosophy is more practical and critical, aiming to understand and improve society through diverse perspectives and real-world engagement.



## 1.8 FURTHER READINGS


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## 1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** Contemporary Western philosophy refers to philosophical thought developed mainly during the 20th and 21st centuries. It focuses on real-life issues and human experience, moving away from abstract metaphysics and seeking practical applications in social, political, and ethical domains.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** Contemporary Western philosophy differs from modern philosophy by emphasizing contextual and social factors in knowledge and truth, rather than focusing on universal principles. It also critiques modernism's reliance on reason and empirical observation, instead examining language, power, and culture in shaping knowledge.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** The two main traditions are analytic philosophy, which emphasizes logic, language, and clarity, and continental philoso-

phy, which is concerned with history, culture, and human existence.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** Analytic philosophy focuses on the analysis of language, logical clarity, and precision. It often engages with philosophical problems through scientific and empirical approaches, aiming to resolve complex issues through logical reasoning and linguistic analysis.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** Two important movements under Continental Philosophy are existentialism, which focuses on human freedom and responsibility, and phenomenology, which examines the structures of consciousness and subjective experiences.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** Existentialism is concerned with human freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent or absurd world. It emphasizes individual experience, authenticity, and confronting existential challenges like anxiety and despair.

**Ans to Q. No. 7:** Phenomenology focuses on the study of consciousness and the way experiences appear to individuals. It investigates how subjective experiences are structured and understood, often through a first-person perspective.

**Ans to Q. No. 8:** Key philosophers of the contemporary period include Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Simone de Beauvoir, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Richard Rorty.

**Ans to Q. No. 9:** Postmodernism challenges Enlightenment ideals by rejecting the belief in objective truth, universal progress, and rationality. It emphasizes the role of language, culture, and power in shaping knowledge and truth, often deconstructing grand narratives and focusing on pluralism and diversity.

**Ans to Q. No. 10:** Contemporary philosophy addresses a range of social and ethical concerns such as gender equality, racial justice, identity, power dynamics, environmental ethics, and the ethical implications of technology.

**Ans to Q. No. 11:** In modern philosophy, the self was often seen as a rational, autonomous individual. In contemporary philosophy, however, the self is viewed as a socially and linguistically constructed identity, influenced by culture, power structures, and social contexts.

**Ans to Q. No. 12:** Contemporary philosophy engages with other disciplines such as psychology, neuroscience, literature, sociology, and political theory, integrating insights from these fields to address complex issues related to human nature, society, and culture.

**Ans to Q. No. 13:** German Idealism, particularly through philosophers like Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, influenced movements such as phenomenology and existentialism. It emphasised that reality is shaped by human consciousness and rational structures, profoundly impacting the way later philosophers understood experience and meaning.

**Ans to Q. No. 14:** Contemporary philosophy is more practical in that it critiques traditional theories and offers insights into real-world issues. It addresses pressing social, ethical, and political challenges, aiming to improve society and enhance human well-being.

**Ans to Q. No. 15:** The analytic approach focuses on logical analysis, clarity, and language, often grounded in scientific methods. The continental approach, on the other hand, emphasizes history, culture, and human existence and is more concerned with sociocultural context, interpretation, and power dynamics.



## 1.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short Questions:**

**Q. 1.** What is Contemporary Western Philosophy?

**Q. 2.** Name the two main traditions of contemporary Western philosophy.

**Q. 3.** What does analytic philosophy emphasize?

**Q. 4.** Define existentialism.

**Q. 5.** Who are some of the key philosophers of the contemporary period?

**Q. 6.** What is phenomenology focused on?

**Q. 7.** Mention any two movements under Continental Philosophy.

**Q. 8.** How does postmodernism challenge Enlightenment ideals?

**Q. 9.** What social and ethical concerns does contemporary philosophy

address?

**B. Short Questions: (Answer in about 150 words)**

**Q. 1.** What is the difference between modern and contemporary philosophy?

**Q. 2.** How does analytic philosophy differ from continental philosophy?

**Q. 3.** What are the main concerns of existentialism in contemporary philosophy?

**Q. 4.** What influence did German Idealism have on later philosophical movements?

**C. Write Short Notes On: (Answer in about 150 words)**

**Q. 1.** Analytic Philosophy

**Q. 2.** Continental Philosophy

**Q. 3.** Existentialism

**Q. 4.** Phenomenology

**Q. 5.** Postmodernism

**D. Long Questions: (Answer in about 300 words)**

**Q. 1.** Discuss the key characteristics and main trends in contemporary Western philosophy.

**Q. 2.** Explain the differences between analytic philosophy and continental philosophy, highlighting their key features and contributions.

**Q. 3.** Define the concept of contemporary Western philosophy and distinguish it from modern philosophical traditions.

**Q. 4.** How does existentialism address human freedom and responsibility? Discuss its major themes and contributors.

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# UNIT 2: HUSSERL'S PRESUPPOSITIONLESS PHILOSOPHY

## UNIT STRUCTURE


2.1 Learning Objectives
2.2 Introduction
2.3 Immanent Perception
2.4 Formal Ontology and Transcendental Ontology
2.5 Transcendental Idealism
2.6 Positive Science
2.7 Conclusion
2.8 Let Us Sum Up
2.9 Further Readings
2.10 Answer to Check Your Progress
2.11 Model Questions


## 2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Know the fundamental principles of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and its goal of establishing a presuppositionless philosophy.
- Explain the concepts of immanent perception and transcendent perception and their roles in phenomenological analysis.
- Know how to differentiate between formal ontology and transcendental ontology as discussed by Husserl.
- Analyse Husserl's theory of transcendental idealism and its distinction from Kant's transcendental idealism.
- Know to critically evaluate Husserl's critique of positive science and his emphasis on lived experience as the foundation of all knowledge.

## 2.2 INTRODUCTION

Edmund Husserl was the founder of phenomenological movement in the early years of 20th century. The word 'phenomenology' was derived

from Greek word 'phainomenon' means - 'that which appears' and 'logos' means 'study'. Thus, phenomenology can be described as the philosophical study of the ways things appear or present themselves in and through our experiences. The primary objective of phenomenology is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced without all the previous theories, conceptions, beliefs and suppositions. By nature, Phenomenology is descriptive. It is concerned with the description of pure phenomena with experience. It is also a rigorous science as it goes to the root of the phenomena. It talks about the essence of things which can be known through experience. So, phenomenology is an investigation of the most basic, primitive and original understanding of our consciousness. Thus, phenomenology is a pre-supposition less philosophy in the sense that, it never considers any pre-suppositions or beliefs while starting the process of investigation. Husserl was impressed by radical empiricism of William James. In radical empiricism there is no room for pre-suppositions. Husserl also wanted to make his phenomenology a pre-supposition less philosophy. Husserl moved away from the external world of object towards the analysis of how objects appear to subjects and the subject's contribution to this appearance. In his phenomenology we never find a 'subject-object distinction', rather, it discusses the 'subject-object' relation. He claimed that philosophy should be free from all the assumptions and must begin with what is given in experience.

## 2.3 IMMANENT PERCEPTION

It can be said that 'immanent perception' is the basis of Husserl's phenomenology. To establish a phenomenology as presuppositionless philosophy one must adopt 'immanent perception'. Immanent perception refers to direct perception of objects as it appears within consciousness without considering the previous assumptions. He claimed that immanent perception is absolute as it does not depend on anything external to consciousness. On the other hand, transcendent perception is not absolute or certain, as it is the perception or our awareness of objects external to our consciousness. Immanent perception provides the basis of

phenomenology as analysis of pure consciousness is the starting point of phenomenology. In our day-to-day life we never pay attention to the fact that how things of the world appear to our consciousness, rather we are concerned with the given world and the things. Through such a perception, it is not possible to have a real understanding of the phenomena. Husserl explained that in immanent perception, "perception and perceived essentially constitute an unmediated unity, that of a single concrete cogitation."1 Thus immanent perception refers to conscious experience of something as a part of one's own reality. It is the direct, internal awareness of mental states as opposed to the perception of external objects. It refers to the first-person access to one's own mental events- perception, evaluation, recollection etc.

## 2.4 FORMAL ONTOLOGY AND TRANSCENDENTAL ONTOLOGY

Husserl introduced the term 'formal Ontology' in his Logical Investigation. Formal ontology is concerned with formal categories. This refers to the part, whole, relation, property, states of affair, oneness, identity etc. The domain of formal ontology is universal. In his Logical Investigation, Husserl draws a distinction between formal logic and formal ontology. He claimed that formal logic deals with interconnections of truths-with inference relations, consistency, proof and validity. On the other hand, formal ontology deals with the interconnections of things, objects and properties, parts and wholes, relations and collectives. As formal logic deals with properties of inferences which are formal in the sense that they apply to inferences in virtue of their form alone, in the same way formal ontology deals with properties of objects which are formal in the sense that they can be exemplified, in principle, by objects in all material spheres or domains of reality. Thus, formal ontology deals with the essential structures that apply to all entities, regardless of their specific nature. It doesn't depend on empirical intuition, rather it describes the necessary structures that any object must conform to. On the other hand, transcendental ontology is a first-person transcendental analysis of experience. It focuses on how objects and meanings are constituted in transcendental consciousness. It differs

from traditional ontology, as it does not only describe what exists but investigates how being is given to consciousness. It investigates conditions that make any reality meaningful and intelligible. Husserl claimed that transcendental ontology is the basis of formal ontology. Formal ontology describes structures of being and transcendental ontology explains how these structures are constituted in consciousness. Formal and transcendental ontology both are closely related and they operate at different levels of analysis.

## 2.5 TRANSCENDENTAL IDEALISM

Husserl's transcendental idealism believes that, existence of real objects and the existence of the real world is unthinkable without reference to a consciousness which experiences them. The world appears to us only through consciousness. Husserl's phenomenology can be termed as transcendental idealism as it claimed that knowledge of the external world is rooted in the structures of our consciousness. As, it believes in the supremacy of consciousness it can be termed as a form of idealism. It differs from subjective idealism, which states that existence of external world is dependent simply on the subjective mind. Again, it differs from objective idealism which believes that existence of external world is dependent on objective mind or the mind of God. As stated by Moran and Cohen "The essence of transcendental idealism for Husserl was the a priori correlation between objectivity and subjectivity"2. According to him world is the correlate of consciousness.

Kant's philosophy has been also called as transcendental idealism. But there are differences between Kant and Husserl's transcendental idealism. Husserl's transcendental idealism can be termed as a theory of knowledge rather than a metaphysical theory. The objective of transcendental idealism is to establish philosophy as a rigorous science. He claimed that a philosophising mind must be free from any prejudice and must be free from presuppositions. He searched for a foundation of knowledge and finds that transcendental ego or consciousness is the basis from which all knowledges arise. In his Cartesian Meditation, Husserl stated that, what we produce purely subjectively in ourselves and our insightful thinking, on the

ground of actual and possible experience, serves us as the norm of our world-cognitions - as the norm of truth for the world itself, as it is and for itself, whether we live or die, whether we cognize it or not. This is the position of transcendental realism which cooperates with his notion of transcendental idealism which states that the world we know is always in accordance with the a priori structure of our mind or consciousness. The Known world is the only real world. Like Kant he did not admit that there are two worlds - phenomenal world and noumenal world. According to Kant, the phenomenal world is the world that we come to know through the medium of categories of understanding. On the other hand, Noumenal world is beyond our experience. But, according to Husserl, there is only one universe of being. This universe can be known from two perspectives. The first one is natural perspective; it studies the real objects as mind independent objects. Secondly, there is phenomenological perspective, it studies the same real objects only related to them as pure phenomena, as related exclusively to our consciousness So, he claimed objectivity without subjectivity is meaningless and vice versa. He stated: "Every imaginable sense, every imaginable being is anchored in consciousness"3. (Husserl 1960, 84).

## 2.6 POSITIVE SCIENCE

Criticising positive science which focuses on objective study of the world, Husserl emphasises the importance of subjective "lived experience" in constituting the understanding of this world. Positive science reduces the world to measurable, mathematical entities and ignores the subjective dimension of reality. He stated that there is a conceptual separation between the world understood by science in its idealized and mathematized form and the world that we experienced in our day to day lived experiences. In his later work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, criticising Positive science Husserl stated that, despite it successfully attempted to describe the world, it is not able to inculcate the lived experiences that is the foundation of all knowledge. Positive science ignores the qualitative and subjective aspects of experience. Rather, it focuses on an objectivist approach towards the world. Husserl claimed that, positive science adopts a

naturalistic attitude instead of a phenomenological attitude. Adopting natural attitude, it takes the world as something given and as such doesn't concern with the question of how the world appear in and through our lived experiences. He suggested that, the world as we directly experience it through our consciousness must be the basis of all scientific abstractions. He did not deny the validity of scientific knowledge, but he claimed that it is incomplete, as it does not take into account the subjective experiences. According to Husserl, phenomenology must be the foundational discipline, as all knowledge including scientific must constitute in experience.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

Husserl wanted to establish phenomenology as a presuppositionless philosophy, which can be the foundation of all knowledge. He claimed that all knowledge must begin with pure consciousness. As, here we have to put aside all the presuppositions we can access the pure phenomena - the true nature of an object. It focuses on the importance of consciousness and lived experiences. Phenomenology refers to the "back to the things themselves". With an emphasis on consciousness. It does not accept the assumptions of the world, rather it wants to understand the world. Here, his objective is to find out the pure-phenomena that could be the foundation of philosophy. In Ideas I, Husserl stated:

> ……that every originary presentative intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition, that everything originally (so to speak, in its 'personal' actuality) offered to us in intuition is to be accepted simply as what it is presented as being, but also only within the limits in which it is presented there.

This is the principle of all principle according to Husserl, which must be the universal principle of all methods. As a presuppositionless philosophy, Phenomenology is that philosophical approach which emphasizes the significance of direct observation and the description of conscious experience. It seeks to understand the concrete and immediate nature of experience.

To elaborate his idea of a presuppositionless philosophy he offered the concepts of intentionality and phenomenological reduction. Which we are going to analyse in the next units.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** Who is considered the founder of the phenomenological movement?

.....

**Q 2:** What is the literal meaning of the word 'phenomenology'?

.....

**Q 3:** What is the primary objective of phenomenology according to Husserl?

.....

**Q 4:** What is meant by 'immanent perception' in Husserl's philosophy?

.....

**Q 5:** How does 'transcendent perception' differ from 'immanent perception'?

.....

**Q 6:** What is 'formal ontology' according to Husserl?

.....

**Q 7:** What is 'transcendental ontology' in Husserl's phenomenology?

.....

**Q 8:** How does Husserl's transcendental idealism differ from Kant's?

.....

**Q 9:** What is Husserl's critique of positive science?

.....

**Q 10:** What is the fundamental principle stated by Husserl in Ideas I?

.....



## 2.9 LET US SUM UP

- Edmund Husserl was the founder of the phenomenological movement in the early 20th century.
- Phenomenology is the philosophical study of the ways things appear or present themselves in and through our experiences.

- The primary objective of phenomenology is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced without previous theories, conceptions, or beliefs.
- Phenomenology is descriptive in nature and concerned with the description of pure phenomena with experience.
- Husserl was influenced by William James's radical empiricism, which emphasizes experience without presuppositions.
- Husserl's phenomenology moves away from external objects towards the analysis of how objects appear to consciousness.
- Immanent perception is the basis of Husserl's phenomenology as it refers to direct perception within consciousness without external assumptions.
- Immanent perception is absolute because it does not depend on anything outside consciousness.
- Transcendent perception is not absolute as it deals with objects external to consciousness.
- Formal ontology deals with universal categories like part, whole, relation, property, and identity.
- Husserl distinguishes between formal logic, which concerns inference and validity, and formal ontology, which concerns structures of objects.
- Transcendental ontology is a first-person analysis of how objects and meanings are constituted in consciousness.
- Husserl claims transcendental ontology is the basis of formal ontology.
- Husserl's transcendental idealism asserts that the world exists only as experienced through consciousness.
- His transcendental idealism is a theory of knowledge, not a metaphysical claim about two worlds.
- Husserl rejects Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal world, claiming there is only one universe of being.
- Objectivity without subjectivity is meaningless and vice versa according to Husserl.
- Husserl criticizes positive science for ignoring the subjective, lived experiences that underlie all knowledge.

- Phenomenology emphasizes "back to the things themselves," focusing on direct consciousness of phenomena.
- Husserl introduces the principle that every originary presentative intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition.



## 2.10 FURTHER READINGS

1) Husserl Edmund, *Ideas II*, translated by Gibson, London-New-york,1931, section 38.
2) Moran and Cohen, *The Husserl Dictionary*, New York: Continuum, 2012, p 330
3) Husserl Edmund, *Cartesian Meditations: An introduction to Phenom-enology*. Transl. D. Carnis, The Hauge, Boston, London: Martinus Nijhoff.1960, p84.
4) Husserl Edmund, *Ideas I*, edited Karl Schuhmann,1913, section 24.



## 2.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** Edmund Husserl is considered the founder of the phe-nomenological movement.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** The word 'phenomenology' comes from the Greek words 'phainomenon' meaning that which appears and 'logos' meaning study, so it means the study of what appears.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** The primary objective of phenomenology is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experi-enced, without the influence of previous theories or beliefs.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** Immanent perception refers to the direct, internal aware-ness of objects as they appear within consciousness, independent of any assumptions or external references.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** Transcendent perception involves the awareness of ob-jects external to consciousness and is not considered absolute, unlike

immanent perception which is based purely on internal experience.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** Formal ontology deals with the universal and necessary structures of objects, such as part-whole relations, identity, properties, and states of affairs, independent of their specific nature.

**Ans to Q. No. 7:** Transcendental ontology is the first-person analysis of how objects and meanings are constituted in consciousness, focusing on the conditions that make experience meaningful.

**Ans to Q. No. 8:** Husserl's transcendental idealism is a theory of knowledge rather than metaphysics. Unlike Kant, Husserl does not believe in two separate worlds (phenomenal and noumenal); he claims there is only one universe of being known from different perspectives.

**Ans to Q. No. 9:** Husserl criticizes positive science for ignoring subjective, lived experiences and for reducing the world to mathematical and measurable entities, thus leaving out the fundamental basis of knowledge.

**Ans to Q. No. 10:** In Ideas I, Husserl states the principle that every originary presentative intuition is a legitimizing source of cognition. This means that anything directly given in intuition must be accepted as it presents itself, within its limits.



## 2.12 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short Questions:**

**Q. 1.** What does the term 'phenomenology' literally mean?

**Q. 2.** Who influenced Husserl's idea of presuppositionless philosophy?

**Q. 3.** What is the main focus of phenomenology?

**Q. 4.** What is the difference between formal ontology and formal logic?

**Q. 5.** Which work of Husserl criticizes positive science?

**(B) Short Questions (Answer within 150-200 words answers):**

**Q. 1.** Explain the concept of immanent perception in Husserl's phenomenology.

**Q. 2.** Discuss the difference between formal ontology and transcendental ontology in Husserl's philosophy.

**Q. 3.** What is Husserl's transcendental idealism? How is it different from Kant's idealism?

**Q. 4.** Why does Husserl criticize positive science? What does he propose instead?

**Q. 5.** What role does the principle of originary intuition play in Husserl's phenomenology?

**(C) Long Questions (Answer within 400 words answers):**

**Q. 1.** Discuss Husserl's objective of establishing phenomenology as a presuppositionless philosophy. How does he achieve this through his method?

**Q. 2.** Analyse the significance of immanent perception in Husserl's phenomenology and explain how it differs from transcendent perception.

**Q. 3.** Elaborate on Husserl's distinction between natural attitude and phenomenological attitude. Why is this distinction important for his philosophy?

**Q. 4.** Critically evaluate Husserl's critique of positive science in the context of his work The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology.

**Q. 5.** Explain the meaning of Husserl's statement, "Every imaginable sense, every imaginable being is anchored in consciousness." How does this reflect his transcendental idealism?

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# UNIT 3: PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION OF HUSSERL

## UNIT STRUCTURE


3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2. Introduction

3.3 Husserl's Phenomenological Reduction: Method, Purpose, And Philosophical Significance

3.4 The Epistemological Problem Phenomenological Reduction Aims to Solve

3.5 The Analysis That Disclosed the Need for the Reduction

3.6 The Structure, Nature, And Performance of the Phenomenological Reduction

3.7 How the Phenomenological Reduction Solves the Epistemological Problem

3.8 Criticisms and Challenges

3.9 Conclusion

3.10 Let Us Sum Up

3.11 Further Readings

3.12 Answer to Check Your Progress

3.13 Model Questions


## 3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Analyse the historical background and philosophical context that led to the development of Husserl's phenomenological reduction.
- Explain the concepts of epoché and bracketing as central components of Husserl's method.
- Describe the structure of intentionality, focusing on the relationship between noesis and noema.

- Know the significance of transcendental subjectivity in Husserl's phenomenology.
- Explain how phenomenological reduction addresses the epistemological problem of scepticism and provides a new foundation for knowledge.
- Analyse the criticisms and challenges faced by Husserl's phenomenological reduction, including the risks of solipsism and practical difficulties in performing the method.

## 3.2 INTRODUCTION

Phenomenology, pioneered by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), represents a transformative shift in modern philosophy. Central to Husserl's method is the phenomenological reduction, also known as epoché or bracketing. This technique addresses long-standing epistemological problems, particularly the issues of knowledge and certainty, by suspending assumptions about the existence of an external reality. Instead of focusing on whether the world exists independently, phenomenology examines consciousness and its intentional experiences that how things appear to us in direct experience.

Husserl argued that philosophy must begin not with speculative metaphysics but with a rigorous analysis of experience itself, free from presuppositions. Through phenomenological reduction, philosophers can isolate and study the structures of consciousness, clarifying how meaning and knowledge are constituted. This method provides a new foundation for philosophical inquiry, addressing scepticism and re-establishing certainty on the basis of pure experience rather than empirical evidence or logical deduction.

This unit explores the historical background of phenomenological reduction, the epistemological challenges it addresses, the analytical process that led Husserl to develop it, its methodological structure, and how it ultimately offers a solution to the philosophical problem of knowledge.

## 3.3 HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION : METHOD, PURPOSE AND PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

So far as the phenomenological reduction of Husserl is concerned, it is very important to discuss about its method, purpose and philosophical significance. Let us discuss all these important points in a detailed manner.

### 3.3.1 Development

The development of phenomenology by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) represents one of the most significant philosophical shifts of the 20th century. Husserl's phenomenology proposed a radical rethinking of how philosophy should approach the problems of knowledge, experience, and reality. At the heart of Husserl's philosophical system lies a unique and revolutionary method called the phenomenological reduction, also referred to as epoché or bracketing.

The phenomenological reduction is designed to address some of philosophy's deepest and most persistent problems-particularly the epistemological issues concerning knowledge, certainty, and the nature of reality. Instead of asking, "Does the external world exist?" or "How do we know objects are real?", Husserl shifted the focus to the structures of consciousness and how phenomena are given to us in experience.

This process involves suspending or "bracketing" the natural belief in the external world, setting aside metaphysical assumptions, and focusing solely on the pure experience of consciousness. Through this, Husserl sought to provide philosophy with a rigorous, presuppositionless foundation, moving beyond scepticism and relativism.

This unit will examine:

- The historical background of phenomenological reduction.
- The epistemological problems it addresses.

- The analysis and discovery that led to its development.
- The structure and method of the reduction.
- How it solves philosophical problems of knowledge.
- Its challenges and criticisms.

### 3.3.2 Historical Background of Phenomenological Reduction

1. **Philosophical Context:** The late 19th and early 20th centuries were dominated by several philosophical trends: empiricism, positivism, psychologism, and neo-Kantianism. Each of these schools contributed to philosophical development but also left unresolved issues related to the foundation of knowledge.
2. **Psychologism:** Psychologism was particularly dominant in Husserl's early philosophical environment. Thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and others treated logic and epistemology as branches of psychology. For them, the laws of logic were considered descriptions of how humans actually think.

However, Husserl strongly rejected this approach. He argued that truth and logical validity cannot be reduced to psychological states, which are subjective, contingent, and prone to variation. If logic were based on psychology, then truth would become relative to the mind's operations, leading to the relativization of knowledge and truth.

Empiricism and Positivism

Empiricism and positivism reduced knowledge to sense data and observation. Thinkers like David Hume and the logical positivists focused on the idea that knowledge must originate in sensory experience.

Husserl criticised this view for neglecting the role of consciousness in structuring experience. The empirical sciences study objects and facts but ignore the processes of perception, meaning-giving, and intentionality that make knowledge possible in the first place.

3. **Neo-Kantianism:** Immanuel Kant had revolutionized philosophy by arguing that the mind contributes to the organisation of experience through categories and forms of intuition. However, Husserl believed that Kant did not go far enough. While Kant introduced the notion of transcendental philosophy, he failed to examine the lived experience of consciousness itself in a direct and descriptive manner. Husserl sought to complete Kant's project by exploring consciousness as the starting point for all philosophical reflection.

### 3.3.3 Husserl's Intellectual Evolution

Husserl's path to phenomenology was not immediate. He began his academic career as a mathematician, particularly interested in the foundations of mathematics.

- In his early work, Philosophy of Arithmetic (1891), Husserl attempted to analyse the concept of number using psychological methods.
- However, he soon recognized the limitations of this approach. Reducing mathematical concepts to psychological processes leads to relativism and subjectivism.
- His major breakthrough came with the Logical Investigations (1900-1901). In this work, Husserl argued for the existence of objective meanings and introduced the concept of intentionality, which became the cornerstone of phenomenology.

## 3.4 THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEM PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION AIMS TO SOLVE

Now let us discuss about the epistemological problem those are trying to solved by phenomenological reduction.

### 3.4.1 The Crisis of Knowledge

Husserl observed that modern philosophy faced a crisis of knowledge. The fundamental question was: How can we justify knowledge if it is always mediated by subjective experience?

Several key issues lay at the heart of this crisis:

1. **The Cartesian Problem of Scepticism**

   Following Descartes, philosophers questioned how we could be certain that the external world exists. How do we know that our perceptions are not illusions or dreams? This problem led to scepticism about the reliability of the senses and the possibility of objective knowledge.

2. **Subjectivity vs Objectivity**

   If all knowledge is filtered through consciousness, how can we ensure that it reflects reality as it is? Can subjective experience ever provide a basis for objective knowledge?

Foundation of Science

Husserl worried about the "crisis of the European sciences". In his later work, he argued that modern sciences had become detached from their experiential roots, leading to alienation from the lifeworld (Lebenswelt)-the world of everyday lived experience.

### 3.4.2 Husserl's Solution

Instead of trying to prove the existence of the external world or assuming it outright, Husserl proposed focusing on how things appear to consciousness. By studying conscious experience itself, we can find a secure and indubitable foundation for knowledge.

This led Husserl to develop the phenomenological reduction-a method to suspend belief in the world's independent existence and focus exclusively on the appearance of things in consciousness.

## 3.5 THE ANALYSIS THAT DISCLOSED THE NEED FOR THE REDUCTION

So far as the need for the reduction is concerned, there is need to analysis of the content that try to disclose it. Now in the following sub sections, let us try to discuss and analyse the different points regarding it.

### 3.5.1 Intentionality: The Starting Point

One of Husserl's most significant contributions was the revival of the concept of intentionality-the idea that consciousness is always about something. Every mental act has:

- A noesis: The act of consciousness (perceiving, imagining, judging, etc.)
- A noema: The content or object as it is given or presented in consciousness.

This dual structure of experience requires careful analysis because the way something appears is as important as what appears.

### 3.5.2 The Natural Attitude

Most people operate in what Husserl called the natural attitude. In this mode of life:

- We assume that objects exist independently of us.
- We trust in the reality of the world without questioning it.
- We believe that our perceptions correspond directly to reality.

While this attitude is necessary for daily life, it is philosophically naïve because it leaves unexamined the processes through which the world is experienced and constituted.

### 3.5.3 The Need for Suspension (Epoché)

To investigate consciousness rigorously, Husserl introduced the epoché, or suspension of belief in the natural world. This does

not mean denying the world's existence but rather bracketing the question of whether it exists. The focus shifts from the existence of objects to how they are given in experience.

## 3.6 THE STRUCTURE, NATURE AND PERFORMANCE OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

Now let us try to discuss the structure, nature and performance of the phenomenological reduction. It is discussed as follows:

### 3.6.1 What is Phenomenological Reduction?

The phenomenological reduction is a methodical shift from concern with the external world to an analysis of pure experience. It allows philosophers to investigate consciousness without the distortions of metaphysical assumptions.

Two Components of the Reduction

1. **Epoché (Suspension):**

- A methodological suspension of belief in the world's independent existence.
- We "bracket" the ontological question, focusing instead on how things appear to us.

2. **Reduction Proper:**

- This involves shifting attention from the object in the world to the experiencing subject and the structures of consciousness.
- The analysis turns from noema (the object as intended) to noesis (the intentional act).

### 3.6.2 The Steps of Phenomenological Reduction

**Step 1: Perform the Epoché**

- Set aside natural assumptions about reality.
- Refrain from making judgments about existence.

- This is similar to Descartes' methodic doubt but differs because it is methodological, not sceptical.

**Step 2: Reflect on Consciousness**

- Analyse how objects are constituted in consciousness.
- Examine the correlational structure between subject and object.

**Step 3: Identify Essences (Eidetic Reduction)**

- Move from specific experiences to universal structures of experience.
- Use eidetic intuition to grasp the essential features of phenomena-those that cannot be otherwise.

**Step 4: Enter the Transcendental Perspective**

- Recognize that consciousness is transcendental, meaning it constitutes the world of experience.
- Focus on the conditions that make experience possible.

## 3.6.3 What is Transcendental Subjectivity?

The final result of the phenomenological reduction is the discovery of transcendental subjectivity-the pure ego or consciousness itself, prior to all empirical observation. This pure subjectivity is the source of all meaning and sense-giving, not the psychological self but the experiencing subject at the foundational level.

## 3.6.4 Key Characteristics of the Reduction

| Aspect | Description |
|---|---|
| Purpose | To clarify how objects are given to consciousness. |
| Method | Bracketing (epoché) and reflection on experience. |
| Focus | Not on objects themselves, but on the way they are experienced. |
| End Result | Access to essential structures of consciousness. |

Philosophical Goal Provide a rigorous, presuppositionless foundation for philosophy.

## 3.7 HOW THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION SOLVES THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEM

So far as the phenomenological reduction of Husserl is concerned, it is very important to discuss how it solves various epistemological issues and problems. Now let us try to discuss it in a proper way. It is mentioned as follows.

### 3.7.1 Establishing Certainty

By focusing on how things are experienced, Husserl reaches a level of apodictic certainty-the kind of certainty that cannot be doubted. For example, if I perceive a red apple, the experience of perceiving it is undeniable, regardless of whether the apple exists outside of my mind.

### 3.7.2 Providing a New Foundation for Philosophy

The phenomenological reduction creates a new starting point for philosophy:

- Not metaphysics, as in Aristotle.
- Not doubt, as in Descartes.
- But lived experience as it presents itself.

Philosophy becomes a rigorous science of consciousness.

### 3.7.3 Reconstructing Science

Modern sciences often forget their roots in experience. For example, physics abstracts the world into mathematical models. Through phenomenological reduction, Husserl seeks to return to the primordial experiences that underlie scientific concepts, grounding science more securely.

### 3.7.4 Restoring Meaning

In contemporary life, people often feel alienated from meaning due to over-reliance on scientific abstraction. Phenomenology restores attention to the lifeworld (Lebenswelt)-the rich, lived world of everyday experience.

## 3.8 CRITICISMS AND CHALLENGES

Though the phenomenological reduction of Husserl is considered to be one of the most significant and important theories of contemporary trend in philosophy, but is nor free from limitations and criticisms. So let us discuss the criticisms and limitations found to be associated with this theory.

### 3.8.1 The Problem of Solipsism

Some critics argue that focusing only on consciousness leads to solipsism-the idea that only my own experiences are real. Although Husserl introduced the concept of intersubjectivity to address this, some philosophers remain unconvinced.

### 3.8.2 Practical Difficulties

Performing the reduction requires rigorous philosophical discipline. It is not easily accessible to those unfamiliar with phenomenological methods.

### 3.8.3 Later Developments

Thinkers like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre expanded or critiqued Husserl's ideas. For example, Heidegger argued that being-in-the-world cannot be bracketed because existence is always already embedded in context.

## 3.9 CONCLUSION

Husserl's phenomenological reduction represents one of the most ambitious and innovative solutions to the epistemological problems of modern philosophy. By shifting the focus from external reality to the structures of consciousness, Husserl hoped to provide a rigorous and secure science of experience.

Despite criticisms, the phenomenological reduction remains a cornerstone of continental philosophy, influencing modern discussions in epistemology, psychology, cognitive science, and existential philosophy. It offers a path to reconnect philosophy, science, and human life with their fundamental experiential roots.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** What is phenomenological reduction and why is it important in Husserl's philosophy?

.....

**Q 2:** What does Husserl mean by "epoché" or "bracketing"?

.....

**Q 3:** Why did Husserl reject psychologism?

.....

**Q 4:** How did Husserl criticise empiricism and positivism?

.....

**Q 5:** What is intentionality according to Husserl?

.....

**Q 6:** What is the difference between noesis and noema in Husserl's phenomenology?

.....

**Q 7:** What is the natural attitude, and why did Husserl consider it problematic for philosophy?

.....

**Q 8:** What is meant by transcendental subjectivity in Husserl's phenomenological reduction?

.....

**Q 9:** How does Husserl's phenomenological reduction attempt to solve the problem of scepticism?

.....

**Q 10:** What are two main criticisms or challenges to Husserl's phenomenological reduction?

.....



## 3.10 LET US SUM UP

- Phenomenological reduction, also known as epoché or bracketing, is the core method of Husserl's phenomenology, aiming to suspend assumptions about external reality.
- Instead of focusing on whether the world exists independently, phenomenology studies consciousness and intentional experiences.
- Husserl rejected psychologism, which reduces logic and truth to psychological processes, arguing for the objectivity of meaning.
- He criticised empiricism and positivism for neglecting the constitutive role of consciousness in experience.
- While Kant highlighted the mind's role in organizing experience, Husserl believed Kant did not fully explore lived consciousness.
- Husserl's early work in mathematics led him to the Logical Investigations, where he introduced the concept of intentionality.
- Intentionality means that consciousness is always directed toward something-it has a noesis (act) and noema (object as experienced).
- The natural attitude is the everyday, uncritical acceptance of the world's independent existence, which Husserl sought to bracket in phenomenology.
- The epoché involves suspending judgment about the external world to focus on how phenomena appear to consciousness.
- The phenomenological reduction shifts attention from objects to the structures of consciousness that constitute them.

- Through eidetic reduction, phenomenology identifies the essential features of experience, moving from particular cases to universals.
- The process leads to transcendental subjectivity, the pure consciousness that constitutes meaning, beyond the empirical self.
- By focusing on the givenness of experience, Husserl bypasses scepticism and reaches certainty through direct experience.
- Husserl aimed to re-ground science and philosophy by returning to the lifeworld (Lebenswelt), reconnecting knowledge to lived experience.
- Critics raise concerns about solipsism, the difficulty of performing reduction, and later phenomenologists like Heidegger expanded or critiqued Husserl's method.



## 3.11 FURTHER READINGS


1) Husserl, E. (1931). *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Trans. W.R. Boyce Gibson. George Allen & Unwin.
2. Husserl, E. (1960). *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Trans. Dorion Cairns. Martinus Nijhoff.
3. Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Routledge.
4. Zahavi, D. (2003). *Husserl's Phenomenology. Stanford University Press*.
5. Smith, D. W. (2007). *Husserl*. Routledge.




## 3.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** Phenomenological reduction is Husserl's method of suspending or "bracketing" all assumptions about the external world to focus solely on the structures of consciousness and how things appear in direct experience. It is important because it provides a rigorous, presuppositionless foundation for philosophical inquiry.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** "Epoché" or "bracketing" refers to the act of suspending judgment about the independent existence of the world. Instead of

questioning whether the world exists, Husserl suggests focusing on how the world appears to consciousness.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** Husserl rejected psychologism because it reduces logic and epistemology to psychological processes. He argued that truth and logical validity are objective and universal, not contingent on individual mental states.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** Husserl criticised empiricism and positivism for reducing knowledge to mere sense data and observations, ignoring the role of consciousness in constituting meaning and experience.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** Intentionality, for Husserl, is the concept that consciousness is always directed toward something. Every mental act has an object, whether it is real or imagined.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** Noesis refers to the act of consciousness (such as perceiving or imagining), while noema refers to the object or content as it is experienced. Both are essential to the structure of intentionality.

**Ans to Q. No. 7:** The natural attitude is the everyday, uncritical assumption that the world exists independently of consciousness. Husserl considered this problematic because it leads to unexamined presuppositions in philosophy.

**Ans to Q. No. 8:** Transcendental subjectivity is the pure ego or consciousness, stripped of all empirical characteristics. It is the source of all meaning and sense-giving, discovered through phenomenological reduction.

**Ans to Q. No. 9:** Husserl's reduction avoids scepticism by focusing on the certainty of direct experience rather than trying to prove the existence of the external world. The experience of phenomena is undeniable, even if the world's independent existence is bracketed.

**Ans to Q. No. 10:** Two main criticisms of Husserl's phenomenological reduction are:

1. It risks solipsism, since it focuses only on individual consciousness.

2. The method is difficult to practice because it requires a high level of philosophical discipline and abstraction.



## 3.13 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short Questions:**

**Q. 1.** Who is the founder of phenomenology?

**Q. 2.** What is another term for phenomenological reduction?

**Q. 3.** What is meant by "epoché" in Husserl's method?

**Q. 4.** What does the term "intentionality" mean in Husserl's philosophy?

**Q. 5.** Name the two components of intentionality.

**Q. 6.** What is the "natural attitude" according to Husserl?

**Q. 7.** What is the focus of phenomenological reduction?

**Q. 8.** What is transcendental subjectivity?

**Q. 9.** What is the "lifeworld" or Lebenswelt in Husserl's thought?

**Q. 10.** Which major philosophical problem does phenomenological reduction address?

**(B) Write Short Notes on (150-200 words)**

**Q. 1.** Phenomenological Reduction

**Q. 2.** Epoché

**Q. 3.** Intentionality

**Q. 4.** The Natural Attitude

**Q. 5.** The Lifeworld (Lebenswelt)

**(C) Short Questions (Answer in 150-200 words)**

**Q. 1.** How does Husserl's phenomenological reduction differ from Cartesian doubt?

**Q. 2.** What role does intentionality play in Husserl's phenomenology?

**Q. 3.** Why did Husserl critique empiricism and positivism?

**Q. 4.** What is transcendental subjectivity in Husserl's thought?

**Q. 5.** How does Husserl's phenomenological reduction help reconstruct the foundations of science?

**(D) Long Questions (Answer in 350-400 words)**

**Q. 1.** Discuss the historical background and philosophical context that led Husserl to develop phenomenological reduction.

**Q. 2.** Explain the method of phenomenological reduction in detail, including epoché, eidetic reduction, and the role of transcendental subjectivity.

**Q. 3.** How does Husserl's phenomenological reduction address the problem of scepticism and the foundation of knowledge?

**Q. 4.** Compare and contrast Husserl's phenomenological reduction with the approaches of empiricism, positivism, and neo-Kantianism.

**Q. 5.** Critically evaluate the challenges and criticisms of Husserl's phenomenological reduction, including solipsism and practical difficulties.

**********

# UNIT 4: THE IDEA OF INTENTIONALITY OF EDMUND HUSSERL

## UNIT STRUCTURE


4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Background and General Considerations of Intentionality

- 4.3.1 Historical Background
- 4.3.2 Husserl's Reinterpretation of Intentionality

4.4 Intentionality in Husserl's Logical Investigations

- 4.4.1 Overview of the Logical Investigations
- 4.4.2 Meaning and Objectivity
- 4.4.3 Intentional Acts and Content

4.5 Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy

- 4.5.1 Transition to Phenomenological Idealism.
- 4.5.2 Noesis and Noema
- 4.5.3 The Phenomenological Reduction and Intentionality

4.6 The Perceptual Noema

- 4.6.1 Definition and Importance
- 4.6.2 Noema and Objectivity
- 4.6.3 Noema in Later Phenomenology

4.7 Conclusion

4.8 Let Us Sum Up

4.9 Further Readings

4.10 Answer to Check Your Progress

4.11 Model Questions


## 4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Explain the historical background and philosophical context of the concept of intentionality.

- Describe Edmund Husserl's contribution to the theory of intentionality through his Logical Investigations.
- Analyse the development of intentionality in Husserl's later work, especially in Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology.
- Discuss the concept of the perceptual noema and its relevance to phenomenological analysis.
- Evaluate the significance of Husserl's notion of intentionality for modern philosophy and cognitive science.

## 4.2 INTRODUCTION

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is regarded as the founder of phenomenology, a philosophical method that seeks to investigate and describe the structures of consciousness and the phenomena that appear in acts of consciousness. Central to Husserl's phenomenology is the idea of intentionality-the notion that consciousness is always "about" something, directed toward an object, idea, or experience.

The concept of intentionality, though not new in Husserl's time, was fundamentally transformed by his philosophical investigations. While earlier thinkers like Franz Brentano reintroduced the term in the 19th century, Husserl redefined intentionality, placing it at the core of his phenomenological project. Through works such as the Logical Investigations and Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology, Husserl elaborated the idea of intentionality, developing concepts like the noesis-noema structure and establishing the foundations for subsequent phenomenological and existential philosophies.

This unit explores Husserl's concept of intentionality in depth, examining its historical background, detailed articulation in the Logical Investigations, further elaboration in *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, and the role of the perceptual noema in phenomenological analysis.

## 4.3 BACKGROUND AND GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS OF INTENTIONALITY

Before delving into the detailed analysis of Husserl's concept of intentionality, it is important to understand its broader historical and philosophical background. Intentionality did not originate with Husserl; rather, it has deep roots in classical philosophy and was reintroduced into modern philosophical discourse by thinkers like Franz Brentano. Husserl, however, gave it a radically new direction, transforming it into the core structure of consciousness in his phenomenological philosophy. To appreciate Husserl's unique contribution, we must first explore the origins, evolution, and general considerations of the idea of intentionality as it developed prior to and alongside his work.

### 4.3.1 Historical Background

The term intentionality has a long philosophical history, originating in Scholastic philosophy, particularly in the works of Thomas Aquinas and medieval philosophers. In this classical context, intentionality referred to the capacity of the mind to be directed toward objects, whether real or imaginary. It was often associated with mental representation, with terms like "intentional objects" describing things as they are conceived or represented in the mind.

In the 19th century, Franz Brentano revived the concept in his seminal work, *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874). Brentano claimed that "intentionality is the mark of the mental," meaning that mental phenomena are characterized by their reference to an object. For Brentano, every mental act has content; it is directed toward something-whether it be a perception, a memory, or an imagination. This marked a crucial move away from materialist and associationist psychology of the time.

However, Brentano did not fully clarify how objects of thought can exist when they have no real existence (e.g., fictional entities).

He also left unresolved questions about the relation between acts of consciousness and their objects. This ambiguity provided a point of departure for Husserl's phenomenological investigations.

### 4.3.2 Husserl's Reinterpretation of Intentionality

Husserl inherited Brentano's idea of intentionality but radically transformed it. For Husserl, intentionality was not merely a feature of mental acts but the defining structure of consciousness itself. Consciousness is not a container of ideas or sensations but an active process that constitutes meaning and objectivity through intentional acts.

Husserl's analysis of intentionality focuses on the correlation between consciousness and its object. Every experience, perception, or thought involves a noesis (the act of consciousness) and a noema (the object as it is meant or intended in consciousness). This intentional correlation is not accidental; it is essential to how consciousness operates.

Husserl's shift was crucial because it laid the groundwork for an anti-reductionist view of consciousness, rejecting both psychologism and empiricism. For Husserl, the study of consciousness could not be reduced to mere psychological facts or empirical observations-it required a phenomenological analysis of how meaning and objectivity arise in lived experience.

## 4.4 INTENTIONALITY IN HUSSERL'S LOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Intentionality is one of the important concepts in Husserl's Phenomenological investigations. Let us discuss about it.

### 4.4.1 Overview of the Logical Investigations

Husserl's Logical Investigations (1900-1901) represent his early mature work, in which he critiques psychologism in logic and

lays out the principles of phenomenology. The six investigations included in this work cover topics such as the nature of meaning, the structure of signs, and the foundation of knowledge.

The Fifth Logical Investigation is particularly important for understanding intentionality. Here, Husserl explains how consciousness relates to objects through intentional acts. He distinguishes between:

- The act of consciousness (noesis)
- The intentional object as meant (noema)

For example, when someone perceives a tree, they are not merely receiving sensory data. Rather, their consciousness is directed toward the tree as it appears to them. This object-the tree as intended in perception-is the perceptual noema.

### 4.4.2 Meaning and Objectivity

In the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl also addresses the nature of meaning and its role in intentionality. He differentiates between:

- Expression (Ausdruck): The linguistic or symbolic representation
- Meaning (Bedeutung): The ideal sense or intention conveyed by the expression

This distinction leads Husserl to reject psychologism, the idea that meanings are mental states or psychological phenomena. Instead, meanings are ideal entities that transcend individual consciousness, though they are accessed and constituted by intentional acts.

For Husserl, logical truths, mathematical concepts, and even linguistic meanings are objective not because they exist in an external world but because they are constituted through the shared intentional acts of conscious subjects.

### 4.4.3 Intentional Acts and Content

Husserl further distinguishes between different types of intentional acts:

- Perceptual Acts: Consciousness directed toward actual objects
- Imaginative Acts: Consciousness directed toward non-existent or fictional entities
- Judgmental Acts: Consciousness involved in affirming or denying propositions

Each of these acts has a specific intentional content, which is the way the object is "meant" or "given" in consciousness. Husserl's notion of intentional content thus captures the mode of appearance of objects in various forms of experience.

## 4.5 IDEAS PERTAINING TO A PURE PHENOMENOLOGY AND TO A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

Let us discuss the ideas pertaining to pure phenomenology and to a phenomenological philosophy

### 4.5.1 Transition to Phenomenological Idealism

After the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl continued to develop his philosophy, culminating in Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy (1913). In this work, he introduces the method of phenomenological reduction, also known as epoché, which involves "bracketing" or suspending judgment about the existence of the external world in order to focus solely on the structures of consciousness.

This method allows the philosopher to study pure consciousness and its intentional acts without presupposing any metaphysical claims. The focus shifts from objects in the world to how objects are given to consciousness.

### 4.5.2 Noesis and Noema

In Ideas I, Husserl elaborates on the noesis-noema correlation, which becomes central to his mature theory of intentionality.

- Noesis refers to the act of consciousness-the perceiving, remembering, imagining, or judging.
- Noema refers to the object as intended or meant in consciousness, including its various modes of appearance.

For example, when perceiving a tree, the noesis is the act of perceiving, while the noema is the tree as it is given in perception-the "tree-in-appearance."

This distinction allows phenomenology to account for how consciousness can relate to:

- Real objects
- Imaginary objects
- Abstract entities

Without collapsing them into mere psychological events.

### 4.5.3 The Phenomenological Reduction and Intentionality

Through the phenomenological reduction, Husserl suspends the natural attitude-the everyday belief in the independent existence of objects-to focus on the transcendental structures of consciousness. By doing so, he uncovers the intentional constitution of objects.

Objects are not simply "out there" in the world but are given meaning and structure by consciousness. This is not to say that consciousness creates the world in a subjective sense, but that all experiences of the world are mediated by intentional acts.

## 4.6 THE PERCEPTUAL NOEMA

Let us discuss the concept of noema in details.

### 4.6.1 Definition and Importance

The concept of the perceptual noema is one of the most debated and intriguing elements of Husserl's phenomenology. In perception, the noema represents the object as it is intended, including its appearance, perspective, and horizon of possible further appearances.

For instance, when seeing a tree from one side, the noema includes not just the currently visible features but also the anticipation of unseen sides. This anticipatory structure is part of the intentional horizon of the perceptual act.

### 4.6.2 Noema and Objectivity

The noema is not the physical object itself but the object as experienced. This allows phenomenology to explain how we perceive a stable object despite changing sensory data (different angles, lighting, etc.). The noema maintains the unity of the object in consciousness even as its appearances vary.

This concept helps resolve philosophical problems like:

- The problem of perception: How do we perceive consistent objects despite fragmentary sense data?
- The problem of objectivity: How do multiple observers intend the same object despite having different perspectives?

Husserl's answer lies in the intentional synthesis of consciousness, whereby multiple noematic moments are unified into the experience of a coherent object.

### 4.6.3 Noema in Later Phenomenology

Husserl's notion of the noema was later taken up and expanded by thinkers such as:

- Martin Heidegger, who focused on being-in-the-world
- Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who emphasized embodiment and perception

- Jean-Paul Sartre, who developed existential phenomenology

In contemporary philosophy, the noema remains relevant in discussions of cognitive science, philosophy of mind, and phenomenological psychology.

## 4.7 CONCLUSION

Husserl's theory of intentionality is a cornerstone of phenomenology and modern philosophy. From the early *Logical Investigations* to the later *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology*, Husserl refined and expanded his understanding of how consciousness is always directed toward something, through the complex interplay of noesis and noema.

By developing the concept of perceptual noema, Husserl provided a framework for understanding how objects are constituted in experience, despite the variability of sense data. This insight has influenced not only philosophy but also fields like psychology, linguistics, and artificial intelligence.

Husserl's intentionality challenges us to rethink the nature of consciousness, perception, and reality-not as separate entities but as interrelated phenomena that unfold within the dynamic structure of intentional acts.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** Who is regarded as the founder of phenomenology?

.....

**Q 2:** What is the central concept of Husserl's phenomenology?

.....

**Q 3:** What does intentionality mean in Husserl's philosophy?

.....

**Q 4:** Which philosopher reintroduced the concept of intentionality in the 19th century?

.....

**Q 5:** Name Husserl's two major works where he developed the idea of intentionality.

.....

**Q 6:** What is the noesis in Husserl's phenomenology?

.....

**Q 7:** What is the noema according to Husserl?

.....

**Q 8:** What is the phenomenological reduction (epoché)?

.....

**Q 9:** What is meant by the "natural attitude" in phenomenology?

.....

**Q 10:** What type of intentional acts are directed toward imaginary objects?

.....

**Q 11:** What role does the Fifth Logical Investigation play in Husserl's work?

.....

**Q 12:** How does Husserl differentiate between expression and meaning?

.....

**Q 13:** Why did Husserl reject psychologism?

.....

**Q 14:** What is the perceptual noema?

.....

**Q 15:** Name two philosophers influenced by Husserl's concept of noema.

.....



## 3.10 LET US SUM UP

- Intentionality is the central concept of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, referring to consciousness always being directed toward an object or content.
- Husserl inherited the concept of intentionality from Franz Brentano but gave it a new phenomenological interpretation.

- In medieval philosophy, intentionality described the mind's capacity to be directed toward objects, whether real or imaginary.
- Franz Brentano defined intentionality as the distinguishing feature of all mental phenomena.
- Brentano's account of intentionality left unresolved questions about how consciousness relates to non-existent objects.
- Husserl redefined intentionality as the essential structure of consciousness itself, not just a property of mental acts.
- In Husserl's phenomenology, consciousness consists of a correlation between the noesis (the act of consciousness) and the noema (the object as intended).
- The Logical Investigations (1900-1901) are Husserl's early major work, where he critiques psychologism and introduces a rigorous theory of meaning.
- In the Fifth Logical Investigation, Husserl distinguishes between the act of consciousness and the intentional object as meant.
- Husserl's distinction between expression (Ausdruck) and meaning (Bedeutung) highlights that meanings are ideal and not reducible to psychological states.
- Logical and mathematical concepts are objective because they are constituted through shared intentional acts of consciousness.
- Husserl categorized intentional acts into perceptual acts, imaginative acts, and judgmental acts, each having specific intentional content.
- In Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology (1913), Husserl introduces the method of phenomenological reduction or epoché.
- Phenomenological reduction involves suspending belief in the external world to study the pure structures of consciousness.
- Husserl's noesis-noema correlation accounts for how consciousness relates to real, imaginary, or abstract objects.
- The noema is the object as experienced in consciousness, including its perspective, appearance, and possible further appearances.
- The concept of perceptual noema helps explain how we perceive consistent, stable objects despite changing sensory data.

- Through intentional synthesis, consciousness unifies multiple appearances of an object into a coherent experience.
- Later phenomenologists like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre expanded Husserl's ideas on noema and intentionality.
- Husserl's theory of intentionality has had a profound influence on philosophy, psychology, cognitive science, and artificial intelligence.



## 4.9 FURTHER READINGS

1) Husserl, E. (1900-1901). *Logical Investigations*.
2) Husserl, E. (1913). *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*.
3) Brentano, F. (1874). *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint.*
4) Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to Phenomenology. Routledge.*
5) Smith, D. W. (2007). *Husserl. Routledge.*



## 4.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** Edmund Husserl is regarded as the founder of phenomenology.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** The central concept of Husserl's phenomenology is intentionality.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** Intentionality means that consciousness is always directed toward something, whether an object, idea, or experience.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** Franz Brentano reintroduced the concept of intentionality in the 19th century.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** Husserl's two major works on intentionality are Logical Investigations and Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** Noesis refers to the act of consciousness, such as perceiving, judging, or imagining.

**Ans to Q. No. 7:** Noema is the object as it is meant or intended in consciousness, including its appearances and meanings.

**Ans to Q. No. 8:** Phenomenological reduction (epoché) is the suspension of judgment about the existence of the external world to study pure consciousness.

**Ans to Q. No. 9:** The "natural attitude" refers to the everyday belief in the independent existence of the world outside of consciousness.

**Ans to Q. No. 10:** Imaginative acts are directed toward non-existent or fictional entities.

**Ans to Q. No. 11:** The Fifth Logical Investigation explains how consciousness relates to objects through intentional acts.

**Ans to Q. No. 12:** Husserl differentiates expression as linguistic or symbolic representation, while meaning is the ideal sense conveyed by the expression.

**Ans to Q. No. 13:** Husserl rejected psychologism because meanings are not psychological states but ideal entities constituted through intentional acts.

**Ans to Q. No. 14:** The perceptual noema is the object as experienced in perception, including both the visible features and the anticipated unseen aspects.

**Ans to Q. No. 15:** Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty are two philosophers influenced by Husserl's concept of noema.



## 4.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short Questions:**

**Q. 1.** Who introduced the term "intentionality" into modern philosophy?

**Q. 2.** What is the noesis in Husserl's phenomenology?

**Q. 3.** What does the term noema refer to?

**Q. 4.** Name one of Husserl's main works where he discusses intentionality.

**Q. 5.** What method does Husserl introduce in Ideas I?

**Q. 6.** What is meant by "intentional acts"?

**Q. 7.** What is the "natural attitude" according to Husserl?

**Q. 8.** Which philosopher criticized psychologism in logic?

**Q. 9.** What kind of object is an "intentional object"?

**Q. 10.** Name a philosopher influenced by Husserl's notion of intentionality.

**(B) Short Questions (150-200 words answers)**

**Q. 1.** Explain the historical background of the concept of intentionality before Husserl.

**Q. 2.** Describe the noesis-noema structure of intentionality according to Husserl.

**Q. 3.** What is the phenomenological reduction (epoché), and why is it important in Husserl's philosophy?

**Q. 4.** How does Husserl distinguish between real, imaginary, and abstract objects in intentionality?

**Q. 5.** What are the main contributions of the Fifth Logical Investigation to the study of intentionality?

**Q. 6.** Discuss Husserl's critique of psychologism in the Logical Investigations.

**Q. 7.** How does the concept of perceptual noema solve the problem of objectivity in perception?

**(C) Long Questions (400-500 words answers)**

**Q. 1.** Discuss the development of the idea of intentionality from Brentano to Husserl. How did Husserl transform the concept?

**Q. 2.** Analyse the role of noesis and noema in Husserl's theory of consciousness. Why is this distinction important?

**Q. 3.** Explain the significance of phenomenological reduction in Husserl's method. How does it relate to the study of intentionality?

**Q. 4.** Elaborate on the concept of the perceptual noema and its relevance in explaining consistent object perception despite changing perspectives.

**Q. 5.** Evaluate the impact of Husserl's theory of intentionality on modern philosophy, cognitive science, and existential phenomenology.

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# UNIT 5: HUSSERL'S VIEW OF LIFE-WORLD

## UNIT STRUCTURE


5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Background of Husserl's View of Life-world

- 5.3.1 Early Phenomenology and the Turn to the Life-world
- 5.3.2 The Life-world Defined

5.4 The Problem of the Life-world

- 5.4.1 The Crisis of Modern Science
- 5.4.2 Life-world and the Natural Attitude

5.5 Developments after Husserl

- 5.5.1 Heidegger and Being-in-the-World
- 5.5.2 Schutz and Phenomenological Sociology
- 5.5.3 Merleau-Ponty and Embodied Experience

5.6 Habermas and the Life-world

- 5.6.1 Habermas's Interpretation of the Life-world
- 5.6.2 The Colonization of the Life-world

5.7 Conclusion

5.8 Let Us Sum Up

5.9 Further Readings

5.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.11 Model Questions


## 5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Explain the concept of the Life-world (Lebenswelt) in Husserl's phenomenology.
- Describe the historical and philosophical background that led Husserl to develop the idea of the Life-world.
- Analyse the problem of the Life-world and its significance in Husserl's later philosophy.

- Discuss the developments of the Life-world concept after Husserl, especially in existential phenomenology and critical theory.
- Evaluate Jürgen Habermas's interpretation and critique of the Life-world in the context of social theory.

## 5.2 INTRODUCTION

The concept of the Life-world (Lebenswelt) marks a crucial development in the later philosophy of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). While Husserl's early phenomenology concentrated on the structures of pure consciousness and intentionality, his later work, particularly in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), introduced the idea of the Life-world. The Life-world is the pre-scientific foundation of all knowledge and experience. It refers to the world of everyday life, the environment in which people live, act, and interact without reflective or scientific abstraction. In the Life-world, we operate within a natural attitude, assuming the world exists as it appears to us through experience.

The Life-world encompasses shared cultural practices, social meanings, and common understandings that provide the context for all communication and perception. Husserl argued that modern science, in its focus on objectivity and abstraction, had forgotten this essential ground, creating a crisis of meaning. The Life-world thus becomes a critical theme for understanding how knowledge arises from lived experience. This idea significantly influenced later philosophers, particularly Jürgen Habermas, who incorporated it into critical theory, analysing how modern society threatens the integrity of the Life-world through systemic domination and loss of authentic communication.

## 5.3 BACKGROUND OF HUSSERL'S VIEW OF LIFE-WORLD

The Life-world (Lebenswelt) is a central concept in Husserl's later philosophy, representing the everyday world of lived experience. It is the world as directly perceived and experienced, prior to scientific or theoretical

abstraction. Husserl introduced the idea in response to what he saw as a crisis in modern science, which had become disconnected from the concrete reality of human life. The Life-world is the foundation of all knowledge and meaning, yet it is often overlooked because of our reliance on objective, scientific thinking. Understanding its background helps clarify why Husserl made this shift from pure consciousness to the Life-world.

### 5.3.1 Early Phenomenology and the Turn to the Life-world

In his early phenomenology, Edmund Husserl focused on analysing the structures of pure consciousness, especially through the concepts of noesis and noema-the intentional acts and the objects as meant in consciousness. His aim was to explore how objectivity and meaning are constituted within conscious experience. However, as Husserl's philosophy evolved, he turned his attention to a broader concern: the foundations of the sciences and the growing crisis of modern rationality.

In his later work, particularly in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1936), Husserl argued that the rise of natural sciences had caused a significant forgetfulness of the Life-world (Lebenswelt)-the world of everyday lived experience. Modern science, according to Husserl, describes reality through mathematical and objective frameworks, focusing on quantities, measurements, and empirical data. While this method has led to technological and scientific advancements, it also abstracts from the world as it is actually lived.

For Husserl, this abstraction creates a dangerous disconnect: scientific knowledge becomes detached from the meaningful, experienced world that forms the original ground of all understanding. He believed that by neglecting the Life-world, modern science fails to address the concrete realities of human existence, leading to a philosophical and cultural crisis.

### 5.3.2 The Life-world Defined

The Life-world (Lebenswelt), as conceptualized by Husserl, refers to the pre-theoretical world of everyday lived experience. It is the world that individuals encounter directly through practical activities, social interactions, language, and cultural practices. Unlike scientific descriptions that seek objective, measurable facts, the Life-world is the background of shared meanings and unspoken assumptions that guide how people perceive and understand reality in daily life.

It is not something we consciously analyse or observe as an object but rather the horizon within which all experiences and interpretations naturally take place. Everything we know or do-from basic perceptions to complex cultural expressions-occurs within the context of the Life-world. For Husserl, it serves as the foundation of meaning that precedes any scientific theories or reflective thinking. By highlighting the Life-world, Husserl emphasizes the importance of grounding knowledge in lived human experience, not just in abstract scientific models.

## 5.4 THE PROBLEM OF THE LIFE-WORLD

The concept of the Life-world raises critical philosophical questions about the relationship between everyday experience and scientific knowledge. Husserl observed that modern science often ignores the Life-world, focusing instead on objective abstractions. This creates a crisis where the very ground of meaning and experience-the Life-world-is forgotten or overlooked.

### 5.4.1 The Crisis of Modern Science

In his later philosophy, particularly in *The Crisis of European Sciences*, Husserl identified a fundamental problem in modern scientific thinking. While science has advanced in precision and objectivity, it has lost sight of its origins in the Life-world-the world of lived, everyday experience. Science deals with abstract models,

mathematical structures, and idealized objects, but these abstractions are possible only because human consciousness first experiences the world directly. Husserl argued that this leads to a "crisis of meaning," where science can explain how things work but not what they mean in the context of human life. Scientific knowledge becomes disconnected from the practical, cultural, and social world in which it originally developed. For Husserl, understanding the Life-world is essential to restoring a meaningful connection between scientific knowledge and human existence. All objectivity, he maintained, is ultimately rooted in the Life-world.

### 5.4.2 Lifeworld and the Natural Attitude

Husserl's concept of the *natural attitude* describes the everyday, unreflective way in which people live and engage with the world. In this mode, we accept the world as simply existing, taking objects, people, and events at face value without questioning how they appear to us or how we understand them. Within the Life-world, we carry out daily activities, interact socially, and rely on shared cultural meanings and assumptions. We interpret objects and events within familiar, pre-given contexts, without reflecting on the processes of perception or cognition involved. The *problem of the Life-world* emerges when philosophy and science ignore this fundamental layer of human existence. By focusing solely on abstract knowledge or objective facts, they overlook the lived experience that forms the basis of all understanding. Husserl believed that phenomenology must "return to the things themselves," meaning a return to the Life-world to uncover how meaning, knowledge, and objectivity are constituted.

## 5.5 DEVELOPMENTS AFTER HUSSERL

After Husserl, the concept of the Life-world continued to influence many philosophers and social theorists. Thinkers like Heidegger, Merleau-

Ponty, and Habermas expanded and reinterpreted the idea in new contexts. Their developments focused on intersubjectivity, social structures, and the role of communication in shaping the Life-world.

### 5.5.1 Heidegger and Being-in-the-World

Martin Heidegger, one of Husserl's most influential students, expanded on the concept of the Life-world by introducing the idea of Being-in-the-world (Dasein). Unlike Husserl, who emphasized the structures of consciousness, Heidegger focused on the fundamental nature of human existence. For Heidegger, human beings are not detached observers of the world but are always already involved in it through practical activities, relationships, and cultural practices. He argued that existence is embedded in a web of meanings and social interactions, which constitutes the Life-world. This Life-world is not just a background for experience but the very context in which life unfolds. Heidegger shifted phenomenology from a study of consciousness to an inquiry into being, making ontology his primary concern. However, the idea of the Life-world remains essential in his philosophy as it highlights the everyday, lived experience and the situatedness of human life in a meaningful world.

### 5.5.2 Schutz and Phenomenological Sociology

Alfred Schutz extended Husserl's concept of the Life-world into the field of social theory, becoming a key figure in phenomenological sociology. Schutz argued that social reality is constructed through *intersubjectivity*-the shared understandings and meanings that allow individuals to interact and communicate. He introduced the idea of typification, where people classify experiences, events, and others into familiar categories based on prior experiences. Additionally, Schutz highlighted the role of the *stock of knowledge*, which refers to the background assumptions and cultural knowledge individuals rely on in everyday life. These concepts help explain how social order and meaning are maintained in daily interactions.

### 5.5.3 Merleau-Ponty and Embodied Experience

Maurice Merleau-Ponty expanded Husserl's concept of the Life-world by emphasising the role of the lived body (Leib). For Merleau-Ponty, the Life-world is not just a mental or abstract structure but is directly experienced through the body's engagement with the world. The body is not merely an object among objects but the primary means of perception, action, and interaction. Through bodily movement, sensation, and presence, individuals encounter the world in its immediacy. This embodied perspective highlights how perception and meaning are grounded in the lived experience of being-in-the-world, making the Life-world fundamentally rooted in bodily existence.

## 5.6 HABERMAS AND THE LIFE-WORLD

Let us us discuss about the life world of Habermas.

### 5.6.1 Jürgen Habermas' Interpretation

Jürgen Habermas, a leading figure in the Frankfurt School and critical theory, reinterpreted Husserl's concept of the Life-world in his seminal work *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981). For Habermas, the Life-world is the shared background of cultural traditions, social norms, and mutual understandings that make communication and social coordination possible. It provides the context within which people engage in dialogue, interpret meanings, and maintain social cohesion. However, Habermas warned that modern societies face a threat to this Life-world through the expansion of systemic mechanisms such as money, market forces, and bureaucratic administration. He described this as the "colonization of the Life-world," where instrumental rationality replaces communicative action, leading to social alienation and a breakdown of shared meanings. Habermas thus expanded the Life-world concept into a critique of modern society, emphasising the need to

protect communicative practices that sustain democratic participation and social integration.

### 5.6.2 The Colonisation of the Life-world

In modern societies, communication and cultural life often become dominated by technocratic reasoning and instrumental logic, where efficiency and control take precedence over meaningful social interaction. This leads to a loss of authentic communication, the erosion of shared cultural meanings, and a sense of alienation in everyday life. According to Jürgen Habermas, this situation reflects the "colonization of the Life-world," where systems like bureaucracy and market mechanisms overshadow communicative action. Habermas's critique expands Husserl's concept of the Life-world by highlighting its vulnerability to modern power structures, emphasising the need to preserve spaces for genuine dialogue and democratic participation.

## 5.7 CONCLUSION

Husserl's concept of the Life-world (Lebenswelt) stands as one of the most influential ideas in 20th-century philosophy. It refers to the pre-scientific, everyday world of lived experience, the foundational ground upon which all knowledge, perception, and understanding are built. By emphasising the Life-world, Husserl reminded modern thinkers that even the most objective scientific systems are rooted in the subjective and intersubjective activities of human beings. The Life-world is where meaning is first constituted, prior to abstract theorisation or formal modelling.

This idea was further developed by major thinkers such as Martin Heidegger, who explored Being-in-the-world; Alfred Schutz, who applied it to social reality; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who focused on embodiment; and Jürgen Habermas, who incorporated it into critical social theory. Each extended the concept into new domains namely, ontology, sociology, and political critique and demonstrating its broad philosophical relevance.

Understanding the Life-world is crucial not only for phenomenology but also for engaging with contemporary questions about knowledge, culture, and human experience.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** What is the Life-world (Lebenswelt) according to Husserl?

.....

**Q 2:** In which of Husserl's works was the concept of the Life-world mainly introduced?

.....

**Q 3:** What does Husserl mean by the "natural attitude"?

.....

**Q 4:** What problem does Husserl identify with modern science in relation to the Life-world?

.....

**Q 5:** Who expanded the Life-world concept into the idea of "Being-in-the-world"?

.....

**Q 6:** What is typification according to Alfred Schutz?

.....

**Q 7:** How did Merleau-Ponty contribute to the development of the Life-world concept?

.....

**Q 8:** What is meant by the "colonization of the Life-world" in Habermas's theory?

.....

**Q 9:** What role does intersubjectivity play in the Life-world?

.....

**Q 10:** Why is the Life-world considering the foundation of all knowledge and meaning?

.....



## 5.8 LET US SUM UP

- Husserl's concept of the Life-world (Lebenswelt) represents the pre-scientific, lived foundation of all knowledge and experience.
- The Life-world refers to the world of everyday life where people act, interact, and perceive without reflective abstraction.
- In the Life-world, individuals operate within a natural attitude, assuming the world exists as it appears to them.
- Modern science, according to Husserl, has forgotten the Life-world by focusing exclusively on objectivity and abstraction.
- The crisis of European sciences arises because scientific knowledge becomes disconnected from the lived experiences that ground it.
- The Life-world includes shared cultural practices, social meanings, and common understandings that guide perception and communication.
- Husserl's early phenomenology focused on pure consciousness, noesis (acts of consciousness), and noema (objects as intended).
- In his later philosophy, Husserl shifted focus from pure consciousness to the foundations of scientific knowledge and the Life-world.
- The Life-world is the pre-theoretical context of everyday experience, prior to scientific or reflective interpretations.
- Scientific abstractions are possible only because human consciousness first experiences the world directly in the Life-world.
- The natural attitude describes the unreflective way people perceive the world, accepting it as simply existing.
- Husserl's call to "return to the things themselves" involves returning to the Life-world to uncover the constitution of meaning.
- Martin Heidegger expanded Husserl's idea into Being-in-the-world (Dasein), emphasising existential involvement in the world.
- Alfred Schutz applied the Life-world concept to sociology, highlighting intersubjectivity, typification, and the stock of knowledge.
- Merleau-Ponty developed the notion of the Life-world through the lens of embodied experience, focusing on perception via the lived body.

- Jürgen Habermas incorporated the Life-world into critical theory, emphasising its role in communication and social coordination.
- Habermas introduced the idea of the "colonization of the Life-world", where systems like bureaucracy and market forces dominate social life.
- The colonization of the Life-world leads to alienation, loss of authentic communication, and erosion of shared cultural meanings.
- The Life-world is essential for democratic participation, as it provides the background for dialogue and social integration.
- Understanding the Life-world is crucial for phenomenology, social theory, and addressing the crisis of meaning in modern knowledge systems.



## 5.9 FURTHER READINGS

1) Husserl, E. (1936). *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology.*
2) Schutz, A. (1967). *The Phenomenology of the Social World.*
3) Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945). *Phenomenology of Perception.*
4) Habermas, J. (1981). *The Theory of Communicative Action.*
5) Moran, D. (2000). *Introduction to Phenomenology*. Routledge.



## 5.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** The Life-world (Lebenswelt) is the pre-scientific, everyday world of lived experience, where people engage with life directly without theoretical or scientific abstraction.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** Husserl introduced the concept of the Life-world primarily in his book The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (1936).

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** The "natural attitude" is the everyday, unreflective mode of experience where people take the existence of the world for granted and do not question how they perceive it.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** Husserl argued that modern science focuses on objectivity and abstraction, neglecting the Life-world, which leads to a crisis where scientific knowledge becomes detached from human experience.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** Martin Heidegger expanded the Life-world concept into his idea of "Being-in-the-world" (Dasein), emphasising human existence as fundamentally situated in practical and social contexts.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** Typification, according to Alfred Schutz, is the process by which people classify experiences and others into familiar categories based on shared social knowledge.

**Ans to Q. No. 7:** Merleau-Ponty contributed by emphasising embodied experience, arguing that the Life-world is encountered through the lived body, not just through consciousness.

**Ans to Q. No. 8:** The "colonization of the Life-world" refers to Habermas's idea that modern systems like bureaucracy and market mechanisms dominate and distort everyday life and communication.

**Ans to Q. No. 9:** Intersubjectivity in the Life-world involves shared understandings and meanings that make social interactions and communication possible.

**Ans to Q. No. 10:** The Life-world is considered the foundation of all knowledge and meaning because it is the original context of lived experience from which all scientific and theoretical knowledge arises.



## 5.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short Questions:**

**Q. 1.** What is the meaning of Lebenswelt in Husserl's philosophy?

**Q. 2.** Name one major work of Husserl where the Life-world concept is discussed.

**Q. 3.** What does Husserl mean by the "crisis of modern science"?

**Q. 4.** Who introduced the idea of "Being-in-the-world" related to the Life-world?

**Q. 5.** What is the "natural attitude" in phenomenology?

**(B) Short Questions (Answer within 150-200 words)**

**Q. 1.** Briefly explain the concept of the Life-world and its significance in Husserl's philosophy.

**Q. 2.** What are the main reasons for Husserl's shift from pure consciousness to the Life-world in his later works?

**Q. 3.** Discuss Alfred Schutz's contribution to the development of the Life-world in phenomenological sociology.

**Q. 4.** How does Merleau-Ponty's concept of embodiment relate to the Life-world?

**Q. 5.** Explain Habermas's idea of the "colonization of the Life-world" with examples from modern society.

**(C) Long Questions (Answer within 400 words)**

**Q. 1.** Critically analyze Husserl's concept of the Life-world as presented in The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology.

**Q. 2.** Discuss the problem of the Life-world and how it leads to a "crisis of meaning" in modern scientific thinking according to Husserl.

**Q. 3.** Compare and contrast the interpretations of the Life-world by Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty.

**Q. 4.** Examine the role of intersubjectivity and typification in the Life-world as explained by Alfred Schutz. How do these ideas contribute to social order?

**Q. 5.** Evaluate Jürgen Habermas's critique of the Life-world in the context of modern social systems. How does his theory expand Husserl's original idea?

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# UNIT 6: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EXISTENTIALISM

## UNIT STRUCTURE


6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2. Introduction

6.3. Six main existentialist philosophers

6.4. Theistic and Atheistic Existentialism

6.5. Existence precedes essence

6.6. Salient Features of Existentialism

6.7. Conclusion

6.8. Check your progress

6.6. Let us sum up

6.10. Further reading

6.11. Answer to check your progress

6.12. Model questions


## 6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- know what is existentialism and how it developed as a movement in the history of philosophy
- know about the six main existentialist thinkers
- know about the basic features of existentialism
- know what about the theism and atheism in existentialism
- know what is the meaning of the central statement of existentialism- existence precedes essence.

## 6.2 INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is a human effort to comprehend the problems of the universe. Staring from the traditional to contemporary period, an attempt

has been made to solve the problem of being by means of reflection and analysis. The traditional Western Philosophy has been attempted to build a systematic philosophy with the influence of scientific culture. This rationalistic attitude analyzed the problems of human on the basis of reason which failed to provide a clear explanation of the 'existence' of human. This rationalistic attitude towards human problems is found in Hegelianism. But, at that time, a philosophical movement was grown against all the traditional explanation of the existence of man as a mere concept which is known as existentialism. It is a movement emerged against traditional Western rationalistic philosophy, essentialism, naturalism and idealism. Existentialism is the philosophy which emphasizes individual human existence- his freedom and responsibility. This philosophical movement generally considered a study that pursues meaning in existence and seeks value for the existing individual. Unlike other fields of philosophy, it does not treat the individual as a concept and values individual subjectivity over objectivity. Existentialism thinks that reason tried to give us an idea of man in general, not that of the uniqueness of individual man. According to it, 'man' is not a concept which can be explained on the basis of reason. Man cannot be regarded as a mere object; he is the subject. So, existentialism is concerned with the explanation of subjective human existence that is very much opposed to any kind of existence having by rocks, plants and animals.

## 6.3 SIX MAIN EXISTENTIALIST PHILOSOPHERS

Existentialism is basically a 20th century philosophical movement whose roots can be traced back to the 16th century, particularly to the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. The other existentialist thinkers are, namely- Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, and Karl Jaspers. Among them, Danish Philosopher S?ren Kierkegaard is known as the father of existentialism. It is to be noteworthy that existentialism paying attention on individual human lives and the very inevitability of suffering and choice of every individual. At the beginning of

the 20th century, after the two world wars, a kind of despair took possession of the human mind which completely destroyed man's faith in future. At this stage, philosophy tried to discover man as an individual and in doing so, it came to discover the philosophy of Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard strongly opposed Hegel's rationalistic explanation of the universe based on complete objectivity. He was mainly concerned with subjective truth and stated that truth mainly lies in subjectivity, not objectivity. German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche is well known for his doctrine of the Will to Power, Superman, Morality of Masters and Morality of Slaves. Karl Jaspers mainly deals with the method of philosophizing where he discusses about the world orientation, matter, life, mind and soul. Moreover, his philosophy is characterized by anguish, despair and preoccupation with death. Philosopher Martin Heidegger discusses about the problem of Being, Dasein, authentic and inauthentic modes of existence. French Philosopher Gabriel Marcel's philosophy is a philosophy of a reflection to restore the unity of living and thinking. He explains the existence of human in terms of situation in the world. Another French existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre emphasized man's absolute freedom and established existentialism as a humanism. Generally, these thinkers have diverse outlook, although they discuss certain general ideas which are coming from the philosophical approach known as existentialism.

## 6.4 THEISM AND ATHEISM IN EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism can be divided into two basic camps- one is theistic existentialism and other is atheistic existentialism. Actually the division of two camps is based on the diverse beliefs of all existentialists upon the God existence and human existence. Theistic existentialism believes in the existence of God. According to them, at the deepest level of human existence we encounter God. God is often regarded to be the deepest subjective truth. Kierkegaard is regarded to be a most prominent theistic existentialist.

On the other hand, atheistic existentialism rejects the existence of God. According to it, human being is absolutely free and responsible for own action. He can create his own essence and also can define his existence. There is no God to guide him. Friedrich Nietzsche, one o the atheistic existentialist, has declared that 'God is dead'. Death of God leads to the rejection of a belief in cosmic or physical order and also to a rejection of absolute values themselves. Jean Paul Sartre, another atheistic existentialists, has stated that man is the creator of own values. He is absolutely free and nothing can determine his freedom, except him.

## 6.5 EXISTENCE PRECEDES ESSENCE

The central theme of existentialism is- existence precedes essence. According to them, first of all, man exists, encounter him, surges up the world and define him afterwards. The term 'existence' comes from the Latin word 'existere' which means 'to stand out'. In existentialism, the word 'existence' means a full, vital, self-conscious, responsible and growing life. It means stand beyond oneself. A man exists by being conscious that he exists and he becomes conscious of other things that are consciousness. Man is self-conscious being. All the existentialists agree in one point that existence cannot be conceived, it is to be experienced. It was philosopher Plato who regarded essence as prior to existence. For him, essence precedes existence. But existentialists reject the Platonic dictum 'essence precedes existence' and declare that 'existence precedes essence'. According to them, man is not born with an essence. It is his existence that creates his essence. Therefore, existence is prior to essence. Philosopher Jean Paul Sartre wrote in his book 'Existentialism and Humanism' that man has freedom by which he can create his essence. Man can create his essence by his free choices. Sartre and other existentialists reject Rene Descartes dictum 'cogito ergo sum' (I think therefore I exist). According to them, thinking is not possible before/without existence. Therefore, the very fact of human being is his existence which always comes first before essence.

## 6.6 SALIENT FEATURES OF EXISTENTIALISM

The salient features of existentialism are as follows-.

### 6.6.1 Existentialism emphasizes human existence

Existentialism emphasizes human existence in terms of man's vital experience in intimate relation with his body, the world and the society. It gives importance on individual uniqueness and primacy of existence. According to the existentialist, existence of the individual is the highest truth.

### 6.6.2 Existentialism Rejects Essentialism

The domain of essence started in philosophy from the time of Plato has been oriented by way of conceptualism where human existence was regarded as concept. Existentialism interested in giving explanation of the predominance of existence over essence. It rejects the primacy of essence and accepts the primacy of existence for giving meaning to human existence.

### 6.6.3 Existentialism gives importance on the Subjectivity of man

According to the existentialist, individuals' life is a totality of experiences, such as feeling, thinking, willing, which are subjective. They reject the naturalists' explanation of man as natural phenomena. Domain of naturalism, idealism and materialism reduce man to objects or to mere thought idea. But human experience can neither be reduced to thought nor to matter.

### 6.6.4 Existentialism lays Stress on Human Freedom and Responsibility

According to existentialism, man is free to do his choices and decisions. Individual's free choice and decision gives a meaning and

value to his life. He makes himself what he chooses to be. S?ren Kierkegaard, in this regard, believes that freedom lies at the root of every decision.

### 6.6.5 Individual's Moral Impulse is Based on Distinctive Ethical Affirmation

According to existentialism, individual's moral impulse is based on distinctive ethical affirmation. The existential affirmation of individual has its value only in authenticity. In Kierkegaard's philosophy, authentic person is called 'the single individual'. There are two modes of existence -authentic existence and inauthentic existence. Authentic existence is regarded as the highest level of subjectivity.

### 6.6.6 Existentialism does not aim at System - Building

Existentialism does not aim at system - building philosophy like Hegel. It gives importance on analysis of living experience of an individual with depth. It analyses dread, anguish, despair, hope, love etc.

### 6.6.7 Existentialism and Pessimism

By emphasizing the individual's concrete living experience in depth, existentialism tends towards pessimism. But the existentialist's pessimism is active, not passive. It challenges the obstacles of life and make active endeavors to overcome by which the individual can define his existence.

### 6.6.8 Existentialism strongly opposed the scientific philosophy and culture

With tremendous progress in science and technology, rapid industrialization and urbanization have taken place. This has given

rise to crowded towns in which individual are lost. Today, it is not the individual who chooses his end; rather all decisions are made by computer or statistical laws and data. Thus, the existentialists thought that science has made the value of man negligible.

## 6.7 CONCLUSION

Existentialism is known as both a branch of philosophy and also a movement in the history of philosophy which mainly concerned with the individual person existing in the world as well as all the problems he has faced in the path of life. According to existentialism, philosophy is a realization of one's existence or the problems and possibilities through which an individual has to cross in life. So, it rejects all the rationalistic explanation regarding human existence. Human existence is not a matter of explanation on the basis of reason. Rather it is a matter of realization. Therefore, existentialism emphasizes human existence in terms of subjectivity, not objectivity. Moreover, it also describes human existence in terms of freedom and responsibility. It is through freedom by which an individual defines what he is. According to the existentialists, existence is always prior and important than the essence.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** What is the subject matter of existentialism?

.....

.....

.....

**Q 2:** Do the existentialists believe in rationalistic explanation of human existence?

.....

.....

.....

**Q 3:** Write the name of one atheist existentialist philosopher.

.....

.....

.....

**Q 4:** At which century the movement of existentialism begun?

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.....

.....

**Q 5:** Mention the name of the philosopher who is associated with the concept of 'will to power'.

.....

.....

.....

**Q 6:** 'Essence precedes existence'- who is the supporter of this dictum?

.....

.....

.....



## 6.8 LET US SUM UP

- The existence of human being is a matter of realization. It is not a concept or idea as described by Plato. Therefore the existentialists reject the traditional analysis of human existence.
- Existentialism is movement raised in 20th century against essentialism, naturalism, rationalism and scientific culture. It mainly focuses on the study of meaning of life which is found only in subjectivity.
- Existentialism emphasizes human existence on the basis of subjectivity. It completely rejects the objective or rational analysis of human existence.

- According to existentialism, existence precedes essence. Existence is more important than essence. First of all, man exists in this world. Afterwards, he can define his essence.
- Existentialism is found in two distinct ways- one is theistic existentialism and another is atheistic existentialism. Kierkegaard, the father of existentialism, is known as a theist existentialist. On the other side, Sartre and Nietzsche are known as atheist existentialists.
- Though there are some distinctions among all the existentialists, but they agree in many regards. They all reject objective truth. They believe that truth lies in subjectivity. Similarly, the very fact of human existence can be understood in subjectivity.



## 6.9 FURTHER READINGS

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## 6.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** The subject matter of existentialism is to discuss about human existence.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** No. The existentialists don't believe in the rationalistic explanation of human existence.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** Jean Paul Sartre

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** The movement of existentialism was begun in 20th century.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** Friedrich Nietzsche

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** Plato



## 6.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short Questions:**

**Q. 1.** Who is known as the father of existentialism?

Q. 2. 'God is dead'- who said this?

Q. 3. Who declared existentialism as humanism?

Q. 4. What is the meaning of the term 'existence' in existentialism?

Q. 5. 'Cogito ergo sum'- who is the advocator of this dictum?

Q. 6. Mention the name of the philosopher who is associated with the problem of Being.

B. Short questions :

Q.1. Give an account of the history and development of existentialism.

Q. 2. Discuss how theism and atheism arise in existentialism.

Q. 3. What is the reason given by existentialism to reject scientific philosophy and culture?

Q. 4. Explain how existentialism rejects rational analysis of human existence.

C. Long questions

Q. 1. Discuss the salient features of existentialism in details.

Q. 2. Briefly discuss about the philosophy of six main existentialists philosopher.

Q. 3. Does existence precede essence? Explain.

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# UNIT 7: KIERKEGAARD

## UNIT STRUCTURE


7.1 Learning Objective

7.2. Introduction

7.3. Background of Kierkegaard Existentialism

7.4. Three Stages of Existential Transformation

7.5. Subjectivity

7.6. Conclusion

7.7. Let us sum up

7.8. Further Reading

7.9. Answer to check your progress

7.10. Model Question


## 7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Know the background of Kierkegaard's Existentialism
- Know how to identify three stages of Existential Transformation
- Explain the idea of Subjectivity

## 7.2 INTRODUCTION

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emphasizes individual existence, free will and responsibility in a world that has inherent meaning or purpose. It suggests that individuals create their own meaning through their choices and action. Soren Kierkegaard is widely regarded as the father of existentialism. He was a 19th century Danish philosopher and theologian whose writings explored themes of individual existence, authenticity and the meaning of life.

According to him, existentialism is a philosophy that emphasises the individual's freedom and responsibility in creating meaning and purpose in a world without an inherent meaning. It rejects abstract thinking and

focuses on the subjective lived experience of human existence including anxiety, dread and the leap of faith needed to embrace authentic self-hood. Kierkegaard generally focuses on individual existence, particularly religious existence as a process of becoming and for his emphasize on authenticity, commitment, responsibility, anxiety and dread.

## 7.3 BACKGROUND OF KIERKEGAARD'S EXISTENTIALISM

Soren Kierkegaard laid the groundwork for the philosophical movement by emphasizing the subjective nature of truth and the individual's responsibility for creating meaning in their lives. Kierkegaard's work explored themes of choice, faith, authenticity, and the meaning of existence, significantly influencing subsequent existentialist thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger. Here's a more detailed look at the background of Kierkegaard's existentialism-

1. **Reaction against Philosophical Systems**

   Kierkegaard rejected the prevailing philosophical systems of his time, particularly Hegelianism, which he felt was too abstract and detached from the lived experiences of individuals. He argued that philosophy should focus on the individual's subjective experience and their relationship with their own existence, rather than grand, universal theories.

2. **Emphasis on Subjectivity and Truth**

   Kierkegaard believed that truth is not something that can be objectively discovered through reason, but rather something that is discovered through individual choice and commitment. He distinguished between objective and subjective truth, emphasizing the importance of the individual's subjective experience in understanding the world.

3. **The Role of Choice and Responsibility**

   Kierkegaard highlighted the importance of individual choice and responsibility in shaping one's existence. He argued that each person is responsible for creating their own meaning and purpose in life.

**4. The Concept of Anxiety and Dread**

Kierkegaard explored the psychological states of anxiety and dread, which he saw as fundamental to the human experience. Anxiety, for Kierkegaard, is the feeling of being faced with the possibility of choosing between different paths in life, while dread is the experience of being overwhelmed by the weight of one's choices and responsibilities.

**5. The Stages of Existence**

Kierkegaard outlined three stages of existence- the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. The aesthetic stage is characterized by a focus on pleasure and immediate gratification, while the ethical stage involves a concern for moral principles and social norms. The religious stage, for Kierkegaard, involves a personal relationship with God and a commitment to faith.

**6. The Importance of Faith**

Kierkegaard's concept of faith was not about blind acceptance of dogma but about a personal and passionate commitment to religious truth. He argued that faith is a "leap of faith," a bold commitment to something that cannot be fully grasped or understood by reason.

**7. Influence on Later Existentialism**

Kierkegaard's ideas laid the groundwork for later existentialist thinkers who emphasized themes of freedom, responsibility, and the absurd. His work was particularly influential in the development of Christian existentialism, which sought to reconcile existentialist thought with Christian theology.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** What does it mean to be an individual?

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**Q 2:** What is the relationship between freedom and responsibility?

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**Q 3:** Why is aesthetic, ethical and religious life important?

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## 7.4 THREE STAGES OF EXISTENTIAL TRANSFORMATION

The three stages of an existential transformation, often linked to the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, are the Aesthetic, Ethical, and religious stages. These stages represent a progression in one's understanding of oneself and one's place in the world, moving from subjective experience to moral obligation and ultimately to a religious understanding of existence.

### 7.4.1 Aesthetic stage

This stage is characterized by a focus on subjective experience, pleasure, and immediate gratification. Individuals in this stage seek continuous enjoyment and stimulation, often avoiding commitments that might limit their freedom. This pursuit is driven by a desire to escape boredom and find meaning through transient experiences. By focusing on personal gratification, aesthetes often evade deeper responsibilities and commitments, leading to a life that lacks direction and purpose. To maintain their lifestyle, individuals may suppress deeper emotions and avoid situations that require vulnerability or long-term investment. Over time, the superficial nature of this lifestyle can lead to feelings of emptiness and despair, as the individual realizes that transient pleasures cannot provide lasting fulfillment. In connection to nihilism the aesthetic stage can lead to a form of existential nihilism, where the individual perceives life as inherently meaningless. This realization often results from the repetitive cycle of seeking pleasure without achieving lasting satisfaction. As Kierkegaard suggests, this despair can be a catalyst for transitioning to the next stage of development. Kierkegaard proposes that moving beyond the aesthetic stage involves embracing

the ethical stage, where individuals take responsibility for their actions and seek a life of purpose and commitment. This transition requires acknowledging the limitations of a pleasure-centered life and striving for deeper meaning through ethical living and personal growth.

Thus, the aesthetic stage is characterized by a focus on immediate gratification and avoidance of deeper responsibilities, which can ultimately lead to despair and a sense of meaninglessness. Recognizing these limitations is essential for personal development and the pursuit of a more fulfilling life.

### 7.4.2 Ethical Stage

The aesthetic stage is marked by a preoccupation with beauty, entertainment, and sensory enjoyment. It's a life devoted to pleasure for its own sake is art, music, romantic relationships, intellectual stimulation, or any pursuit that distracts from the deeper questions of life. The aesthetic individual avoids long-term commitments and responsibilities because they restrict freedom and create discomfort. For example- Someone who constantly seeks new experiences i.e. travel, parties, or casual relationships- without ever settling into stable or meaningful commitments.

While this stage is 'subjective', it is not deeply authentic. The person avoids confronting existential questions like- 'What is the purpose of my life? What do I believe in?' The aesthetic individual treats life as a canvas for enjoyment, but the engagement is surface-level it lacks depth, direction, or moral seriousness.

Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure- is a core trait here. But for Kierkegaard, this is not sustainable. Over time, pleasure becomes repetitive or loses its effect. The person may become bored, disillusioned, or empty, since they never anchor themselves in anything meaningful. Boredom is the root of all evil. Kierkegaard describes boredom as a form of existential despair that emerges when the aesthetic life fails to satisfy. The aesthetic life, lacking higher

purpose or meaning, often leads to nihilism is the sense that nothing really matters. Kierkegaard believes that when the aesthetic individual is forced to confront their inner emptiness, they fall into despair is a spiritual and emotional crisis. There are two reactions at this point:

- Remain in despair and continue escaping through distractions.
- Advance to the ethical stage by acknowledging the emptiness and seeking meaning through responsibility and moral commitment.

Kierkegaard often describes the aesthetic stage using irony and satire such as the character of 'A' in 'either/or', who articulates a beautifully refined life of pleasure but ends up admitting that his life is empty. This tragic irony shows that intellectual brilliance and aesthetic refinement cannot substitute for authentic existence.

### 7.4.3 Religious Stage

Kierkegaard's concept of the 'leap of faith' involves embracing belief in God without reliance on rational evidence. This leap is not grounded in empirical proof but is a subjective commitment to the divine, acknowledging that certain truths transcend human understanding.

### 7.4.4 Transcending Ethical Norms

In the religious stage, individuals recognize that ethical principles, while important, may not encompass the entirety of moral truth. This stage involves a personal relationship with God that can supersede conventional ethical norms, as exemplified by Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac is a command that defied ethical reasoning but was rooted in absolute faith.

### 7.4.5 Embracing Paradox and Subjectivity

Faith in the religious stage accepts the paradoxes inherent in religious belief, such as the divine becoming human. This

acceptance is not based on objective reasoning but on a subjective, inward passion that acknowledges the limitations of human logic in comprehending the divine.

### 7.4.6 Authentic Individuality

The religious stage emphasizes personal responsibility and authenticity. Individuals must confront their own despair and sinfulness, seeking redemption through a sincere relationship with God. This stage is not about adhering to societal religious norms but about an inward transformation and commitment.

Kierkegaard outlines a progression through three stages. Aesthetic Stage is characterized by the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of commitment. Ethical Stage is marked by a sense of duty and responsibility to societal norms and moral codes. Religious Stage is defined by a personal relationship with the divine, transcending both aesthetic desires and ethical obligations. Each stage represents a deeper level of self-understanding and existential commitment, culminating in the religious stage, where true meaning and purpose are found through faith.

The religious stage, according to Kierkegaard, is the highest form of existence, where individuals find authentic purpose through a personal relationship with God. This stage requires a leap of faith, embracing the paradoxes of belief and moving beyond the confines of aesthetic pleasure and ethical duty. It is a journey toward self-realization and spiritual fulfillment, grounded in the subjective experience of faith.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 4:** What is the primary focus of an individual in the aesthetic stage of existential development?

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**Q 5:** What significant shift takes place in the ethical stage during existential transformation?

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**Q 6:** In what ways does the religious stage differ from the aesthetic and ethical stages?

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## 7.5 SUBJECTIVITY

According to Soren Kierkegaard Subjectivity is truth and Truth is subjectivity- One of his most famous and central philosophical claims. For him, Subjectivity refers to the inner, lived experience of the individual- the passion, commitment and personal relationship one has to truth. It is not about objective facts or abstract system but about how deeply and authentically a person relates to those truths.

Kierkegaard's view on subjectivity, truth is not just objective knowledge knowing that God exists, or that life has meaning, is not enough if it doesn't affect how you live. For Kierkegaard, it's not what you know but how you relate to it. Subjective truth requires passion and commitment, a person must commit inwardly and wholeheartedly to what they believe, especially in matters of faith and existence. Faith is the highest form of subjectivity, in the religious stage, truth involves a leap of faith-believing in something absurd or paradoxical (like God becoming man) with full personal convocation. Subjectivity is essential to authentic existence, living authentically means making choices based on personal convocation, not societal norms or external systems.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 7:** What does it mean for truth to be subjective rather than objective?

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.....

**Q 8:** How does individual choice contribute to the development of an authentic self?

.....

.....

## 7.6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Soren Kierkegaard's philosophy centers on the individual's subjective relationship with existence, truth and God. True understanding and authentic existence come from a personal, inward journey marked by faith, choice and commitment. He believed that objective truths are important, but they can't address the deepest concerns of human life- like meaning, despair and the self.

Kierkegaard emphasized the primacy of individual responsibility over reliance on collective systems or societal norms. Central to his existential philosophy is the idea of the "leap of faith", which he considered essential for discovering personal meaning, particularly in one's relationship with God. He viewed human existence as a dynamic process, unfolding through three stages of life: the aesthetic (pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of commitment), the ethical (embrace of responsibility and moral choice), and the religious (a personal, passionate relationship with the divine, marked by faith and inwardness).

In short, Kierkegaard concluded that becoming a true self requires passionately embracing the paradoxes of existence and ultimately choosing faith not as proof, but as a personal, inward commitment.



## 7.7 LET US SUM UP

- Soren Kierkegaard is regarded as the father of existentialism, a philosophy centered on individual existence, freedom, and responsibility.
- Existentialism asserts that life has no inherent meaning; individuals must create their own purpose through choice and action.
- Kierkegaard rejected abstract systems like Hegelianism, advocating instead for a focus on personal experience and subjectivity.

- His philosophy stresses the subjective nature of truth, arguing that how a person relates to truth is more important than objective knowledge.
- Individual choice and responsibility are central to Kierkegaard's idea of authentic existence.
- He explored anxiety and dread as essential human experiences, emerging from the freedom to choose and the burden of responsibility.
- Kierkegaard described three stages of life or existential transformation: aesthetic, ethical, and religious.
- The aesthetic stage focuses on personal pleasure, entertainment, and avoidance of commitment.
- Individuals in the aesthetic stage often face despair, due to a lack of deeper meaning in life.
- The ethical stage is characterized by a commitment to moral values, social duties, and self-responsibility.
- In the ethical stage, individuals accept responsibility for their actions and seek to live meaningfully within a moral framework.
- The religious stage involves a leap of faith, committing to a relationship with God and accepting paradoxes beyond rational understanding.
- This stage transcends both pleasure and ethical duty by embracing subjective, inward faith.
- Faith is a personal, passionate commitment rather than blind adherence to doctrine.
- Kierkegaard viewed religious faith as believing in something inherently paradoxical (e.g., God becoming man).
- He claimed that "subjectivity is truth and truth is subjectivity" - truth must be lived, not merely known.
- Authentic living requires passion, inwardness, and a break from external norms and societal expectations.
- The self is not a static being but a dynamic process of becoming through choice and commitment.
- Kierkegaard argued that objective truths, while useful, cannot address human questions of meaning, despair, or selfhood.
- His idea of "leap of faith" represents the courage to embrace uncertainty and paradox in pursuit of true meaning.

- He emphasized that becoming a true self demand facing anxiety, making moral decisions, and surrendering to faith.
- Kierkegaard's work heavily influenced later existentialist thinkers, such as Sartre and Heidegger.
- He also laid the foundation for Christian existentialism, which merges existential thought with religious faith.
- Kierkegaard insisted that philosophy should serve the individual's inward journey, not universal or abstract systems.
- In conclusion, Kierkegaard believed that true selfhood is achieved by moving from aesthetic pleasure to ethical responsibility, and finally to religious faith is a personal journey of meaning through subjective truth.



## 7.8 FURTHER READINGS


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## 7.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** To be an individual means to recognize oneself as a self-aware being responsible for creating meaning and purpose in one's

own life. Kierkegaard emphasized the subjective nature of existence, where an individual must make authentic choices and accept the responsibility that comes with those choices, rather than conforming to universal systems or societal norms.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** Freedom, according to Kierkegaard, involves the ability to make choices about one's own existence. However, this freedom inherently carries the burden of responsibility. Every individual must not only choose freely but must also take full responsibility for the consequences of those choices, thus shaping the course of their own life meaningfully.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** In Soren Kierkegaard's existential philosophy, the aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages represent different ways in which individuals engage with life and existence. These stages are important because they reflect the progression of human development toward a deeper, more authentic understanding of life and self.

- **Aesthetic Life:** This is the first stage, where individuals seek pleasure, sensory experiences, and immediate gratification. It is characterized by a pursuit of personal enjoyment without a deeper sense of commitment or meaning. While this stage may seem attractive due to the instant rewards it provides, it lacks long-term fulfillment and leads to despair and emptiness because it does not provide any deeper sense of purpose.
- **Ethical Life:** The second stage represents a shift from immediate pleasure to a more responsible, moral way of living. In this stage, individuals are guided by a sense of duty, ethical principles, and societal norms. It emphasizes responsibility, accountability, and making choices that align with a greater sense of justice and personal integrity. While this stage provides a sense of stability and meaning, it may also be seen as restrictive and lacking the freedom that comes with the aesthetic stage.
- **Religious Life:** The final and most significant stage, according to Kierkegaard, is the religious stage, where the individual makes a leap of faith and establishes a personal relationship with God. This

stage involves commitment to religious truths that cannot be fully grasped by reason, embracing the paradoxes and mysteries of faith. It is characterized by a sense of humility, surrender, and devotion. Kierkegaard believed that this stage is the highest form of existence, as it allows the individual to transcend both personal desires and societal expectations, finding a deeper meaning in the connection with the divine.

These stages are important because they highlight the existential journey of human beings in their search for purpose and meaning. Each stage reflects a different response to life's challenges, with the religious stage offering the potential for true authenticity and fulfillment. Through these stages, Kierkegaard suggests that individuals must navigate the complexities of existence, making choices that align with their values and embracing responsibility for their lives.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** In the Aesthetic stage, individuals focus on subjective experience, pleasure, and immediate gratification, often seeking personal enjoyment without considering broader moral implications.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** In the Ethical stage, individuals shift towards a more structured and moral way of living, beginning to care about values, morals, social norms, duties, and obligations, and striving to live in accordance with them.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** The Religious stage differs from the Aesthetic and Ethical stages in that it involves a deeper engagement with self and the world, often requiring a leap of faith or recognition of a higher power or transcendent reality, providing a foundation for meaning, purpose, and moral obligation.

**Ans to Q. No. 7:** For Kierkegaard, truth being subjective means that truth is not just about objective facts or abstract knowledge but about how deeply and personally an individual relates to those truths. It involves the inner, lived experience, passion, commitment, and how it impacts one's life.

**Ans to Q. No. 8:** The role of individual choice in becoming an authentic self is crucial. Living authentically means making choices based on per-

sonal conviction, not simply following societal norms or external systems. It involves inward commitment to one's beliefs and faith, especially in existential matters.



## 7.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short Questions:**

**Q. 1.** Who is regarded as the father of existentialism?

**Q. 2.** What are the core principles emphasized by existentialism?

**Q. 3.** What are the three stages involved in existential transformation?

**Q. 4.** What are the defining characteristics of the aesthetic stage?

**(B) Short questions Answers in about (100-150words)**

**Q. 1.** What is the meaning of existentialism?

**Q. 2.** What are the three stages of existential transformation according to existentialist thought?

**Q. 3.** How does Kierkegaard interpret the relationship between subjectivity and truth?

**(C) Long question**

**Q. 1.** Explain Kierkegaard's three stages of life- the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. How does each stage show a deeper understanding of the self and life's meaning?

**Q. 2.** Analyse Kierkegaard's assertion that 'subjectivity is truth.' What does he mean by 'subjective truth' and why is it essential for achieving authentic existence and genuine faith?

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# UNIT 8: SARTRE'S CONCEPT OF MAN

## UNIT STRUCTURE


8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2. Introduction

8.3. Sartre's Concept of Man Existence

8.4. Being-in-itself (Être-en-soi)

8.5. Being-for-itself (Être-pour-soi)

8.6. Being-for-others (Être-pour-autrui)

8.7. Subjectivity

8.8. Consciousness

8.9. Facticity

8.10. Givenness

8.11. Being (Être)

8.12. Transphenomenality of Being

8.13. Nihilation of the In-itself

8.14. Freedom

8.15. Responsibility

8.16. Anguish

8.17. Authentic Existence

8.18. Let us sum up

8.19. Further Readings

8.20. Answers to check your progress

8.21. Model Questions


## 8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Explain the Core Idea of Existentialism
- Know the differentiate Types of Being
- Analyse the Role of Subjectivity and Consciousness
- Examine the Relationship Between Freedom and Responsibility

- Describe the Emotional and Ethical Dimensions
- Know how to apply Existentialist Thought to Real-Life Contexts

## 8.2 INTRODUCTION

One of the most influential representatives of existentialism in the 20th century was the French philosopher, author and public intellectual Jean-Paul Sartre. Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasises personal autonomy, decision-making and the purpose of life. Sartre's interpretation of existentialism is referred to as atheistic existentialism because he held that since there is no God, people must establish their own morals and purpose in life.

The notion that "existence precedes essence" is among Sartre's most well-known concepts. Accordingly, a human being creates their identity by their choices and activities after initially being in the world. Humans are not born with a predetermined role or nature, in contrast to a chair or tool, which are produced with a certain purpose. Each person is responsible for creating their own identity. Put another way, we have to create meaning because we are not born with it. Sartre thought that because of this freedom, every individual is entirely in charge of their own destiny. This duty is not simple; it may cause distress or worry. People frequently lie to themselves in an attempt to avoid this obligation. This was referred to by Sartre as "bad faith" (maisse foi in French). To avoid the stress of having to make a decision, someone can, for instance, act as though they had no options in a given circumstance. However, Sartre contends that even in cases where it appears difficult, we always have a choice.

We live in connection to others, according to Sartre as well. He clarified that we begin to view ourselves through the eyes of others when we become aware that they are seeing us. This demonstrates how our social environment affects our freedom and can cause emotions like pride or shame. Authenticity is another fundamental concept in Sartre's philosophy. Accepting our freedom and accepting full responsibility for our acts without deceiving ourselves are essential components of living an

authentic life. It all comes down to living bravely and being truthful with ourselves. Sartre's existentialism holds that although life has no set purpose, each individual has the ability to give it purpose by free will and responsible behaviour.

## 8.3 SARTRE'S CONCEPT OF MAN EXISTENCE

Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy centres around the powerful assertion that "existence precedes essence." This phrase captures the core of his concept of man and human existence. Traditionally, Western philosophy and theology have often maintained that the essence or nature of a human being is given before or independently of one's existence. However, Sartre reverses this relationship. For him, there is no predefined human essence; rather, individuals come into existence first and it is through living, acting and making choices that they define themselves. Sartre begins with the assumption that there is no God to create or assign a purpose to human life. If God does not exist, then there is no divine blueprint or eternal idea of what a human should be. As a result, man appears first, thrown into the world, and only afterward defines himself. Unlike objects or tools-a knife, for example, which is made with a specific function in mind-human beings are born without any predetermined purpose. It is only through our freedom to act that we begin to shape who we are. This freedom, however, is both liberating and burdensome. Since we are the authors of our own lives, we carry the full weight of responsibility for what we become. We cannot shift the blame for our failures onto fate, divine will or human nature. Sartre emphasizes that even in limiting circumstances, we still have the freedom to choose our response. In this radical freedom lies the dignity of human existence, but also the root of anguish and anxiety. To be human, according to Sartre, is to be constantly aware of the possibilities before us and to be anxious about the consequences of our choices-not just for ourselves, but for humanity as a whole. Since there are no universal values given a priori, each of our choices affirms what we believe others should also choose, thus imposing a moral responsibility on each individual.

Furthermore, Sartre distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic ways of living. Authenticity involves accepting our freedom, recognizing our responsibility, and living in accordance with values we have chosen for ourselves. In contrast, inauthenticity or what Sartre calls "bad faith" (mauvaise foi), occurs when individuals deceive themselves by pretending, they are not free, by adopting roles or identities imposed by society or others or by hiding behind excuses. Bad faith is a form of self-deception in which we act as if we are bound by an essence we did not choose, thereby evading responsibility for our actions. Sartre's concept of man highlights the fluidity, creativity and anxiety of human existence. We are not static beings with a fixed nature; we are dynamic, self-making projects. This existential position places human freedom and responsibility at the centre of philosophical inquiry, challenging us to live consciously, authentically, and with full awareness of the gravity of our choices. For Sartre, it is precisely in this freedom and burden that the true meaning of human existence is found.

## 8.4 BEING-IN-ITSELF (ÊTRE-EN-SOI)

In Sartre's philosophy, Being-in-itself refers to the way non-living things or objects exist in the world. These are things like a rock, a chair, a tree, or a table. They simply exist as they are, without any thought, feeling, or awareness. Sartre says they are complete and fixed. A rock, for example, does not try to change itself, think about its purpose, or reflect on its own being. It just is, solid, unmoving and without any question about itself. Being-in-itself is also passive. It does not act or make choices. It has no consciousness, and therefore, it cannot say "I am" or "I want." It is full of being in the sense that it is already what it is-there is no gap between what it is and what it could be. It cannot imagine anything, it cannot desire anything, and it cannot become something else. Sartre uses this idea of Being-in-itself to contrast it with human existence, which he calls Being-for-itself. Unlike objects, human beings are not fixed or complete. We are always in the process of becoming, always aware of what we are and what we could be. We can imagine different futures, make choices, and try to

change ourselves. This is possible because humans have consciousness, and consciousness introduces the idea of lack-we feel we are not what we want to be yet. So, Being-in-itself is important in Sartre's philosophy because it helps to show how different human beings are from things. Objects are simply there, without freedom or awareness. But humans, with consciousness, have the power to reflect, choose, and change and this gives rise to freedom and also to responsibility.

## 8.5 BEING-FOR-ITSELF (ÊTRE-POUR-SOI)

Being-for-itself is a term Sartre uses to describe the way human beings exist. It refers to our consciousness-our ability to think, reflect, and be aware of ourselves and the world around us. Unlike objects such as a rock or a chair (which Sartre calls Being-in-itself), human beings are not fixed or complete. We are always changing, growing, and trying to become something more than what we are right now. Being-for-itself means that we are aware of our existence. We can ask, "Who am I?" or "What do I want to become?" This makes us different from things that cannot think or make choices. We are never just what we are in the present moment-we are always in the process of becoming something else. For example, a student is not just a student; they are also someone trying to become a teacher, an artist, or something more in the future. This kind of being is defined by lack or absence, because we are always reaching for what we are not yet. We are not complete, and this gives us freedom to imagine new possibilities. But this freedom also creates responsibility, because we must choose our own path in life. Nobody else can do it for us. Because of this freedom and responsibility, we often feel anxiety or worry. Sartre says this is a natural part of human life. We are free to make choices, but we are also responsible for what we choose. This can be a heavy burden, but it is also what makes human life meaningful. So, Being-for-itself shows that human beings are not just "things", we are free, conscious, and always becoming who we are through our choices.

## 8.6 BEING-FOR-OTHERS (ÊTRE-POUR-AUTRUI)

Being-for-others is a term Sartre uses to explain how we experience ourselves when we are seen by other people. It means that we are not only aware of ourselves from inside, but also become aware of how others see us. This changes how we feel and how we act. Sartre gives a well-known example to explain this idea: Imagine you are peeking through a keyhole, thinking no one is watching. You are focused only on what you are doing. But suddenly, you hear footsteps and realise someone is watching you. At that moment, you feel shame. Why? Because now you see yourself as the other person sees you. You are no longer just a subject but you feel like an object under someone else's gaze. This feeling shows what Being-for-others means. When others look at us, we become aware of ourselves from the outside. We feel judged or observed. We may start to act differently or try to control how others see us. This can lead to problems in relationships, because other people may try to define who we are, and we may resist being seen in a certain way. Sartre says this creates conflict and tension between people. We want to be free, but we also care about how others see us. At the same time, we do the same to others-we judge or label them. This creates a constant push and pull in human relationships.

## 8.7 SUBJECTIVITY

Subjectivity is one of the most important ideas in Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy. By subjectivity, Sartre means that each person is the centre of their own experience, and it is through this experience that they give meaning to life. There is no fixed truth or purpose that comes from outside-like from God, religion, or tradition. Instead, meaning comes from the individual's own choices, thoughts, and actions. Sartre famously said that "existence precedes essence." This means that people are not born with a fixed nature or purpose. We first exist, and only later, through what we do, we decide who we are. In this process, our subjectivity plays the key role. It is through our own consciousness that we understand the world, make decisions, and create our values. This does not mean Sartre supports selfishness or

chaos. He is not saying that anything goes or that people can do whatever they want without thinking. Instead, he talks about a reflective subjectivity and a deep, thoughtful awareness of our own freedom and the weight of our choices. When we choose something, we are not only choosing for ourselves but also setting an example for others. This is why Sartre says that we are responsible not just for our own lives but for all humanity. In Sartre's view, there is no moral law written in the sky. There is no universal rulebook. Instead, each person must choose their own values and live according to them. This can feel frightening, because we cannot blame anyone else for our mistakes. There is no one to guide us and no God, no destiny, no fixed human nature. But at the same time, this gives us real freedom to live meaningful lives. This freedom also brings anguish or anxiety. When we realise that we are free and responsible for everything we do, it can feel overwhelming. But this anguish is not something bad-it is a sign that we are fully human, aware of our responsibility. Only when we accept this and live according to our own freely chosen values can we live authentically. Subjectivity, then, is not just about personal opinions. It is about being aware, responsible, and committed to living a life that we create ourselves. Sartre believes that this kind of subjectivity is the foundation of human dignity. It is what makes us different from objects or machines. It is what gives us the power to change, grow, and shape our world.

## 8.8 CONSCIOUSNESS

In Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy, consciousness plays a central role. He does not think of consciousness as a fixed thing, like a part of the body or a container for thoughts. Instead, Sartre describes it as a dynamic process. This means consciousness is always active and moving-it is not something that simply "is," but something that is always doing something. Sartre says that consciousness is always intentional. This means it is always directed toward something else. For example, if you are thinking, you are always thinking about something. If you are feeling sad, you are sad about something. You are never just "sad" or "thinking" in general. So, consciousness is always connected to the world, to objects, ideas, or people

outside of itself. Sartre also explains that consciousness is empty by itself. It has no fixed content or substance. It is not like a box filled with ideas. Instead, it only has meaning because it reaches out to the world and gives meaning to what it sees or experiences. For Sartre, this is what makes consciousness special and it is not made of things, but it is the activity that reveals things. Because consciousness is not a fixed thing, Sartre says it is made of nothingness. He means that consciousness can separate itself from what it experiences. For example, you can say, "I am not happy with my life," or "I am not my job." This ability to say "no" or to negate something shows that consciousness brings in a space of freedom. We are not stuck in what we are-we can imagine new possibilities and try to become something else.

This is why Sartre says consciousness is the mark of Being-for-itself. Human beings, unlike objects, can think about themselves, reflect and change. We are never just what we are now-we are always becoming something else. Through consciousness, we can dream, plan, create, and even question our own identity. Because of this, Sartre believes that freedom and responsibility come from consciousness. Since we are aware of ourselves and can choose how to act, we are completely free to shape our lives. But this also means we are fully responsible for our actions. We cannot blame others or the world for what we do. Our consciousness makes us responsible because we are the ones choosing how to live.

## 8.9 FACTICITY

In Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy, facticity refers to the facts of our existence that we do not choose and cannot change. These are the conditions or limits that come with being born and living in the world. Examples of facticity include things like your birthplace, your family, your language, your physical body, your past experiences and the situation you find yourself in. For instance, you do not choose where you are born, what language you speak, or your genetic traits. These facts simply exist, and they shape some parts of your life. Sartre calls these facts "givens" or "brute facts" because they are raw realities of life that you cannot control.

However, even though these facts limit us in some ways, Sartre emphasizes that they do not determine who we are or what we become. This is a very important idea in his existentialist philosophy. While we have certain limits, we still have freedom to choose how we respond to those facts. For example, consider someone born into poverty. Poverty is a fact, a part of their facticity. They did not choose to be born poor, and they cannot change that fact. But how they live their life in response to poverty-whether they feel defeated, whether they work hard to improve their condition, whether they create meaning in their life despite poverty-is up to them. Their freedom lies in how they interpret and act upon these facts. This shows that facticity and freedom exist together. Facticity is about the limits of our situation, while freedom is about how we go beyond those limits. Sartre uses the idea of transcendence to explain this. Transcendence means going beyond or rising above facticity through our choices and actions.

Life is full of tension because we always live between these two forces-our facticity, which is fixed and our freedom, which is open and limitless. We cannot escape our facticity, but we are never fully determined by it. This tension is the reality of human existence. In practical terms, this means that while we cannot change many facts about our lives, we always have the power to decide what those facts mean to us and how we live with them. Sartre believes this is what makes us truly human. We are not just passive victims of our circumstances. Instead, we have the power to give our lives meaning through our choices.

## 8.10 GIVENNESS

In Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy, givenness is a concept closely related to facticity. It refers to the things and conditions in life that are simply given to us without our choice. These are the aspects of reality that we cannot control or change. Examples of givenness include the natural world around us, our own body, our past experiences and the external situations we find ourselves in. For example, you did not choose your physical body, the country you were born in, or many events from your past. These things are simply there; they are part of the background of your life. Sartre calls

these "givens" because they are presented to us-they are facts or conditions that exist before we start making choices. Although givenness forms the setting or environment of our lives, Sartre points out that it does not take away our freedom. We are free not because we can change or remove all the things that are given to us, but because we have the power to decide how we react to them. This is very important. Imagine two people who both lose their jobs. This event is a given-it happens to them without their choice. But one person might feel hopeless and give up, while the other might use it as an opportunity to learn new skills or start a new career. The event itself is the same for both, but their attitudes and responses are different. Sartre says that it is this ability to choose our attitude toward the givens of life that shows our freedom.

This means that freedom does not mean having control over everything. Instead, it means that we can always decide how to face or interpret what life gives us. We can choose meaning, purpose, and action, even in difficult or limiting situations. Sartre also explains that givenness is not something we can escape. It is part of the reality we live in and it forms the context in which freedom happens. Just like a stage sets the scene for a play, givenness sets the scene for our actions. We cannot rewrite the stage, but we can decide how to perform on it. In this way, givenness shows the balance between limitation and freedom in human life. We are not completely free to do anything we want without limits, but neither are we prisoners of our circumstances. Instead, our freedom is always exercised within the context of what is given.

## 8.11 BEING (ÊTRE)

In Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy, the concept of Being (Être) is very important. Sartre explains that there are two main kinds of being: Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself. These help us understand the difference between things that simply exist and human beings who are aware of their existence. First, Being-in-itself refers to the way objects and things exist. This kind of being is solid, complete and unchanging. For example, a rock or a chair exists as it is-it does not think or change itself. Being-in-itself is full of being,

but it has no awareness. It simply exists without questioning or reflecting. It is passive and fixed. On the other hand, Being-for-itself is the kind of being that belongs to human beings and consciousness. It is very different from Being-in-itself because it is open, reflective, and always changing. Human beings are aware of themselves; they can think about who they are and who they want to become. Being-for-itself means that people are not complete or fixed; they are always in the process of becoming something new. This kind of being is connected to freedom, because humans can choose their actions and change their lives. Sartre also introduces the idea of Being-for-others, which is the way our self-awareness changes when we realise that other people are looking at us. When someone else sees us, we become aware that we are an object in their world. This changes how we see ourselves. Being-for-others is important because it shows how relationships with other people affect our sense of self.

Together, these three concepts help Sartre explain the full experience of existence. Being-in-itself is the world of things. Being-for-itself is human consciousness and freedom. Being-for-others is how we exist in relation to other people. Sartre is especially interested in human being because humans are different from objects. Through human subjectivity-our ability to think, feel, and choose and we interpret the world around us. We do not just exist in the world; we actively make sense of it and change it through our actions. For Sartre, the most important kind of being is human being, because only humans have the power to understand themselves and create meaning. Our existence is not fixed like a rock's; it is flexible and open to change. By understanding these kinds of being, Sartre helps us see what it means to be human. We are not just things that exist; we are beings with freedom, awareness, and the ability to shape our own lives and the world around us. This idea is at the heart of Sartre's existentialism.

## 8.12 TRANSPHENOMENALITY OF BEING

In Sartre's philosophy, the idea of trans phenomenality of being is very important. This concept means that being is more than just what appears to our senses or consciousness. To understand this, we need to

first know what "phenomena" means. Phenomena are the things as they appear to us-what we see, hear, feel, or experience. Sartre argues against a philosophy called idealism, which says that being is only ideas or appearances in our mind. Idealism suggests that what we experience is the only reality. But Sartre disagrees. He says that being exists beyond these appearances-there is more to reality than what we directly experience or think about. This is where the term trans phenomenality comes in. "Trans" means beyond or across, and "phenomenality" means the realm of appearances or phenomena. So, trans phenomenality means that being goes beyond appearances. Even though consciousness can experience things, the full reality of what exists is never completely shown in these experiences. For example, when you look at a tree, you see its shape, colour, and texture. But the tree's being is not just what appears to you. There is more to the tree's existence than what you can see or understand. The tree exists independently of your perception of it. Sartre calls this the difference between the being-in-itself (the tree's full reality) and the appearance of the tree to your consciousness. Sartre also says that consciousness always intends or points toward being and we are always aware of something beyond ourselves. But this awareness can never fully capture the whole reality of what we perceive. Being is always richer and deeper than the limited way it appears to us. This distinction is very important in Sartre's overall philosophy, or ontology (the study of being). It shows that while we live in a world of experiences and appearances, the true reality and being itself is more than these appearances. This means our knowledge and perception have limits. We must accept that the world has aspects that are beyond what we can fully understand or describe.

## 8.13 NIHILATION OF THE IN-ITSELF

In Sartre's philosophy, the idea of nihilation of the in-itself is very important to understanding human freedom. To explain it simply, nihilation means creating a "nothingness" or gap between what exists (Being-in-itself) and what we want or imagine. Being-in-itself refers to things that just exist as they are, like a rock or a chair. These things do not change

themselves, and they don't have any awareness. They simply are. But human beings are different because we have consciousness, and consciousness can introduce "nothingness" into the world. This means that through our awareness, we can say "no" to what is, or imagine what is not yet there. For example, if you say, "I am not a good writer," you are doing something special. You are negating or rejecting a current fact about yourself. You create a space between who you are now and who you want to become. This is the act of nihilation-you separate yourself from your current state (the in-itself) by introducing a "no" or a gap. This gap is important because it allows you to think about what could be different. You are not stuck in your present condition. You can imagine new possibilities, set new goals, and choose different actions. This power to say "no" to what is and imagine something else is the foundation of human freedom. Without nihilation, we would be like objects, fixed and unable to change. But because of this ability to create nothingness or negation, we can always move beyond our current state. We are free to decide who we want to be, not just who we are. At the same time, this freedom brings challenges. Because we can reject our current state and imagine other possibilities, we also feel anxiety or responsibility. We are responsible for choosing our path, and this choice can be difficult. The nothingness we create through nihilation opens the door to freedom but also to uncertainty and moral responsibility.

## 8.14 FREEDOM

Freedom is the most important idea in Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy. For Sartre, to be human means to be radically free. This means that freedom is not just something we have sometimes-it is the very condition of our existence. We cannot escape it. Sartre says that we are "condemned to be free." This means that even though we did not choose to be born or to exist, we are still fully responsible for everything we do in life. There is no one else to blame-no God, no fate, no fixed rules that tell us exactly what to do. We alone are responsible for our actions and who we become. This kind of freedom is different from just doing whatever we want. It is not about doing

anything without thinking. Instead, it is the inability to avoid making choices. Every moment of our life, we must choose and even if we try to avoid it. For example, if someone refuses to make a decision, that refusal itself is a choice. We are always choosing, and through these choices, we define ourselves. Because there are no fixed values or eternal truths given to us, Sartre believes that people must create meaning in their lives. This can feel scary because it means there is no guidebook or map. But it also means we have the power to decide what is important and who we want to be. Sartre's idea of freedom is very empowering, because it puts us in charge of our own lives. But it is also demanding and difficult. Being free means we must accept full responsibility for our actions and their consequences. We cannot blame others or external forces for our choices. This freedom also leads to feelings of anguish, anxiety and sometimes loneliness, because it is a heavy burden to be fully responsible for ourselves. But Sartre thinks this is the price of being truly human. It is only through this freedom that we can live authentically-by accepting our freedom and making choices honestly, rather than hiding from it.

## 8.15 RESPONSIBILITY

In Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy, responsibility goes hand in hand with freedom. Because humans are radically free, we are also fully responsible for everything we do. Sartre says, "We are responsible for everything we do." This responsibility is not limited to just our actions but also includes the values and meanings we choose to live by. Since Sartre rejects the idea of God or any fixed moral law, he believes there is no universal rulebook that tells us what is right or wrong. Instead, every person must create their own values through their choices. When we decide how to act, we are also deciding what is important and what kind of person we want to be. In this way, our responsibility is very broad-it includes not only what we do but also the kind of world we help create by our choices. This means we cannot blame fate, society, or even our nature for what we do. We cannot say, "I did this because I was born that way," or "It's because of my environment." Sartre insists that these are just excuses to avoid facing

our freedom and responsibility. We are the only ones who can take ownership of our lives and our actions. Because this responsibility is so absolute, it can feel very heavy and difficult. Sartre calls this feeling anguish. Anguish comes from realizing that we alone are responsible, and there is no one else to blame if we make mistakes or fail. This can be scary, but Sartre also sees it as the basis for authentic living. When we accept our responsibility, we live honestly and fully. We stop hiding behind excuses or pretending we are not free. Living with responsibility means understanding that our actions matter-not only for ourselves but also for others and for the kind of world we build. Every choice reflects who we are and what we believe in. This awareness can be challenging, but it also gives our lives meaning.

## 8.16 ANGUISH

In Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy, anguish is a deep emotional feeling that comes from realizing our radical freedom and total responsibility. It is the painful awareness that we alone are responsible for everything we choose and do in life. There are no outside rules, no divine guidance, and no fixed values to follow. We cannot rely on fate, tradition, or human nature to decide for us. Everything depends on us-and this realization creates anguish. Sartre gives an example to explain this feeling. Imagine standing at the edge of a high cliff. You look down and suddenly realise that nothing is physically stopping you from jumping. Of course, you probably don't want to jump, but the fact that you could jump if you chose to shows how free you are. That moment of awareness-that you are not held back by anything except your own decision-brings a strange fear. This fear is not just about falling. It's about being free to make a life-or-death choice. This is what Sartre means by anguish. Anguish is not a sign of weakness. For Sartre, it is a sign of honesty and authenticity. When we feel anguish, it means we truly understand our freedom and take it seriously. We are not hiding behind excuses or blaming others for our choices. We are facing the truth that we must decide for ourselves-and that our decisions matter. Anguish also comes from knowing that our choices affect not only us, but also others. When we

choose a value or a way of life, we are saying it is good-not just for us, but for people in general. This adds more weight to our responsibility and deepens our anguish. However, Sartre does not see anguish as something to avoid. Instead, he believes it is a necessary part of being truly human. If we never feel anguish, it might mean we are not fully aware of our freedom or that we are hiding from it. Only by accepting our anguish can we live authentically.

## 8.17 AUTHENTIC EXISTENCE

In Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy, authentic existence means living a life where you fully accept your freedom, responsibility and individuality. To live authentically is to be honest with yourself and to take full ownership of your actions and choices. Sartre believes that human beings are not born with a fixed identity or purpose. Instead, we create who we are through our decisions, behaviours, and values. There is no higher power or set of rules telling us what we should become. That means we are free-but this freedom also brings the burden of responsibility. Authentic living means not running away from that burden, but facing it with courage. When we live authentically, we act based on values that we choose for ourselves. We do not simply follow others, obey social expectations blindly, or blame fate or circumstances for our lives. We say, "This is who I choose to be," and we live with that decision. The opposite of authentic existence is inauthenticity, or what Sartre calls bad faith. Bad faith happens when we lie to ourselves-when we deny our freedom by pretending that we have no choice. For example, someone might say, "I can't do anything because I'm just a poor person," or "That's not my fault, it's just how the world is." In these moments, they are avoiding responsibility and acting as if they are a thing, not a free human being. Sartre teaches that even though authentic life is difficult, it is the only way to truly respect our human nature. It requires being aware, honest, and active in shaping our life. We must make conscious choices and stand by them, knowing that we are creating meaning through our actions.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** What does Sartre mean by the phrase "existence precedes essence"?

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**Q 2:** What is Being-in-itself (Être-en-soi) according to Sartre?

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**Q 3:** How does Being-for-itself (Être-pour-soi) differ from Being-in-itself?

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**Q 4:** What is Being-for-others (Être-pour-autrui) in Sartre's philosophy?

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**Q 5:** What role does subjectivity play in Sartre's existentialism?

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**Q 6:** What does Sartre mean by "bad faith" (mauvaise foi)?

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## 8.18 LET US SUM UP

- Jean-Paul Sartre, a key figure of 20th-century existentialism, argues that human beings must create their own meaning in a world without a divine or pre-given purpose.
- His central idea, "existence precedes essence," means that humans exist first and then define themselves through their actions and choices, unlike objects that are made with a fixed purpose.

- Sartre distinguishes between different modes of being: Being-in-itself (non-conscious objects that simply are), Being-for-itself (human consciousness which is dynamic and reflective), and Being-for-others (the way we become aware of ourselves through the gaze and judgment of others).
- Human consciousness is intentional, always directed toward something, and has the capacity to separate itself from what is-this brings about freedom, as we can imagine and pursue new possibilities.
- While we are thrown into situations we did not choose (our facticity or givenness), we still have the freedom to decide how to respond, and this defines our individual responsibility.
- Sartre emphasizes that freedom is unavoidable-we are "condemned to be free" and must take responsibility for everything we choose, with no excuses based on fate or nature.
- This total freedom results in anguish-a deep emotional response to knowing we are fully responsible for ourselves and, by extension, setting an example for humanity through our actions.
- Authentic existence, for Sartre, is about accepting our freedom and responsibility, living truthfully without self-deception (bad faith), and creating meaning in a world where nothing is predetermined.



## 8.19 FURTHER READINGS

1) Sartre, J.-P. (1943). *Being and Nothingness* (H. Barnes, Trans.). Routledge.
(Original work published in French as L'Être et le Néant)
2) Sartre, J.-P. (1946). *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (C. Macomber, Trans.). Yale University Press.
3) Flynn, T. R. (2006). *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
4) Warnock, M. (1970). *Existentialism. Oxford University Press.*
5) Reynolds, J. (2006). *Understanding Existentialism*. Acumen Publishing.

6) Cooper, D. E. (1999). *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*. Blackwell Publishers.

## 8.20 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** It means that human beings exist first and then define themselves through actions, rather than being born with a fixed purpose or nature.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** Being-in-itself refers to non-conscious objects that simply exist, like rocks or chairs, which are complete and unchanging.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** Being-for-itself describes human consciousness, which is aware, incomplete, and always becoming through choices and self-reflection.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** It refers to how a person becomes aware of themselves as an object when perceived by others, influencing their sense of self.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** Subjectivity is central; individuals create meaning and values through personal experiences, choices, and responsibility.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** Bad faith is self-deception where a person denies their freedom and responsibility by pretending, they are bound by external factors.

**Ans to Q. No. 7:** Consciousness enables humans to reflect, negate, and choose, making them free and responsible for shaping their lives.

**Ans to Q. No. 8:** Facticity refers to the unchangeable facts of life, like birth or past events, which limit us but do not determine who we are.

**Ans to Q. No. 9:** Givenness refers to aspects of life that are presented to us without choice, forming the backdrop against which freedom operates.

**Ans to Q. No. 10:** Being distinguishes between objects (Being-in-itself) and humans (Being-for-itself), highlighting human freedom and consciousness.

**Ans to Q. No. 11:** It means that reality exists beyond what appears to consciousness; being is deeper than how it presents itself to us.

**Ans to Q. No. 12:** Nihilation is the process by which consciousness introduces nothingness, allowing humans to imagine and choose beyond their current state.



## 8.21 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short Questions:**

**Q. 1.** Who is considered one of the most influential existentialist philosophers of the 20th century?

**Q. 2.** What does Sartre mean by "existence precedes essence"?

**Q. 3.** What is "bad faith" (mauvaise foi) according to Sartre?

**Q. 4.** What is the difference between Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself?

**Q. 5.** What role does freedom play in Sartre's philosophy?

**Q. 6.** What is facticity in Sartre's existentialism?

**Q. 7.** How does Sartre define authentic existence?

**(B) Short Questions (Answers within 150-200 words)**

**Q. 1.** Explain Sartre's concept of "Being-for-others" with an example.

**Q. 2.** How does Sartre describe the relationship between freedom and responsibility?

**Q. 3.** What does Sartre mean by the "nihilation of the in-itself"?

**Q. 4.** Describe Sartre's idea of subjectivity and its role in creating meaning.

**Q. 5.** What is the trans phenomenality of being in Sartre's philosophy?

**Q. 6.** How does Sartre differentiate between authenticity and inauthenticity?

**Q. 7.** Why does Sartre believe anguish is a necessary part of human life?

**(C) Long Questions (Answers within 400 words)**

**Q. 1.** Discuss the concept of "existence precedes essence" and its significance in Sartre's atheistic existentialism. How does it challenge traditional views about human nature?

**Q. 2.** How does Sartre explain the concepts of Being-in-itself, Being-for-itself, and Being-for-others? Illustrate with examples how these categories help understand human existence.

**Q. 3.** Analyse the relationship between freedom, facticity, and transcendence in Sartre's existentialist thought. How do these ideas interact in real life?

**Q. 4.** What does Sartre mean by consciousness being "intentional" and "empty"? How does this view of consciousness relate to freedom and self-transformation?

**Q. 5.** Explain Sartre's ideas on authentic existence. Why does Sartre consider authenticity crucial for human dignity, and how can one avoid living in bad faith?

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# UNIT 9: SARTRE: ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

## UNIT STRUCTURE


9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2. Introduction

9.3. What is Existentialism?

9.4. Existence Precedes Essence

9.5. Subjectivity against Objectivity

9.6. Critical Estimations

9.7. Let us Sum Up

9.8. Further Readings

9.9. Answers to Check Your Progress

9.10. Model Questions


## 9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Define what is existentialism according to Sartre
- Analyse the statement "existence-precedes essence"
- Discuss the difference between subjectivity and objectivity as advanced by Sartre
- Explain critically Sartre's view on existence and essence.

## 9.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall discuss the views of the French existentialist philosopher Jean Paul Sartre on human essence and existence. Sartre's analysis of human existence and essence is largely based on his atheistic stand which he maintains throughout his philosophical and literary works. Emphasising on the priority of human existence Sartre tries to rediscover the challenged position of the individual human being in the Christian milieu. He insists on an active and engaged life of each individual instead of an idle living with pre designed essence. Taking into account these

features of Sartre's doctrine of human existence, here, we shall discuss how Sartre presents his form of humanism emphasising on the priority of human existence.

## 9.3 WHAT IS EXISTENTIALISM?

While discussing the basic features of existentialism we have already found that existentialism primarily emphasises on the priority of existence over essence. The main goal of existentialism is to establish the dignity of man as a conscious and active subject. However, the philosophical arguments offered by the existentialists asserting human dignity are varied and challenging. There are lot many differences within the trend itself. There is not a particular principle following which the exponents place their views. Rather, most of the existentialist philosophers deny the tag of existentialist. In a nutshell, the philosophers who talk about human predicament and individual authenticity are discussed under the umbrella of existentialism. Philosophers like Kierkegaard and Heidegger never accepted the tag of existentialist willingly. But their views made them get considered so. In brief, existentialism may be defined as a philosophical theory which enquires for categories of authenticity to understand human existence.

Clarifying the definition of existentialism Sartre says that there are two types of existentialism, theistic and atheistic. Theistic or the Christian existentialists include philosophers like Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel etc. The branch, to which Sartre and Martin Heidegger belong, is called atheistic existentialism that does not rely on the existence of God. Their common belief is that existence precedes essence or subjectivity must be the starting point. This is what they mean when they refer to the doctrine of existentialism.

## 9.4 SARTRE ON ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

Sartre advanced his doctrine of existence in his famous lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism* that he delivered in Paris on October, 1945. What he emphasises here is a view against the essentialism of Plato. While Plato considers human essence to be prior to his existence, Sartre gives

priority to human existence and declares that in case of man his "existence precedes essence". It is the reversal of a dictum of Plato which asserts that essence precedes existence. Through this statement Sartre, like the other atheistic existentialists, intends to express the priority of the subject. He asserts that each existing individual is significant in crafting out his own essence after being born as a conscious agent. Sartre says, "subjectivity must be our point of departure".



**LET US KNOW**

Here we may note the fact that "Existentialism Is a Humanism" is a stenographer's note, that he jotted down in shorthand of a lecture that Sartre delivered in Paris on Monday, October 29, 1945.Sartre did not prefer the publication of the lecture and he hardly made any alteration of the shorthand copy. The text of the lecture was published in 1946 by Éditions Nagel.

Sartrean Existentialism is said to be a revolutionary philosophy of the present age, representing man's rebellion against all attempts to ignore or suppress the uniqueness of individual subjectivity. "Existence precedes essence" is the dictum expressing the philosophy of Sartre from which we can find out the importance of active and responsible living of man fashioning his own identity, his own way. Man, according to Sartre, can transcend the givens and carries the potentiality of becoming the author of himself, i. e. an authentic being.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** Which country does Sartre belong to?

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**Q 2:** What are the two branches of Existentialism?

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## 9.5 EXISTENCE PRECEDES ESSENCE

Now, what does Sartre mean when he says that existence precedes essence? The main goal of Sartre is to present a thorough humanism which starts and ends with man. Hence, he emphasises on the philosophy of active man who does not idly follow his already designed life but creates his own identity. Existence precedes essence highlights on human reality that is not designed by any higher authority but, by man through his self chosen activities. Here, it is significant to note that the phase "existence precedes essence" was first advocated by the German existentialist So?en Kierkegaard. Sartre adopted this phrase and used it more elaborately while analysing human existence and essence.

For Sartre there is no pre-designed human nature. We cannot explain the nature of man in the same way we explain the nature of other manufactured objects. He gives the example of a paper knife in order to show the difference between man and other manufactured objects. A paper knife is manufactured by someone who had in his mind the conception of it. The paper knife, thus, is an object produced with a definite purpose. According to Sartre, if the procedure of manufacturing of the paper knife and its serving purpose means its essence, then we see that the essence of a paper knife precedes its existence. Its essence is pre-determined.

Now, if we try to understand man from the same perspective then, the concept of man in the mind of God, the creator, can be compared to the concept of paper knife in the mind of the manufacturer. This is a case if we believe in God. Just as a paper knife is the fulfilment and realisation of a definite conception conceived by the manufacturer, the essence of man may also be pre-conceived by God before his existence and man may be a mere fulfilment of it. If this view is accepted, then in case of man also we have to say that his essence precedes his existence. But, in Sartrean argument the idea of God reveals to be a self-contradictory idea. According to him, whatever exists, must be contingent. If God exists, then God would also be contingent. But this view goes against the theistic view of God which affirms the necessary existence of God. Sartre points out that necessity and existence cannot go together. Thus, the idea of God becomes self-contradictory and hence,

rejected. However, the common tendency in philosophy does not go with such view. A pre-designed human nature is unquestionably accepted in philosophical enquiries. Sartre laments that this has remained the tendency in the philosophical tradition even till Kant. They believe in a definite "human nature" which is found in all men like a universal concept.

Sartre rejects such stand and claims that the non-existence of God makes it evident that there is no prior conception of man in the mind of God. Man is not like a paper knife. He does not have a pre-conceived nature made with a definite purpose. Since there is no God, there is at least one being in whom his existence precedes essence. That is man, the subject who crates his own essence after his existence in the world. Whenever Sartre refers to existentialism, he means, "man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterwards defines himself…Thus, there is no human nature since there is no God to conceive of it…man is nothing other than what he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism."

## 9.6 SUBJECTIVITY AGAINST OBJECTIVITY

The view of Kierkegaard that "subjectivity is truth and truth is subjectivity" is accepted by Sartre. So, he insists on the priority of subjectivity. Then what does the term subjectivity stand for? When we talk about subjectivity, it may be a confusing term for ordinary understanding. To be simply understood, subjectivity in philosophy refers to the conscious, active being or man who is opposite to the material objects. In Sartre's philosophy these two concepts subject and object, are broadly discussed under the heads of "being-for-itself" and "being-in-itself".

**"Being-in-Itself"**

"Being-in-itself" refers to the unconscious, inactive, thing like existence. It is what it is. It means, it has no capacity to choose or create its essence. It does not have the capacity to reflect on itself as self consciousness has. Loosely, it may be identified with the Sa?khya concept of prakriti, which is material, solid, unconscious and inactive in nature. According to Sartre, "Being-in-itself" is opaque, complete and wholly filled

in itself. It is simply what it is. Whereas, on the contrary, "being-for-itself" or consciousness is defined as being what it is not. The "in-itself" has nothing to reveal from within since it has nothing in secret. The terms like transition, becoming etc. which suggest some processes of growth are outside of it on principle. Though it is understood as a material existence, it cannot be exemplified by making reference to any object since an object gets named only when it gets interpreted by human consciousness. Rather, it serves as the background condition for objects to appear. But it is to be noted that in our ordinary living rather than experiencing the undifferentiated stuff, we experience the differentiated objects like tree, house, pen, pencil etc. which clearly mark that this is not that, a tree is a tree not a house and vice versa.

Then how does nothingness come into picture? It leads, therefore, to the intuition that "being-in-itself" gets affected by some other being, a being of which the property is to nihilate or negate. Here appears the second mode of being, the being of consciousness which Sartre calls "being-for-itself".

**"Being-for-itself"**

"Being-for-itself" is called the being of consciousness. It is nothing but the essence of man. In Being and Nothingness Sartre presents man as consciousness having the capacity to curve out our phenomenal world by differentiating one object from another out of the undifferentiated stuff or "being-in-itself". He defines "being-for-itself" as conscious, essence- less and content-less mode of being which always transcends towards the meaning of its being through its freely chosen projects. At every moment man has to choose his own actions and has to go on creating his own essence through these self chosen activities. Man, identified as "being-for-itself", is always more than what he is at the time of birth.



**LET US KNOW**

Besides the two kinds of being, viz, being-in itself (en-soi) and being-for-itself (pour-soi), there is another type of being called being-for-others (pour autrui) by Sartre. It is the being for itself dominated. It is pertinent in the intersubjective discussion of Sartrean existentialism.

Through the phrase "being-for-itself', Sartre gives a new image to the definition of man as the active and engaged consciousness. Human reality is free from the cage of predefined human nature determined by any authority. Since there is no God, according to Sartre, there is no possibility of having any pre-determined essence in case of man. It is not possible to design the essence of man the way the essence of an object is determined before its existence. Like Heidegger, Sartre also maintains that man is thrown into the world and abandoned in a situation where he can only confront nothingness. The ontological structure of man is such that he is free from any fixed qualification. Emphasising on the structural freedom of man Sartre defines man as freedom. Since there is no essence given to man at birth, he has to choose. Free choice becomes the standard for his further projects of essence making. From among the verity of opportunities man has to choose his actions which he considers best for his identity creation. The process goes on till the end of his life. Further, every choice demands commitment and responsibility. Hence, Sartre talks about human anxiety or angst as man is compelled to choose his own course and take the burden of his choices.

These choices, responsibilities and anxieties, all create and recreate the essence of man each moment and the process goes on till he lives. Man, thus, remains beyond the given name or identity. Whatever his essence or identity may be, that always remains in making. Hence, in case of man, Sartre holds that his "existence precedes essence". In Sartre's words, by ""existence precedes essence" we mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterwards defines himself". There is no God to control his fate, no principle to influence human values. The only principle is to work, to get engaged in order to get the identity of man. By the very existence one escapes any reliance on anything for his identity. One start surpassing the givens and lives as transcendence going beyond the given background or facticity of one's reality that comes along in the form of her culture, tradition, environment, language etc. Being one's own nothingness man is forever beyond his existence. His essence is always in making. First of all, man exists and then he makes his own essence by exercising his freedom. "Man is nothing other than what he makes of himself".

Thus, Sartre insists on subjectivity against objectivity, by assigning man more dignity over any other material stuff. It insists on the active existence of man whose essence is not given but chosen through his self undertaken projects. Sartre says, "Man is indeed a project that has a subjective existence, rather unlike that of a patch of moss, a spreading fungus, or a cauliflower. Prior to that projection of the self nothing exists, not even a divine intelligence…"



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 3:** Tick the correct one

a) Being-in-itself is conscious/unconscious

b) Being-for-itself is active/passive

c) Human reality is defined though being-in-itself/being-for-itself

**Q 4:** State whether the following statements are True or False

a) Sartre is an atheist philosopher. (T/F)

b) Man has pre-defined human nature. (T/F)

c) Man relies on the blessings of God for creating his own essence. (T/F)

**Q 5:** What does Sartre mean by "existence precedes essence"?

## 9.7 CRITICAL ESTIMATIONS

There may be various criticisms to Sartre's doctrine of existence and essence. The common reaction against Sartre's statement existence precedes essence is that it is highly a subjective exposition. Sartre is claimed to be a metaphysician of subjectivity for his concentration on the individual subject and his free choice. However, a clear understanding of Sartre's account of existence helps us to find that by insisting on free individual existence Sartre has not presented something chaotic. Rather, his doctrine tries to revive human dignity in the mechanical world where individual subjectivity gets dominated by the mechanical rule following kind of attitude. Indeed, this is the main goal of Sartrean existentialism or we can better say, existentialism as a whole. By claiming the priority of human existence before his essence Sartre wants to emphasise that compared to

the non conscious objects, like the paper knife, man has a greater dignity. Man is an active being who can all the time create and recreate his own essence through his freely chosen activities. He is a project towards the future.

Further, there is no guideline for man to choose in a particular direction determined by any superior authority. Man is condemned to choose his own course of action that is also in accordance with the conditions of mankind as a whole. Since there is no one to be blamed for human choice, man is the sole responsible being for his entire life activity. There is no God to create and hold an image of man. It is man himself who is responsible to create his image in an intersubjective platform by choosing his project. However, such free choices cannot be chaotic. One's choice is said to be authentic only when it is made with committed freedom by admitting responsibility for it. A choice is to be made keeping in mind human subjectivity as a whole. Sartre necessarily talks about an intersubjective society where one has to choose keeping in mind that while he is choosing, he is choosing for mankind as a whole. If the essence of man is considered as already given or determined by any other authority than man himself, then it becomes easy to blame one's fate or other factors for any unwanted activity or consequence. But Sartre does not leave such scope. He understands man only through his self chosen responsible activities where there is no escape, but action and commitment. Thus, through the doctrine existence precedes essence; Sartre presents an active and engaged philosophy of man.



## 9.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed Jean Paul Sartre's view on existence and essence. Let us review the unit through the following points:

- Sartre presents his view on existence and essence through his famous doctrine existence precedes essence.
- It claims that man first exists, and then he creates his own essence though his freely chosen activities.

- Sartre denies the existence of God as the creator of human nature since God itself is a contradictory idea and hence, rejected.
- Since there is no God to determine human essence, Man has to choose his own course of action and shape his future. His subjectivity is prior to any other object. Sartre says, "subjectivity must be our point of departure".
- The difference between subject and object is explained through the difference between the phrases being-for-itself and being-in-itself. While being-for-itself is active, conscious, and free and essence-less, standing for the definition of man, being-in-itself is non-conscious, passive and solid that needs the interference of man to get meaning.
- Sartre assigns man more dignity over any other material stuff. It insists on the active existence of man whose essence is not given but chosen through his self undertaken projects.
- The doctrine existence precedes essence, presents an active and engaged philosophy of man.



## 9.9 FURTHER READINGS

1) Cox, G. (2006). *Sartre: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Continum.
2) Sartre, J. P. (2007). *Existentialism is a Humanism*. (C. Macomber, Trans.) London: Yale University Press.
3) Sartre, J. P. (1992). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* . New York: Washington Square Press



## 9.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** France

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** Theistic and Atheistic Existentialism

**Ans to Q. No. 3:**

a) Unconscious

b) Active

c) Being-for-itself

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** a) True b) False c) False

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** By the phrase "existence precedes essence" Sartre suggests that there is no extra human entity like God to design and determine human essence. It is not possible to explain the nature of man the way the nature of an object is explained. Man comes to existence in the world as an essence-less being and thereafter he creates his essence through the activities he performs according to his choice. In Sartre's words, by "existence precedes essence" we mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterwards defines himself". There is no God to control his fate, no principle to influence human values.



## 9.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short Questions:**

**Q. 1.** Name the text in which Sartre extensively discusses the concepts of human existence and essence.

**Q. 2.** What is considered as the point of departure for Sartre's existentialism?

**Q. 3.** Who for the first time formulated the phrase "existence precedes essence"?

**B) Short Questions: (within 150-200 words)**

**Q. 1.** What is the role of choice in the making of human essence?

**Q. 2.** How does being-for-itself differ from being-in-itself? Discuss briefly.

**Q. 3.** We cannot explain the nature of man in the same way we explain the nature of other manufactured objects. Discuss.

**C) Long Questions: (Answer within 500 words)**

**Q. 1.** How Sartre emphasises on the priority of subjectivity over objectivity? Discuss.

**Q. 2.** Write a critical note on Sartre's doctrine "existence precedes essence".

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# UNIT 10: SARTRE: FREEDOM

## UNIT STRUCTURE


10.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Freedom and Determinism

13.4 Consciousness as Nothingness or Freedom

13.5 Human Reality Redefined

13.6 A Critical Estimation of Freedom

13.7 Let us Sum Up

13.8 Further Readings

13.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

13.10 Model Questions


## 10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Define what is freedom
- Analyse the relation between consciousness, nothingness and freedom
- Explain how freedom redefines man.
- Distinguish between authentic and inauthentic choice
- Discuss critically Sartre's account of freedom.

## 10.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall discuss Jean Paul Sartre's concept of freedom with its significance and different implications. The concept of freedom can be considered as the central theme of Sartre's philosophy around which his entire philosophical argumentation moves. Sartre's motto is to bring forth the uniqueness of man as a free subject from which everything gets meaning. Sartre realises that to elevate the status of man it is not enough to define man only as a rational animal. The structure of man, according to him, includes much more that rationality and animality. He

places his philosophical arguments against the established definitions of man that treats man either as a language user, symbol user or tool user. Further, he denies man as a being created in the image of God.

We have already read that Sartre defines man as a being who first exists and then he creates his own essence through his self chosen projects. Hence, his existence precedes essence. While defining man, Sartre holds that man's "existence precedes essence"; emphasising on freedom, he further stresses that rather it is man's freedom that precedes his essence. Sartre advances his doctrine of freedom against the various theories of determinism which claim all events to be necessarily and inevitably occurring. In the traditional debate the notion of free will has not got any significant emphasis, except their approval of the fact that free will may reside in man as a mysterious capacity. Sartre realises it as a real threat to the purposeful effort of man, his responsibility, commitment and morality. Through his phenomenological analysis, he brings it from the mysterious abode to the empirical level of understanding and establishes free will as the intrinsic and necessary condition of human reality. The undeterred freedom of man is realised in the very structure of consciousness as being-for-itself. Through the notion of being-for-itself Sartre brings forth a unique concept of free and active man who does not follow the necessarily occurring events but chooses his course of actions in situations.

## 10.3 FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM

While emphasising on freedom Sartre significantly maintains the compatibility between free will and determinism. However, there are other philosophers as well who talk about such compatibility. But, when the motive is to bring free will to the capacity of man to facilitate his purposeful effort, these arguments fail to provide the adequate ground for it. For example, Descartes holds that free will and determinism must be compatible, but their connection cannot be comprehended by man, as according to him, God maintains such orders. Leibnitz criticises Descartes and says that Descartes could not unravel these knots…but preferred to cut them with a sword. Nevertheless, the same remains the problem with Leibnitz as the

solution he suggests for showing the compatibility between free will and determinism also remains under the control of the Supreme Being. Thus, the concept of free will remains a problematic issue often discussed within the periphery of the omniscience of God. If freedom is considered as a capacity within the control of God, then human free will lacks real significance. Though freedom comes with determinism, the determination that comes from the Supreme Being or God becomes more powerful over human freedom. Hence, an attempt is made to found a human ontology of freedom in connection with determinism in the existential phenomenology of Sartre introduced through the structure of consciousness as nothingness.

## 10.4 CONSCIOUSNESS AS NOTHINGNESS OR FREEDOM

We have already found that Sartre advocates a thoroughly atheistic philosophy and lands everything on the concrete man, who is free from the control of any Supreme Being or God. Further, we see that in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre talks about two modes of being and defines human consciousness through the opposite nature of these two modes. Through these two modes of being Sartre distinguishes between the conscious subject and the non-conscious object. The being of the subject is called being-for-itself (pour-soi) and the being of the object is called being-in-itself (en-soi). Being-in-itself is the solid, inactive undifferentiated stuff which cannot give itself a meaning, because, it is not conscious to act on itself or anything else. It is devoid of all meaning and significance imparted by the conscious subject. Hence, Sartre defined it as "what it is". On the other hand, being-for itself is consciousness. It does not have any fixed essence. It is active all the time and can curve out the meaningful lived world out of the undifferentiated stuff of being-in-itself. To show the relation between in-itself and for-itself, Sartre brings in the Husserlian notion of intentionality of consciousness. Intentionality implies the object directedness of consciousness. Consciousness is nothing in itself. Rather, it always directs itself towards the external world. Only because of such directedness we can say that we are conscious of this or that. Consciousness is total

emptiness which always intends towards object. Being intentional in nature it totally blows outside itself; it is never self-contained. All physical, psycho-physical and psychic objects, all truths, all values are outside consciousness. Consciousness, being intentional is nothing in itself. Hence, while being-in-itself is defined as what it is, being-for-itself is defined as "what it is not". Sartre identifies human reality with consciousness calling it the "being-for-itself". The "for-itself" is always conscious of not being the "in-itself", which is full of content, static, non-conscious, passive and non-free. More appropriately, it is defined as the embodied consciousness or the active body-subject. The essence of being-for-itself or human consciousness is to negate what is given.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** Whom does Sartre assign the characteristic of freedom?

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**Q 2:** What are the two modes of being?

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consciousness never coincides with itself in a full equivalence. It is a lack which always transcends to fulfil its possibilities. This 'lack' implies the feature of nothingness in "being-for-itself". Thus, ontologically explained, Sartrean phenomenological ontology brings in being of consciousness or "being-for-itself" as nothingness, as the nihilation of "being-in-itself" and further nothingness brings in the concept of freedom, adding to the structure of human reality. According to Sartre, the "for-itself" being nothingness, and having no essence given, is free to create its own essence.

## 10.5 HUMAN REALITY REFINED

Sartre does not prefer to define free will as a mere state of consciousness. Rather, according to him, will, if it is free, must be necessarily negativity with the power of nihilation. Negation and imagination

play major roles in Sartre's explanation of consciousness and freedom. Freedom with the structure of negation and imagination gives a new image to the definition of man as "being-for-itself", the active and engaged consciousness. Being essentially free, even from the control of God, man has to bear the responsibility of his identity creation. Man cannot idly wait for the future events to shape his identity, because, there is no one to determine his future. Time gets meaning through the projects man undertakes. It is not that in order to be free man exists first and becomes free in a subsequent moment. Rather, he insists that man exists as freedom. Hence, rather than defining freedom as one of the properties of man, Sartre defines man as freedom. He argues, "my freedom is not a quality added on or a property of my nature. It is very exactly the stuff of my being...."

The structure of human consciousness is such that it always transcends or goes beyond. Man is meant to overcome the obstacles created by situations. Sartre terms the adverse situations as facticity. In Being and Nothingness, he defines facticity as "coefficient of adversity of things". Facticity presents all kinds of obstacles to man in the form of situational complexities and difficulties. But the structure of consciousness is such that man cannot remain stuck in facticity. Rather, all these prepare the ground for his exercise of freedom, going beyond which he defines himself in his chosen way. Human actions are always a striving to transcend the facticity. All the time he has to exercise his freedom of choice. If one possibility is blocked, he has to strive to create another and thus, go on defining and redefining his essence. This exercise of freedom is a constant effort which man cannot forbid if he wants to stand as an authentic being.



**LET US KNOW**

Sartre's philosophy can be discussed in two phases, early and later. In early phase Sartre talks about absolute freedom of individual without considering the situational hurdles. But in his later writings he brings in the situational complexities and discusses freedom within socio-political situation and admits the limitations of it. Of course, the concept remains undeterred.

Man cannot wait for the God to control his fate, or to any principle to guide his value decisions. Pertaining to the indifference towards the concept of God it is maintained that there is no apriori value serving as the basis of judgement for any human action. Sartre frames his ethical arguments against the possibility of the existence of God or any other higher authority or principle. Since God has no role in founding basic moral values for man, values are ultimately dependent on free individual choice. The only principle, man is left with, is to work, to create and maintain the identity of man. As Sartre maintains, "Man is nothing other than his own project...he is nothing more than his sum of actions...". Emphasising on absolute individual freedom, in Being and Nothingness he holds that there is no limit of human freedom except freedom itself. Nothing readymade is there for him either to receive or to accept. The very being of man is freedom. Man cannot be sometimes slave and sometimes free; he is wholly and forever free or he is not free at all. He is abandoned in a situation where from he has to rise by choosing himself. Because, "...for human reality to be is to choose oneself".

Sartre states, "Man is condemned to be free". He is condemned because there is no way to escape responsibility except self-deception called "bad faith". Man has no meaning without the exercise of freedom and without choice. He cannot escape choosing because even not to choose also constitutes a choice. It is only man who is separate from this objective world by structure. Though being a physical object, he is one in the world, being consciousness, he can always question and go beyond it. There is no other way to define man except his freedom. He is compelled to invent himself every day. Sartre claims that it is within our life time that we create our image through our activities. There is no possibility to change or improve this image once the life is over.

Sartre talks about two levels of existence, inauthentic and authentic. Human life is inauthentic if we remain forgetful about our freedom or the capacities to give situation some alternative direction. This is called "bad faith". In simplified understanding it may be called a kind of self distraction. It is an attitude when a person denies to transcend facticity or the given

situation and thus, remains devoid of freedom choosing himself as an object. It is a status when people avoid taking responsibility for their actions by choosing not to choose. However, it has got larger meaning to be discussed separately. The opposite attitude is the attitude of "good faith" or authenticity. Where inauthenticity is the denial of the truth that we are free and responsible, authenticity is the acceptance and exercise of it. According to Sartre, to be authentic is to understand one's being in situation and exercise responsibly one's free choices in order to overcome the situation. It is to choose in good faith assuming one's responsibility towards himself and mankind as a whole. Sartre argues that in everyday level people often remain inauthentic exercising bad faith. But the real goal of man is to live an authentic life.



**ACTIVITY**

Discuss the relevance of Sartre's concept of freedom in forming an ethical system

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**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 3:** Tick the correct one

a) According to Sartre consciousness is empty/full.

b) Free choice is responsible/not responsible.

c) The essence of consciousness is negative/positive.

**Q 4:** State whether the following statements are True or False

According to Sartre,

a) Freedom is a mere quality of consciousness. (T/F)

b) Man is sometimes free, sometimes slave. (T/F)

c) Intentionality means object directedness of consciousness. (T/F)

**Q 5:** What does Sartre mean by intentionality of consciousness?

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## 10.6 A CRITICAL ESTIMATION OF FREEDOM

Among all the concepts of Sartrean existentialism the concept of freedom may be said to be the most rigorously criticised concept. While addressing the criticisms we may have a clearer understanding of Sartre's theory of freedom.

The theory of freedom is accused of being abstract, radical, unrealistic, dreadful and pessimistic. However, there are valid points within the analyses of Sartre's notion of freedom itself with the help of which his stand can be significantly defended. Even though Sartre's freedom often gets rigorously criticised, there are some critics who consider Sartre as one of the most important moralists on the basis of the deeper ethical essence hidden in the concept of freedom. It is due to the failure of critics to understand the concept the positive side of it remains unattended. It may be clarified that by identifying man as freedom, Sartre does not suggest men to live being uncontrolled. Rather, through the concept he has propounded a philosophy of responsible engagement. In absence of any higher ordered principle, it is man who is responsible to create his image in an intersubjective platform by choosing his projects. However, such free choices cannot be chaotic. One's choice is said to be authentic only when it is made with committed freedom by admitting responsibility for it. A choice is to be made keeping in mind human subjectivity as a whole. Sartre necessarily talks about an intersubjective society where one has to choose keeping in mind that while he is choosing, he is choosing for mankind as a whole. Hence, free choices cannot be to the choice of one single individual.

Sartre is further, criticised of not maintaining difference between free and non-free actions as he is said to have overlooked the situational

obstacles coming in the way of free human projects. It is to be noted that these criticisms are limited to Sartre's concept of original freedom. The broader sense of the concept gets overlooked here. Sartre certainly maintains a difference between original and situational, which is neglected by the critics.

According to Sartre while we are always free to posit our own ends, we also must make decision about the means that we will utilize in achieving those ends. These decisions are always made in a particular embodied context, in a given situation, and this situation contains within it certain objective relations of things that serve as obstacles to our freedom and to some extent constrain the means that are applicable to realising our ends. Sartre calls this the coefficient of adversity of our situation.

In the theory of freedom, freedom and facticity are intertwined notions. Freedom gets meaning only in being engaged in a resisting world. Freedom always requires a given, that is the situation. Thus, emphasising on freedom in situation, Sartre's existential phenomenology places freedom and determinism in a compatible floor. As Sartre holds that each human being is a being towards the future, hence, "for-itself" essentially requires a given being in order to transcend it towards the future. Sartre believes that although our situations put limits to our possibilities and choices, these also contain certain openness and it is up to us how we make choices through these open possibilities.

Thus, when critically examined, we see that the significance of Sartre's doctrine of freedom lies in identifying man as freedom through which he propounds a philosophy of engagement. Further, the emphasis is always there that freedom always carries with it the bounding features of commitment and responsibility. Freedom makes one profoundly committed and responsible for every choice made. Hence, Sartre claims it to be Humanism. Thus, it serves for the active life of man, shaping his identity as per undertaken projects and structuring his ethical life as well in a successful interactive platform. However, there are limitations within the doctrine which may prevent it from getting approved as a universal theory of human behaviour in practical environment.



## 10.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed Jean Paul Sartre's view on Freedom. Let us review the unit through the following points:

- Freedom is the central theme of Sartre's existentialism.
- It claims that man exists as freedom and he is condemned to be free while existing in the world and choosing his projects.
- Freedom is always exercised against given situation. Hence, freedom is bound with situational obstacles called facticity and man's capacity to overcome these is called transcendence.
- Because of its ever-transcending structure, human consciousness is called nothingness. Consciousness is empty in itself. It is always object directed.
- Free choice is never chaotic. Every choice is made in certain situation and it demands commitment and responsibility of the agent.
- Choice made in good faith always keeps in mind human subjectivity as a whole. Hence, free choices cannot be to the choice of one single individual.
- Sartre's theory of freedom promotes an engaged philosophy of an ethical man in an intersubjective world.
- Hence, Sartre calls it humanism.



## 10.8 FURTHER READINGS

1) 1. Cox, G. (2006). *Sartre: A Guide for the Perplexed*. New York: Continum.
2) Sartre, J. P. (2007). *Existentialism is a Humanism*. (C. Macomber, Trans.) London: Yale University Press.
3) Sartre, J. P. (1992). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. New York: Washington Square Press

## 10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** Man

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself

**Ans to Q. No. 3:**

a) Empty

b) Responsible

c) Negative

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** a) False b) False c) True

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** Intentionality is a notion propounded by Edmund Husserl in the phenomenological tradition. It serves as the main connecting feature between the subject pole (the conscious being) and the object pole (the phenomenal world or the world of experience). While Husserl considers intentionality as a particular feature of consciousness, Sartre identifies intentionality with consciousness and holds that consciousness has no content. Consciousness is always consciousness of something. Its entire being consists in its directedness towards the object or the world. It is total emptiness which always intends towards object. This structure again implies the nothingness of consciousness.

## 10.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short Questions:**

**Q. 1.** Freedom and determinism are compatible. Discuss after Sartre.

**Q. 2.** Consciousness is always object directed. Discuss.

**Q. 3.** Distinguish between good faith and bad faith

**(B) Long Questions:**

**Q. 1.** Man is condemned to be free. Explain

**Q. 2.** Critically discuss Sartre's theory of freedom.

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# UNIT 11: SARTRE'S CONCEPT OF BEING-IN-ITSELF

## UNIT STRUCTURE


11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Meaning of Being-in-itself

11.4 Sartre's Concept of Being-in-itself

11.5 Conclusion

11.6 Let us sum up

11.7 Further Reading

11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.9 Model Questions


## 11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- understand the meaning of being-in-itself.
- know the idea of Sartre's being-in-itself.

## 11.2 INTRODUCTION

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was a French philosopher, writer, and political activist, best known as a leading figure of existentialism. The idea of existentialism, being-in-itself, being-for-itself, being-for-others, consciousness, nothingness, freedom, responsibility, bad-faith etc. are originated in his famous book *'Being and Nothingness'* (1943), He believed that humans are free to choose their own path but must also take full responsibility for their actions. Sartre's famous idea was that *existence precedes essence*, meaning we are not born with a set purpose; we create it ourselves through what we do. Besides philosophy, he also wrote novels and plays, like *Nausea* and *No Exit*, which explore deep questions about freedom, identity, and meaning.

Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of *being* explores how human experience connects with reality and what we consider real in the world. For Sartre, being is not just about asking if the world exists, but about understanding the deeper truth of existence and human nature. He explains how our thoughts, feelings, actions, and perceptions shape our experience of being. This helps us understand the basic nature of existence and challenges the limits of how we usually analyze reality. Sartre's focus is on how individuals relate to the world and to others, and how this shapes their sense of self.

## 11.3 MEANING OF BEING-IN-ITSELF

Sartre uses the term *being* to explore different types of existence. In his philosophy, *being-in-itself* refers to the existence of things that simply are, without consciousness, awareness, or the ability to reflect on themselves. These are objects like rocks, trees, or table anything that just exists passively in the world.

Sartre's *being-in-itself* is unconscious. It has no thoughts, feelings or awareness. It is complete and fixed. It is what it is. It is unchanging and self-contained. It is independent. It exists on its own, without needing anything else. Moreover, it is passive. It does not choose or act; it just is. *Being-in-itself* is the way non-living things exist. They don't think or try to become something else. They just exist as they are, fully and without question. In contrast, humans are being-for-itself-conscious beings who can think, choose, and change themselves. He talks about three main types of being in his book *Being and Nothingness*:

1. Being-in-itself *(l'être-en-soi)* - the existence of things or objects that are not conscious (like a rock or a chair).
2. Being-for-itself *(l'être-pour-soi)* - the existence of conscious human beings who are aware of themselves.
3. Being-for-others *(l'être-pour-autrui)* - how we exist in relation to other conscious beings and how others see us.

According to him the study of *being* help us to understand human existence and freedom. He says that freedom is at the core of human

existence, and our actions reflect that freedom. But *being-in-itself* is the kind of existence that just is. It does not think or reflect. It exists independently, is complete, and doesn't change unless acted upon. It's passive and full in its being. *Being-for-itself*, on the other hand, is active and conscious. It involves self-awareness and the ability to make choices. It always questions itself and is never complete; it always tries to become something more. *Being-for-others* is about how we experience ourselves when we are seen or judged by other people. It's the part of our existence that becomes aware of itself through the eyes of others. Simply, *being-for-others* is who we are when others are watching us, it's how our identity is shaped by other people's views and how that changes our experience of ourself.

Sartre says we cannot understand *being* without *consciousness*. Consciousness helps us make sense of the world and gives meaning to what exists, even though objects (being-in-itself) already exist on their own. So, while objects just exist passively, conscious beings like humans must act to define who they are. That's why Sartre famously said that for humans, *existence comes before essence*.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** What is Sartre's Being?

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**Q 2:** How many Beings are there in Sartre's Philosophy?

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**Q 3:** What is the meaning of Being-in-itself, Being-for-itself and being-for-others?

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## 11.4 SARTRE'S CONCEPT OF BEING IN-ITSELF

Sartre's idea of *being-in-itself* relates to the *being of phenomena*. It appears in the world like a chair, a tree, or a table. These objects simply

are. Sartre says that the meaning of *being* applies to all things that exist; including consciousness itself, but the way consciousness exists is different and needs special explanation.

*Being and Phenomena*, the meaning of being is tied to how things appear in the world (phenomena), but being itself is not just about what we see it's something deeper that supports those appearances. Such as-

Consciousness vs Objects: Consciousness *(being-for-itself)* is very different from things like objects *(being-in-itself)*. Consciousness is active, aware, and always questioning. Objects are passive and just exist.

Two Regions of Being: Sartre divides being into two main parts:

- The being of phenomena (like objects, which are unconscious).
- The being of consciousness (which is aware and reflective).

These two kinds of being are separate, but we still need to understand how they relate to each other.

Role of Consciousness: Sartre says we understand the meaning of *being* through consciousness. Even though objects exist on their own, it's only through consciousness that their being becomes meaningful to us. Sartre's being is not some mysterious or hidden reality *(like Kant's noumena)*. Instead, it is the real, deeper being of things that appear to consciousness; what he calls the transphenomenal being. It's beyond mere appearance but not outside of experience.

Thus, Sartre's *being* is more than just what we see. Objects exist, but we only understand their meaning through our consciousness. There are two kinds of being-one for objects and one for consciousness-and even though they're different, both are needed to grasp the full meaning of existence. Consciousness is what reveals and gives meaning to being. He explores what it means to "be" what existence really is. Therefore, he divides existence into two main types i.e. *Being-in-itself* (l'être-en-soi) and Being-for-itself (l'être-pour-soi).

This refers to things or objects like stones, tables, or trees. They just exist. They don't think or reflect about their existence. They can be seen, touched, smelled, etc. In short, they can be perceived by us. Their appearance and reality are the same. What we see is what they are. For

Example: A chair is a chair. It doesn't ask, "Why am I a chair?" This is how he gives the explanation on being-in-itself in his philosophy.

Again, *being-for-itself* (l'être-pour-soi) refers to humans. Conscious beings like you and me. We are aware of ourselves and the world around us. We can think, reflect, and choose how we act. We can ask deep questions like:

"Who am I?"

"Why do I exist?"

"What is the meaning of life?"

For Example: A person doesn't just live; they think about living.

There is a relationship between the two *being* that Sartre had asserted. Firstly, objects (being-in-itself) cannot understand themselves. But we, as conscious beings (being-for-itself), can understand and give meaning to those objects. So, objects depend on us to be understood. Consciousness connects us to the world and makes meaning possible.

Nothingness (Le Néant), Sartre introduces the idea of nothingness. The space between what we are and what we could be. Nothingness is what gives us freedom. It allows us to think, doubt, imagine, and change. It creates the gap between us and the world. So, we are not 'fixed' like a table or rock. We are not stuck being one thing. We can change, make choices, and redefine ourself.

The self vs. the body, Sartre also discusses the self and the body to further clarify the concept of being. According to him, our body is just an object. It is part of being-in-itself. But our true self is the one that thinks about the body, the world, and meaning. This is why Sartre says that the self is separate from the physical body. We are not just a body, because we can think and we can choose what we want. Hence, a conscious being is one that thinks and chooses.

Here, a question arises: how do we see the world? To answer this, consider the following example- a tree is solid (objective), but to one person, it may symbolize peace, and to another, childhood memories (subjective). So, our view of the world is shaped both by what is out there and what is within us.

Therefore, Sartre's philosophy helps us to understand that we are not just things in the world. We are conscious beings with the power to reflect, choose, and create meaning. We are defined by our actions, not by what we were born as. Freedom and responsibility are central to our existence.

According to Sartre, everything that exists becomes known to us through consciousness. In this process, the conscious self what he calls *being-for-itself* also reveals itself. Sartre explains that objects and things exist independently of our awareness (they are *being-in-itself*), but we never fully know or capture their essence. Consciousness can understand the meaning of existence, but it can't control or fully grasp the actual being of things.

These two forms of being are different but still connected. One cannot be fully understood without the other. Sartre uses this relationship to challenge two major philosophical positions i.e. Realism and Idealism. Former one asserts consciousness is shaped by the external world. While later one asserts the world is a product of consciousness.

Sartre rejects both realism (the idea that the world controls us) and idealism (the idea that we create the world with our minds). He believes that consciousness what he calls *being-for-itself* is not completely shaped by the outside world, but it also doesn't fully control or create the world either. Consciousness is active and subjective, while objects what he calls *being-in-itself* have their own independent existence. Neither one is more important or dominant than the other.

In the end, Sartre argues that we need to think about existence in a new way beyond traditional categories like realism or idealism. For him, being isn't something made by God or any other source. It just is. Ideas like active or passive don't apply to being itself those are human concepts based on goals or purposes. Being doesn't try to prove or justify itself; it simply exists.

Sartre rejects the idea of a higher or transcendental being like God that creates or controls existence. For him, being is not separate from any divine mind or purpose. Instead, it only makes sense when we look at it

from the human point of view. He says that being is neither active nor passive. These terms active and passive only make sense when we're talking about goals or intentions. For example, the human mind is active because it thinks and chooses, while the things it uses (like tools or objects) are passive. But being itself has no goal or purpose, so we can't say it is active or passive. That's why Sartre thinks talking about the end or purpose of being doesn't make sense it just is.

Sartre also argues that we can't apply ideas like affirmation or negation to being. Normally, affirmation means something is confirmed by someone else. But in the case of being, there's no separation between what is and who is affirming it. Being is complete and whole in itself it doesn't need to be affirmed or denied.

In phenomenological terms, Sartre describes being as the *noema* (the thing we are aware of) in relation to noesis (the act of being aware). But even with this, he insists that being is *immanent*, meaning it exists fully in itself. We can't truly realize or grasp it completely. Even a tiny gap between us and being would make realization impossible. So, for Sartre, *being-in-itself* simply exists it affirms nothing, seeks nothing, and doesn't act like we do. It just is, without needing any purpose or explanation.

Sartre's being-in-itself is itself which means not refer to itself like self-consciousness or the being-for-itself. *Being-in-itself* is full of itself that can be expressed by what it is. Here, the term is has special meaning in the phrase being is *what it is*. According to Sartre, there are 'creatures who must be *what they are*, the fact that they are what they are is no longer only an axiomatic property; rather, it is a contingent principle of being in-itself. This makes the analytical judgment principle, also known as the principle of identity, a synthetical principle of being that is specific to a certain region. The opaqueness of being-in-itself is what it refers to. The fact that this opacity exists has nothing to do with how we stand in regard to the being itself; we are not required to understand it and pay attention to it because we are 'without'.

So, being-in-itself has no *within* that can be opposed to a *without* as well as similar to a judgment or a law or consciousness of itself. Sartre's

being-in-itself has no secret but concrete. It is assigned as a synthesis "it is the most permanent of all: the synthesis of itself with itself." There is no question for transition or becoming in Sartre's being-in-itself. Although, being-in-itself is away from becoming; it does not become what it is not by itself like being-for-itself does because it does not include any negation. Being-in-itself is just what it is and full of passivity as well. For Sartre, being-in-itself has no temporal character because temporal character is formed on the basis of lack by the being-for-itself. So, being-for-itself has no lack. Being-in-itself has no necessity or possibility that seems as the first characteristics of it. In fact, it is simply is because necessity grasps among ideal existents. Hence, being-in-itself is contingent. Even, being-in-itself is not derived from a possibility that being-for-itself derives. Possibility is the form of being-for-itself. Sartre's being-in-itself is unmade, without a purpose, and unconnected to any other existence. It will always be unnecessary (*de trop*). As a result, being-in-itself is defined as "being is, being is in-itself, and being is what it is."

## 11.5 CONCLUSION

Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of *being*, particularly his distinction between *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself*, offers a profound understanding of existence and human freedom. Being-in-itself refers to the passive, fixed existence of objects that simply are, without consciousness, reflection, or purpose. It is opaque, complete, and contingent, existing without any inner need or external justification. It neither changes nor becomes; it just is.

In contrast, *being-for-itself* represents conscious human existence, marked by self-awareness, freedom, and the ability to question and redefine itself. Humans are not fixed like objects; through consciousness and nothingness, they transcend their current state and create their own meanings. Sartre emphasizes that while objects exist independently of human awareness, it is consciousness that brings meaning to being, making existence dynamic and reflective.

Sartre also rejects traditional notions of realism, idealism, and the existence of a divine creator influencing being. For him, being is neither active nor passive, neither affirming nor negating; it simply exists without

purpose or goal. His phenomenological approach sees being as immediate, immanent, and beyond full human grasp, yet necessarily intertwined with consciousness.

Ultimately, Sartre's exploration reveals that existence precedes essence for humans, and freedom is at the heart of human reality. Being-in-itself and being-for-itself are distinct yet deeply related mode of existence and understanding them is essential to understanding the nature of reality, freedom, and human responsibility. Sartre's philosophy invites us to face the radical contingency of existence and to embrace the responsibility of creating meaning in an indifferent universe.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 4:** . What is the meaning of being-in-itself for Sartre?

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**Q 5:** . Discuss the concept of being-for-itself?

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## 11.6 LET US SUM UP

- Sartre's concept of being focuses on understanding existence itself, not just whether things exist.
- He identifies three types of being:
- Being-in-itself *(l'être-en-soi)* unconscious things (objects).
- Being-for-itself *(l'être-pour-soi)* conscious beings (humans).
- Being-for-others *(l'être-pour-autrui)* how humans are seen by others.
- Being-in-itself refers to the existence of objects like rocks, trees, or tables, which simply are, without awareness.

- Objects (being-in-itself) are complete, fixed, and self-contained, with no consciousness or capacity for change from within.
- Being-in-itself is passive. It doesn't think, act, or strive; it simply exists.
- In contrast, being-for-itself is characterized by self-awareness, freedom, and the ability to choose and change.
- Being-for-others explains how human identity is affected by how others perceive and judge us.
- Consciousness is key for Sartre. It brings meaning to the world of objects, even though objects exist independently.
- Sartre emphasizes that for humans, existence precedes essence. We exist first and define ourselves later through actions.
- Objects and consciousness are two separate regions of being, but understanding both is necessary to grasp existence fully.
- Sartre rejects Kant's notion of noumenal. For him, being is real and immanent, not hidden beyond phenomena.
- Nothingness (Le Néant) is introduced as the space between what we are and what we could become, enabling human freedom.
- The body is part of being-in-itself, but our true self is consciousness, which reflects, doubts, and chooses.
- Sartre asserts that objects cannot understand themselves, only conscious beings can give meaning to objects.
- Sartre challenges both Realism (the world controls us) and Idealism (we create the world). He finds a middle path.
- Being is neither active nor passive, because it has no goal, purpose, or intention. It simply is.
- Affirmation and negation do not apply to being-in-itself. It exists independently without needing validation.
- Sartre sees being-in-itself as opaque, contingent, unnecessary ("de trop"), and without origin.
- Temporal character belongs to being-for-itself, not being-in-itself; the latter exists beyond time and change.
- Ultimately, Sartre's philosophy presents human beings as radically free, responsible for creating their own meaning in a meaningless indifferent universe.



## 11.7 FURTHER READINGS

1) Sartre, Jean-Paul (1943). Being and Nothingness: An essay on phenomenological ontology, Translated by Hazel E. Barnes (2003), London and New York.
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4) Cranston, Maurice (1962). Sartre, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh.



## 11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** *Being* applies to all things that exist; including consciousness itself, but the way consciousness exists is different and needs special explanation. The meaning of being is tied to how things appear in the world but being itself is not just about what we see it's something deeper that supports those appearances.

Ans to Q No 2: In Sartre's philosophy, there is mainly three beings i.e. being-in-itself *(l'être-en-soi)*, being-for-itself *(l'être-pour-soi)* and being-for-others *(l'être-pour-autrui)*.

Ans to Q No 3: *Being-in-itself* means the existence of things or objects that are not conscious (like a rock or a chair). Being-for-itself means the existence of conscious human beings who are aware of themselves. Being-for-others means how we exist in relation to other conscious beings and how others see us.

Ans to Q No 4: Sartre's *being-in-itself* relates to the *being of phenomena*. It appears in the world like a chair, a tree, or a table. These objects simply are. Being-in-itself is unconscious. It has no thoughts, feelings or awareness. It is complete and fixed. It is what it is. It is unchanging and self-contained. It is independent. It exists on its own,

without needing anything else. It is passive. It does not choose or act; it just is. *Being-in-itself* is the way non-living things exist. They don't think or try to become something else. They just exist as they are.

Ans to Q No 5: *Being-for-itself* refers to conscious being. Conscious being means humans like you and me. We are aware of ourselves and the world around us. We can think, reflect, and choose how we act. We can ask deep questions like- Who am I? Why do I exist? What is the meaning of life? So, a person doesn't just live. They think about living too. *Being-in-itself* cannot understand themselves. But being-for-itself can understand and give meaning to those objects. So, objects depend on us to be understood. Consciousness connects us to the world and makes meaning possible. Therefore, *being-for-itself* is not just what it is. It has possibilities to become what they wish for.



## 11.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short question**

**Q. 1.** Who is the author of 'Being and Nothingness'?

**Q. 2.** What does "existence precedes essence" mean?

**Q. 3.** What is being-in-itself?

**Q. 4.** What is being-for-itself?

**Q. 5.** What is being-for-others?

**Q. 6.** Is being-in-itself conscious or unconscious?

**Q. 7.** What gives meaning to being, according to Sartre?

**Q. 8.** What is the role of nothingness in human freedom?

**Q. 9.** Does Sartre believe in a divine creator of being?

**Q. 10.** How does Sartre describe the relationship between self and body?

**(B) Short question (Answer in about 150 words)**

**Q. 1.** What does Sartre mean by being-in-itself, and how does it differ from being-for-itself?

**Q. 2.** How does Sartre describe the characteristics of being-in-itself in terms of consciousness?

**Q. 3.** In what way is being-in-itself considered self-contained according to Sartre?

**Q. 4.** Why does Sartre say that being-in-itself lacks temporality and negation?

**Q. 5.** How does Sartre use the concept of contingency to define being-in-itself?

**Q. 6.** Why does Sartre reject both realism and idealism in understanding being-in-itself and consciousness?

**(C) Long questions (Answers in about 300-500 words)**

**Q. 1.** Critically explain Jean-Paul Sartre's distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself.

**Q. 2.** Discuss Sartre's concept of being-in-itself in relation to consciousness, reality, and phenomenology.

**Q. 3.** Analyse Sartre's idea that 'being-in-itself is what it is'. What does this phrase signify about the nature of objects, passivity, contingency and the absence of purpose in existence?

**Q. 4.** Examine the role of 'Nothingness' in Sartre's existential philosophy, particularly in the relationship between being-in-itself and being-for-itself.

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# UNIT 12: SARTRE'S CONCEPT OF BEING-FOR-ITSELF

## UNIT STRUCTURE


12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Meaning of Being-for-itself

12.4 Sartre's Concept of Being-for-itself

12.4.1 Nothingness

12.4.2 Freedom

12.4.3 Bad Faith

12.4.4 Being-for-others

12.5 Conclusion

12.6 Let us sum up

12.7 Further Reading

12.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.9 Model Questions


## 12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Understand the meaning of being-for-itself.
- Know the idea of Sartre's being-for-itself, nothingness, freedom, bad-faith and being-for-others.

## 12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the book 'Being and *Nothingness'*, Sartre described two distinct and irreducible categories of being i.e. the being-in-itself *(en-soi)* and the being-for-itself *(pour-soi)*, roughly the non-conscious and consciousness respectively, adding a third, the being-for-others *(pour-autrui)*, later in the book. He ends by proposing a method called "existential psychoanalysis," which tries to understand a person's actions in order to discover the

deep, underlying goal or purpose that gives their life unity and direction. Human reality, according to Sartre, is marked by a fundamental ambiguity because it brings together two opposing modes of being: being-in-itself and being-for-itself. These two have completely different characteristics. Being-in-itself refers to things that simply exist without consciousness. It is solid, passive, unchanging, and self-identical it simply is. In contrast, being-for-itself refers to conscious beings like humans. It is not fixed or self-identical; instead, it is dynamic, open-ended, and constantly in the process of becoming. This mode of being exists as a kind of internal negation of being-in-itself. It defines itself in contrast to what is. This dual nature of human existence can also be described in terms of facticity and transcendence. Facticity includes all the fixed or "given" aspects of our lives i.e. our language, environment, past choices, and even our physical existence. These are elements of the in-itself that shape our condition. However, as conscious beings, we also possess the ability to transcend these facts. We can reflect on them, reinterpret them, and project ourselves into new possibilities. This process of surpassing our given conditions forms what Sartre calls our situation.

Importantly, we are always situated beings caught between what we are given and what we can become. However, the exact balance between our facticity and our transcendence is unclear while we are living through it. Because we are never entirely determined by our situation, Sartre argues that we are always more than our circumstances. This idea forms the foundation of his concept of freedom. In fact, Sartre famously says that we are "condemned to be free," meaning that we cannot escape the responsibility of choice and self-definition. Although Sartre is sometimes viewed as a kind of Cartesian dualist, this is not quite accurate. His dualism is not based on two separate substances (like Descartes' mind and body), but rather on two different ways of being i.e. one passive and inert, the other spontaneous and self-negating. Only being-in-itself can be understood as a "thing" or substance. Being-for-itself, in contrast, is "nothingness" a non-thing that negates and questions what is.

For Sartre, the usual logic of identity (S=S) applies only to the in-

itself. The being-for-itself does not follow this logic because it is always changing, always in motion. This has important implications for how Sartre understands time. Time is not a neutral or objective sequence of moments, but something lived and felt. The past corresponds to the fixed in-itself and our facticity. The future represents the openness of the being-for-itself and our potential. The present is where these two dimensions meet it is an unstable blend of what has been and what might be.

In Sartre's philosophy, "being-for-others" becomes important when we encounter another person the "Other" as a conscious subject like ourselves. This awareness of the "Other" isn't something we can logically deduce from earlier ideas (like being-in-itself or being-for-itself); it must be directly experienced. He uses the example of feeling shame when caught in an embarrassing moment. This feeling reveals our immediate awareness of being seen by another conscious being. It provides a strong argument for the reality of other minds without relying on weak analogies, as some empiricist philosophers do. The 'Other' in Being and *Nothingness* isolates or objectifies us (in this work Sartre seems to use these terms equivalently) and the third party is simply this 'Other' compose large. The "us" is objectified by an 'Other' and hence has the ontological status of being-in-itself but the collective subject or "we," he insists, is simply a psychological experience.

Sartre begins by rejecting Immanuel Kant's division between phenomena (the world as we experience it) and noumena (things-in-themselves, which we can never truly know). For Kant, our knowledge is forever limited to representations structured by categories of understanding; the noumenal realm lies beyond possible experience.

In contrast, Sartre denies the ontological validity of the noumenon. He argues that appearances are absolute and self-sufficient. What we perceive is not a mere veil over an inaccessible reality but is reality itself. For Sartre, 'appearance is full positivity', and there is no hidden, deeper reality behind it. This phenomenological realism removes the dualism between inside and outside, essence and appearance. Thus, 'what you

see is what you get' there is no reality beyond the perceptible.

The Distinction between Being-in-Itself and Being-for-Itself refers to non-conscious, inert objects. It simply is *what it is*. It is full, complete, and incapable of change or self-reflection. It has no potentiality or freedom. While, being-for-itself is the mode of human consciousness. It is defined by lack is a fundamental incompleteness. It is aware of itself as not being what it is and being *what it is not*. It is characterized by freedom, negativity, and the capacity to transcend its current state. Thus, human beings are not fixed substances like rocks or chairs; they are dynamic, self-negating and perpetually in the process of becoming.

## 12.3 MEANING OF BEING-FOR-ITSELF

As the ontological structure of human consciousness Sartre's being-for-itself sharply contrasting it with being-in-itself. While being-in-itself is complete, self-identical, and devoid of negation (e.g., a stone simply is what it is), Being-for-itself is defined by its lack of fixed identity. It is a dynamic negation, a "nothingness" that introduces possibility, temporality, and freedom into the world. At the heart of being-for-itself is consciousness as nihilation. Unlike objects, which are fully present to themselves, consciousness exists as a perpetual self-distancing: it is never identical to itself because it is always aware of itself, questioning, imagining, and transcending its immediate state. This self-negation means that human reality is fundamentally unfinished; it exists as a project, constantly reaching beyond itself toward possibilities. Sartre famously declares that for humans, "existence precedes essence" - we are not defined by a pre-given nature but must invent ourselves through choices. This ontological freedom is both liberating and terrifying. Because being-for-itself is not determined by any prior essence or external cause, it is condemned to be free, burdened with absolute responsibility for its actions. Sartre describes the accompanying anguish as the recognition that even inaction is a choice, and there is no ultimate justification for our decisions beyond the ones we create. This radical freedom is often evaded through bad-

faith, where individuals deny their freedom by pretending to be static "things".

Temporality is another key dimension of being-for-itself. Unlike being-in-itself, which are trapped in an eternal present, human existence is a temporal stretch: the past is *facticity* (what I have been, but which does not determine me), the present is the act of *nihilation* (escaping the given), and the future is the *project* (what I am not yet but strive to become). This temporal structure underscores that *being-for-itself* is always becoming, never fully coinciding with itself. The presence of the "Other" further complicates being-for-itself. In Sartre's famous analysis of the Look, the gaze of another person objectifies me, reducing me to a being-in-itself in their consciousness (e.g., shame reveals how I am fixed as an object in their judgment). This creates an existential tension: while I seek to assert my freedom, others threaten to solidify me into a static identity. For Sartre, conflict is thus inherent to inter subjectivity. Sartre's *being-for-itself* diverges from Hegel's *Für-sich-sein* (German for "Being-for-itself") by rejecting dialectical synthesis consciousness remains in perpetual negation, never achieving a stable unity. Similarly, while Heidegger's Dasein emphasizes being-in-the-world, Sartre foregrounds the nothingness at the core of consciousness, making freedom and alienation central to the human condition.

Thus, *being-for-itself* encapsulates Sartre's existentialist vision: human existence is a restless, self-creating freedom, condemned to invent meaning in a world without inherent purpose. Authenticity lies in embracing this freedom, while bad-faith flees from it into the illusion of determinacy. The concept remains foundational for existentialist ethics, phenomenology, and critiques of reification in social theory.

## 12.4 SARTRE'S CONCEPT OF BEING-FOR-ITSELF

Sartre's *being-for-itself* as the fundamental mode of human existence, radically distinct from the mode of being characteristic of objects. This distinction forms the cornerstone of Sartre's existential ontology and provides the framework for understanding human consciousness, freedom, and the experience of existence.

At the most fundamental level, Sartre's ontology divides reality into two irreducible categories:

*being-in-itself* represents the mode of being of objects- things that simply are what they are, complete in themselves. A rock, a table, or any inanimate object exists as pure positivity, fully identical to itself, without interiority or possibility of change from within. It is massive, opaque, and devoid of any relation to itself.

In stark contrast, *being-for-itself* characterises human consciousness. Unlike objects, human existence is never simply identical to itself. Consciousness is always at a distance from itself- it exists as a perpetual self-surpassing, a constant movement beyond what it is at any given moment. This is because consciousness is always consciousness of something (intentionality), and thus is never simply itself.

Sartre's *Being-for-itself* has several defining characteristics that distinguish it from *Being-in-itself*:

a) Negation and Nothingness

The *being-for-itself* introduces nothingness into the world. While Being-in-itself is pure positivity (being), human consciousness exists as a "hole in being." This means that consciousness is never fully coincident with itself or with any of its states. When I say "I am sad," there is already a distance between me and my sadness- I am not identical to it in the way a stone is identical to its stoneless.

b) Temporality

The *being-for-itself* exists as temporal in a way that being-in-itself does not. Human existence is stretched between a past that it was but no longer is, a present that is always slipping away, and a future that it is not yet. This temporal structure means we are always "ahead of ourselves" in our projects and possibilities.

c) Freedom

Perhaps most importantly, the *being-for-itself* is condemned to be free. Because it lacks any predetermined essence, human consciousness must constantly choose and create itself. This freedom is not a pleasant attribute but an inescapable condition - we are "abandoned" in our freedom, without excuses or justifications.

Sartre describes the *being-for-itself* through several absurd formulations that capture its unstable nature:

a) The *being-for-itself* is what it is not and is not *what it is*.

b) Human reality is a being which is *what it is not* and which is not *what it is*.

These paradoxes express how human existence is always beyond itself, never fully present to itself. When I try to grasp myself as an object of reflection the I that does the grasping escapes the grasp. This is why Sartre says consciousness is nothingness, not in the sense of non-existence, but as a perpetual questioning, negating, and transcending of *what is*.

Sartre's conception of *being-for-itself* carries far-reaching philosophical consequences that fundamentally reshape our understanding of human existence. Such as-

a) The Precedence of Existence over Essence: Unlike objects which have fixed natures, humans first exist without essence, and must create their essence through living.

b) Radical Responsibility: Because we are not determined by any pre-given nature, we are absolutely responsible for what we become.

c) The Experience of Anguish: We feel anguish when confronted with our radical freedom and the weight of our responsibility.

d) The Necessity of Choice: Even not choosing is a choice- we cannot escape our freedom.

The Struggle for genuine existence reflects the ongoing conflict between embracing our undefined, self-creating nature and surrendering to the comforting illusions of predetermined identity. For Sartre, this struggle defines the human condition, as we must either courageously claim our freedom or live in bad faith. Given this ontological condition, Sartre suggests that most people live in *bad faith*, attempting to deny their freedom by pretending to be things (like Being-in-itself) or by inventing false necessities. Authentic existence requires embracing the nothingness at our core recognising that we are pure possibility, with no excuses and no predetermined path.

This ontological structure of being-for-itself thus forms the foundation for Sartre's entire existential philosophy, explaining why human existence is characterized by freedom, anxiety, and the constant need to create meaning in a world that offers none inherently. It captures the fundamental dynamism and instability of human consciousness as opposed to the static being of objects.

### 12.4.1 Nothingness (Néant)

A pivotal innovation in Sartre's ontology is the role of Nothingness. Consciousness introduces negation into being. It can conceive of absences, possibilities, and what is not. Thus, the *being-for-itself* is marked by lack and is always in the process of becoming. It is never complete or self-identical.

Sartre's concept of nothingness constitutes one of the most radical and original contributions to 20th century philosophy, fundamentally transforming our understanding of human consciousness and existence. At the heart of this revolutionary idea is the recognition that negation is not merely a logical operation or psychological attitude, but rather the very ontological structure of human reality itself. This nothingness manifests as consciousness's perpetual ability to distance itself from the world, from its own past, and even from its present self.

The dynamic of nothingness operates through several interrelated dimensions of human experience. First, it appears in our temporal existence as the constant slippage between what we were (the past as facticity), what we are (the present as negation), and what we are not yet (the future as possibility). This temporal happiness means we are never fully present to ourselves there is always an "elsewhere" to our being, a fundamental non-coincidence that prevents any final self-identity. Second, nothingness emerges in our capacity for imaginative freedom our ability to mentally negate what is by envisioning what is not (as when we imagine alternatives

to our current situation). Third, it appears in our reflective consciousness, where the act of self-awareness already introduces a division between the reflecting and reflected-upon self.

This ontological negativity has profound existential consequences. It means human beings are essentially *unfinished*. We have no fixed essence that would determine our actions or identity. The nothingness within us is the space of our absolute freedom, but also the source of our existential anxiety, as we confront the terrifying responsibility of having to invent ourselves without any pre-given guidelines. Our freedom is not something we possess, but rather something we are; we are condemned to be free because we cannot not choose, and even refusing to choose is itself a choice.

Sartre's nothingness also explains the unique human capacity for bad-faith, where we attempt to flee our freedom by pretending to be things rather than consciousness. The very possibility of self-deception arises from this ontological structure. We must simultaneously know and not know our freedom to sustain inauthentic roles and identities. Paradoxically, it is our nothingness that makes both authenticity and in authenticity possible.

Moreover, this concept of nothingness radically reconfigures traditional metaphysical categories. It challenges substance-based ontologies by showing how human existence is fundamentally non-substantial. We are not things that persist unchanged, but rather temporal processes of self-creation. It overturns essentialist views of human nature by demonstrating how *existence precedes essence*. And it provides a new framework for understanding intersubjectivity, as the Other's gaze threatens to fix our fluid nothingness into a reified something.

The ethical implications are equally profound. If we are nothing but what we make of ourselves through our actions, then we bear absolute responsibility not just for our individual lives, but in a sense for the very meaning of humanity itself. Every choice becomes a kind of ontological commitment about what human existence should

be. This explains Sartre's famous claim that in choosing for ourselves, we choose for all humankind.

Thus, Sartre's nothingness is not nihilistic but creative. It is the ontological ground for human freedom, meaning-making, and the perpetual transcendence of given conditions. It explains why human reality is characterized by constant becoming rather than static being, and why we are condemned to invent values rather than discover them. This negative foundation paradoxically becomes the most positive aspect of our existence. The source of our ability to question, creates, and transforms both ourselves and our world.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q 1:** What is the meaning of being-for-itself?

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**Q 2:** What is the key difference between being-in-itself and being-for-itself?

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**Q 3:** How does temporality function in being-for-itself?

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## 12.4.2 Freedom

The concept of *freedom* arises from nothingness. Since consciousness lacks a fixed essence, it is condemned to be free, free to choose and define itself. This absolute freedom is a source of anguish, as it implies full responsibility for one's existence.

At its core, it argues that human freedom is not just a capacity we possess but an inescapable condition of our existence one that is both liberating and deeply unsettling. Unlike objects, which have fixed purposes (a knife is made to cut, a chair to sit on), human beings have no predetermined essence. We are not born with a set

identity, purpose, or meaning; instead, we exist first, and then define ourselves through our choices. This is what Sartre means when he says "existence precedes essence."

Because consciousness is not bound by any inherent nature, it is fundamentally free. But this freedom is not a comforting privilege. Instead, it is a kind of condemnation, because it means we cannot escape the burden of choice. Even refusing to choose is, in itself, a choice. This absolute freedom leads to anguish (or existential *dread*) because it forces us to confront the fact that we alone are responsible for who we are. There is no higher power, no fate, no moral law, or societal expectation that can ultimately justify our decisions. We cannot blame God, nature, or circumstance for our lives. We must bear the full weight of our existence.

This responsibility is terrifying because it reveals that meaning is not discovered but created. Every action we take, every value we uphold, is an assertion of what we believe existence should be. If we choose cowardice, we define ourselves as cowards; if we choose courage, we define ourselves as courageous. There is no neutral ground silence and passivity still shapes our being. This is why freedom is not just about doing what we want but about the unavoidable task of self-creation.

Moreover, this freedom extends beyond the individual. Every choice we make implicitly endorses a certain way of being, influencing others and the world. If I choose honesty, I affirm honesty as a value; if I choose deceit, I contribute to a world where deceit is normalized. Thus, freedom is not just personal but ethical we are responsible not only for ourselves but also, in a way, for humanity itself, because our actions contribute to defining what it means to be human.

Thus, the view of freedom is both exhilarating and daunting. It means we have the power to shape our lives entirely, but it also means we can never hide from the consequences of our choices. There is no destiny to fall back on, no excuses to justify failure or suffering. In a universe without inherent meaning, freedom is the raw material of existence and anguish is the price of realizing its weight.

### 12.4.3 Bad Faith

Sartre's conception of *Bad-faith* is a form of self-deception, where the being-for-itself treats itself as if it were an in-itself. He illustrates this with the example of a café waiter who acts out his role so rigidly that he begins to believe it defines his essence. In reality, no human can be reduced to a fixed identity. We are always more than our roles. Therefore, he writes: "Man is not what he is and is what he is not."

In Sartre's philosophy, the concept of *bad-faith* reveals a fundamental paradox of human existence: while we long for the stability of fixed identities, our consciousness constantly undermines any attempt to be definitively defined. This tension manifests in everyday situations where we attempt to reconcile our inherent freedom with society's demand for stable roles. The café waiter exemplifies this conflict; his exaggerated performance of "being a waiter" represents an attempt to collapse his fluid subjectivity into a concrete social category. However, this performance is always haunted by an unspoken awareness of its artificiality, creating what Sartre calls a "perpetual game of escape" from authentic self-awareness.

What makes *bad-faith* particularly complex is that it requires a strange duality of consciousness. We must simultaneously know and not know that we're deceiving ourselves. The waiter must be aware enough of his freedom to suppress it, yet unaware enough of this suppression to maintain the deception. This explains why Sartre describes bad-faith as requiring "a constant and particular effort". It's not passive ignorance but an active, if unconscious, project of self-misrepresentation. The individual in *bad-faith* becomes both the deceiver and the deceived, maintaining what Sartre calls a *metastable* (the precarious, self-sustaining equilibrium of bad-faith) state of belief that constantly threatens to collapse into either full awareness or complete self-deception.

Sartre's analysis suggests that bad-faith is not simply an individual failing but a cultural phenomenon reinforced by language,

institutions, and everyday interactions. The very categories we use to describe ourselves traditionally are a teacher, mother etc. It becomes traps when we mistake them for essences rather than temporary positions we inhabit. This explains why Sartre insists that "man is a useless passion". We endlessly strive to achieve the impossible stability of objects while remaining fundamentally free subjects. The path to authenticity lies not in rejecting all roles, but in recognising them as provisional choices rather than definitions of our being.

### 12.4.4 Being-for-others

Sartre's idea of *being-for-others* (être-pour-autrui) explores how our sense of self is fundamentally disrupted and defined through the gaze or eyes of others. In his phenomenological analysis, he reveals that the mere presence of another consciousness transforms our existence, pulling us out of the subjective realm of pure freedom and objectifying us in ways we cannot control. When another person looks at me, I am suddenly made aware of myself as an object in their world-a being with fixed qualities, judgments, and meanings that I did not choose. This experience is both inescapable and profoundly alienating, as it introduces a dimension of my being that exists outside my own self-definition.

The gaze of the Other does not merely observe me; it captures me, reducing my fluid, self-aware consciousness to a static thing i.e. a waiter, a coward, beautiful woman categories that feel reductive yet inescapable under their scrutiny. This objectification generates shame, not necessarily because of any moral failing, but because shame is the visceral recognition that I am vulnerable to interpretations beyond my control. Even pride is a reaction to this dynamic, an attempt to reclaim the objectified self by embracing the Other's judgment. In this way, my relationship with others is inherently conflictual: I need them to confirm my existence, yet their very awareness of me threatens my sense of autonomy.

Sartre's famous example of the *voyeur* peering through a keyhole illustrates this tension. Initially absorbed in his act, the voyeur

exists purely as *being-for-itself* which is a free, self-defining subject. But the moment he hears footsteps and realizes he might be seen, he is abruptly transformed into being-for-others is a spy in the eyes of another. His subjectivity collapses under the weight of this external interpretation, and he experiences shame not because he judges himself, but because he is *judged*. This reveals the paradox of human relations: while we crave recognition, the recognition we receive is always a form of imprisonment, fixing us in roles we cannot entirely own.

Therefore, *being-for-others* exposes the impossibility of pure subjectivity or pure objectivity. We are forever oscillating between these modes- neither fully free agents nor mere objects, but beings whose existence is co-authored in the tense interplay of gazes. Every social interaction thus becomes a struggle for dominance: to objectify the Other before they objectify me, to seize the freedom they threaten to take away. For Sartre, this conflict is irreducible, marking human relationships as inherently fraught with tension, desire, and the unending battle between the self we choose and the self others impose upon us.

That's why, Sartre's concept of being-for-others justifies itself through its fundamental revelation about human existence: that our self-awareness and identity are inextricably tied to how we are perceived by others. This is not merely an observation about social interaction but an ontological truth about consciousness itself.

## 12.5 CONCLUSION

Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of *being-for-itself* presents a radical reimagining of human existence, one that rejects fixed essences in favor of absolute freedom and perpetual self-creation. At the core of his existential ontology is the distinction between being-in-itself and *being-for-itself*. Unlike inert things, which simply are, human existence is defined by nothingness is a fundamental lack that allows for transcendence, choice, and the constant surpassing of the given.

Sartre's philosophy reveals that human reality is marked by an inescapable tension: we are both *facticity and transcendence*. This duality means we are never fully determined, yet never entirely free from our situations. We are "condemned to be free," burdened with the responsibility of defining ourselves through choices, without recourse to pre-existing values or divine justification. This freedom, while exhilarating, generates anguish, as we recognize that even inaction is a choice; one for which we bear total responsibility.

The concept of bad-faith exposes the human tendency to flee this terrifying freedom by pretending to be fixed entities; whether through rigid social roles, essentialist identities, or deterministic excuses. Yet, authenticity demands that we embrace our nothingness, acknowledging that we are always more than what we appear to be at any given moment.

Finally, *being-for-others* introduces the social dimension of existence, revealing how the gaze of others objectifies us, reducing our fluid subjectivity to a static identity. This creates an inherent conflict in human relationships: we need recognition from others to confirm our existence, yet their perception threatens to imprison us in definitions we do not choose. Thus, Sartre's famous declaration "Hell is other people" captures the paradox of intersubjectivity: while we cannot escape the Other's influence, we must continually struggle to reclaim our freedom within it.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 4:** Why does Sartre claim that humans are "condemned to be free"?

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**Q 5:** What is *bad-faith* and how does it relate to *being-for-itself*?

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**Q 6:** How does "existence precedes essence" relate to freedom?

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## 12.6 LET US SUM UP

- Sartre distinguishes between being-in-itself and Being-for-itself.
- Being-in-itself is complete and self-identical, while being-for-itself is defined by negation and freedom.
- Nothingness: Consciousness introduces negation, making human existence incomplete and perpetually self-surpassing.
- Temporality: Humans exist as a temporal stretch is a past (facticity), present (nihilation), and future (possibility).
- Freedom: Humans are "condemned to be free," bearing absolute responsibility for self-creation.
- Existence Precedes Essence: Humans have no pre-given nature; they define themselves through choices.
- Anguish: The anxiety of recognizing radical freedom and responsibility.
- Bad Faith: Self-deception where individuals deny their freedom by adopting fixed identities.
- The "gaze" of others objectifies us, reducing our subjectivity to a static identity (e.g., shame when seen by another).
- Human relationships are inherently conflictual, as we seek recognition while resisting objectification.
- Rejects Kant's noumenon/phenomenon distinction; appearances are reality.
- Consciousness is non-substantial, a "hole in being" that perpetually negates and transcends.
- Every choice is an ontological commitment, shaping not only the individual but also collective human meaning.
- Authenticity requires embracing freedom; bad faith flees into determinism.
- Sartre's framework critiques essentialism, reification, and complacency, emphasizing human agency in a meaningless world.



## 12.7 FURTHER READINGS

1) 1) Sartre, Jean-Paul (1943). Being and Nothingness: An essay on phenomenological ontology, Translated by Hazel E. Barnes (2003), London and New York.
2) Bhadra, Mrinal Kanti (2004). A Critical Survey of Phenomenology and Existentialism, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi.
3) Blackham, H. J. (2016). Six Existentialist Thinker, London and New York.
4) Cranston, Maurice (1962). Sartre, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh.



## 12.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** Being-for-itself refers to human consciousness as a dynamic, self-aware existence that constantly transcends itself. Unlike static objects, it is characterized by freedom, negation, and perpetual becoming, always projecting itself toward future possibilities rather than being defined by a fixed essence.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** Being-in-itself describes inert objects that simply "are" (e.g., a rock), complete and unchanging, while being-for-itself is human consciousness, which is never self-identical but always in flux, defined by its freedom to negate and surpass its current state.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** For being-for-itself, time is lived as a stretch between facticity (past), nihilation (present), and projection (future). Unlike objects stuck in an eternal present, human existence is always "ahead of itself," using the past as a ground to transcend toward future possibilities.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** Sartre argues humans are "condemned to be free" because we have no predetermined essence or divine blueprint governing our actions. This means we cannot escape the burden of constantly making choices that define who we are, even when we

try to avoid responsibility. Our freedom is absolute and inescapable - we are abandoned to it without excuses or justifications. This condition produces anguish as we realize we alone must bear the weight of creating meaning in a world without inherent purpose. The condemnation lies in the fact that we didn't choose this freedom, yet must live with its consequences.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** Bad faith is a form of self-deception where people deny their fundamental freedom by pretending to be fixed, determined beings like objects. It relates to being-for-itself because it represents a refusal to acknowledge our true nature as consciousness that constantly transcends itself. Examples include people who claim "I have no choice" or over-identify with social roles, treating them as essential identities rather than temporary positions. This contradicts the being-for-itself's dynamic nature as pure possibility and self-creation. Bad faith offers comforting illusions of determinism at the cost of authentic existence.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** "Existence precedes essence" establishes that humans first exist without any predefined nature, and must then create their essence through free choices and actions. This principle makes freedom foundational to human reality, as we are not bound by any inherent design or purpose. Our essence isn't given but emerges from how we exercise our freedom in concrete situations. This means we are radically responsible for who we become, as every action contributes to defining our character and values. The absence of predetermined essence means freedom isn't just something we have, but what we fundamentally are.



## 12.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short question**

**Q. 1.** How is not choosing still a choice?

**Q. 2.** Why does Sartre say consciousness is a "nothingness"?

**Q. 3.** How does existence precedes essence define human freedom?

**Q. 4.** What emotion arises from recognizing radical freedom?

**Q. 5.** Give an example of bad faith in everyday life.

**Q. 6.** Is being-for-itself conscious or unconscious?

**Q. 7.** Why can't humans ever fully become Being-in-itself?

**Q. 8.** How does the gaze of the Other objectify us?

**Q. 9.** What does Sartre mean by "Hell is other people"?

**Q. 10.** What is the paradox of Being-for-others?

**B. Short question (Answer in about 150 words)**

**Q. 1.** Explain Sartre's distinction between Being-in-itself and Being-for-itself with examples.

**Q. 2.** How does Sartre's concept of nothingness (néant) define human freedom?

**Q. 3.** Analyze Sartre's claim "existence precedes essence" in the context of Being-for-itself

**Q. 4.** Describe the role of temporality in Being-for-itself and its existential implications.

**Q. 5.** How does Sartre's example of the café waiter illustrate bad faith?

**Q. 6.** Explain Sartre's view of Being-for-others using the voyeur example. Why is conflict inevitable in human relationships?

**C. Long questions (Answers in about 300-500 words)**

**Q. 1.** Analyze Sartre's distinction between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. How does this ontological divide shape his existentialist view of human freedom and responsibility?

**Q. 2.** "Man is not what he is and is what he is not." Explore Sartre's paradox of being-for-itself with reference to temporality, bad-faith, and the project of becoming.

**Q. 3.** Critically examine Sartre's claim that "Hell is other people." How does being-for-others reveal the tension between freedom and objectification in human relationships?

**Q. 4.** "Existence precedes essence" is the cornerstone of Sartre's existentialism. Evaluate this claim in light of his theories of nothingness, bad faith, and radical freedom.

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# UNIT 13: HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF BEING

## UNIT STRUCTURE


13.1 Learning objectives

13.2 Meaning of Being

13.3 Heidegger's Concept of Being

13.4 Critical Analysis of Heidegger's Concept of Being

13.5 Let us sum up

13.6 Further Readings and References

13.7 Answer to Check your progress

13.8 Model Questions


## 13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Explain the meaning of being
- Know the meaning of being as understood by different Western philosophers
- Know Heidegger's concept of Being
- Know the relation between Heidegger's concept of Being and Dasein
- Understand the points of criticism regarding Heidegger's concept of Being

## 13.2 INTRODUCTION

The concept of being is one of the primordial issues in philosophy. However, it is also the one which has been unjustifiably ignored in the history of philosophy, as Martin Heidegger notes it. The concept of being was prevalent in ancient philosophy, but it went into oblivion and its significance was not recognised until much later in the 20th Century by Heidegger. Ontology, a subdiscipline of metaphysics, deals with the philosophical study of being.

Being does not have the same meaning as the term 'thing'. Being rather signifies things or objects insofar as they are. The term 'being' is derived from the verb 'to be. 'Being is usually defined as 'existence 'and is contrasted with 'non-existence' or 'non-being'. Accordingly, being pertains to every entity that exists. Everything that exists is either being itself or an instance or aspect of being. The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy states that the domain of being includes everything real and nothing unreal. However, being can also mean something deeper than mere existence. The concept of being also incorporates the question - What does one mean when one states that something is rather than is not? The concept of being has been perplexing the minds of philosophers from Pre-Socratic age. Let us now look at some of the prominent philosophers who dealt with the concept of being.

### 13.2.1 Parmenides on Being

Parmenides was a Presocratic Greek philosopher and lived around 5th Century BCE. He is commonly thought of as the founder of the 'Eleatic School.' He is the first to articulate the concept of being in a distinct way by maintaining that being 'is.' Being is one, and non-being 'is not'. Parmenides opined that the multiplicity of things, their movements and changing forms, are merely an appearance of a single eternal reality called-Being. The Parmenidean principle 'all is one' is based on this concept of Being. Moreover, Parmenides postulated that all change or 'non-Being' are illusory and illogical. Parmenides' introduction of the method of basing claims about appearances on a logical concept of Being, made him one of the founders of metaphysics.

### 13.2.2 Plato on Being

In the philosophy of the great Greek philosopher Plato, there is a distinction between Being and becoming. He refers to Being as 'that which always is and has no becoming' and becoming as 'that which

is always becoming and never is. 'While the realm of Being remains constant, the realm of becoming is always in flux and never stable. Additionally, Plato links his concept of Being with his theory of Forms.

### 13.2.3 Aristotle on Being

Aristotle was a disciple of Plato and one of the great Ancient Greek philosophers. He considered Metaphysics as the 'first philosophy, 'namely the study of being qua being. Aristotle explained the meaning of Being by explaining the meaning of the Greek verb 'to be. 'He also opined that the study of substance is the way to understand the nature of being.

Aristotle laid out two accounts of the subject matter of first philosophy. One account saw the discipline as theorizing about the being qua being, and the things which belong to being taken in itself; it differs from the special sciences in that it deals with the most general features of beings, insofar as they are the beings. The other account saw first philosophy dealing with a particular kind of Being, namely, divine, independent and immutable substance; for this reason, heat times called the discipline 'theology.'

### 13.2.4 Thomas Aquinas on Being

Thomas Aquinas belonged to the 13th Century. He was tremendously influenced by Aristotle. Aquinas also viewed metaphysics as the study of being qua being. That is, Aquinas held that metaphysics is the study of the most fundamental aspects of being that constitutes a being.

Aquinas viewed being as the primary subject of philosophy. For him, metaphysics is the study of being as well as certain aspects common to all being. These aspects are essence and existence. All beings, for him, do exist and have an essence. Thus, he viewed Metaphysics as primarily concerned with the study of essence and existence and their relationship.

## 13.3 HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF BEING

### 13.3.1 Situating Heidegger's Thought and Works

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), born in Germany, was a revolutionary philosopher of twentieth-century European philosophy. His philosophy is largely identified with phenomenology and existentialism. His thought has contributed to the development of hermeneutics and postmodernism. His works touch a wide range of topics including metaphysics, ontology, existence, humanism, technology, art, language, poetry, thinking, consciousness, etc. The influence of his thought has extended into other disciplines as well such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, theology, aesthetics, political science, etc. Heidegger also has a significant influence on the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Hannah Arendt, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Georg Lukács, Hubert Dreyfus, Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor and so on.

Heidegger was a pupil of Edmund Husserl, who is regarded as the father of phenomenology. However, Heidegger departed from his teacher's ideas and put forward his own philosophy, which came to be identified as 'existential phenomenology. 'Nonetheless, when Heidegger was identified with the label 'existentialist', he rejected it.

Some of the important works of Heidegger are *Being and Time; What Is Metaphysics? Poetry, Language and Thought; The Question of Technology; What Is Called Thinking? The Basic Problems of Phenomenology etc. Being and Time* (German edition Sein und Zeit) is a work from the earlier philosophy of Heidegger and it continues to be the most famous and influential work of his.

### 13.3.2 The Question of Being

Heidegger opines that Western philosophy for a large part ignored and suppressed the question of Being (*Seinsfrage* in German), in favour of epistemology and traditional metaphysics. He describes the history of Western philosophy as 'forgottenness of Being. 'Heidegger attempts to break away from the pre-occupations of traditional Western thought and inquire into the meaning of Being. For him, the question of Being is the most fundamental and pertinent question, for it represents the underlying basis of all existence and is the foundational concept that underpins all other philosophical questions. While inquiring into the meaning of Being, he also distances himself from the traditional approaches of dealing with it. With regard to Being, traditional ontology dealt with questions such as 'what exists' and 'what there is. Traditional ontology was 'ontic' in the sense that it occupied itself with entities (Seiendes in German) or, what is. Heidegger departs from it and advances 'fundamental ontology' and his question regarding Being is rather -'What is it to be?' or 'What does Being (Sein in German) mean?'

### 13.3.3 Being and being

Heidegger opines that there is a difference between Being and being, and this distinction has been overlooked by traditional Western philosophy. Unlike the previous thinkers, Heidegger attempts not to commit the mistake of reifying or abstracting Being.

The being with lowercase 'b' is ontic and is a concept of entity or entities. Western philosophy, Heidegger argues, has been pre-occupied with ontic knowledge of being, but at the expense of ontological knowledge of Being.

The Being with uppercase 'B' is not a being; nor it is an entity or class of entities. Being is rather that which defines or determines entities as entities. Heidegger's project is ontological insofar as his inquiry is about Being as such, rather than beings. However, although

it is popular to draw a distinction between 'Being' and 'being,' many scholars of Heidegger do not accept this distinction. For those scholars 'being' suffices to represent Heidegger's understanding of Sein.

Nonetheless, being is not available to sensory perception, for it is not something which can be observed, characterised or determined. The ways we deal with being are not applicable in the case of Being. While being is ontic, being is ontological. Being therefore is elusive and resistant to the ordinary ways of understanding. This leads to the question of correct mode of access to Being.

### 13.3.4 Approaching Being by Way of Dasein

According to Heidegger, philosopher shall lost sight of the way to address the question of Being. The correct mode of access to Being, Heidegger argues, is Dasein - the ontological term for man. For, man is the privileged entity who can question its Being. It is Dasein, and Dasein alone, which can raise such a question and examine it. It is Dasein for which Being is an issue. This indicates that the meaning of Being must be approached through an investigation of Dasein. It is for this reason that Heidegger writes, "*fundamental ontology*, from which all others can first arise, must … be sought in the *existential analytic of Dasein*." For, Dasein offers the access through which the uncovering of meaning of Being may be possible. Thus, to find out the meaning of Being, Dasein must first be investigated. Foran analysis of Dasein would reveal the meaning of Being in general.

Heidegger states that Dasein's being consists in *its existence*. Dasein understands itself in terms of its existence. The being of Dasein is characterised by the fundamental structure: *being-in-the-world*. This demonstrates that Dasein is always in the world or is connected to the world. Additionally, Heidegger uses the term 'care' (Sorgein German) to express the unitary structure of being-in-the-

world, viz -uniting Dasein with the world. Care is Dasein relating itself to things by concern and to persons by solicitude. Thus, Heidegger views the Being of Dasein in its 'everydayness'.

Heidegger lays out three existential structures of Dasein: *Existenz*, Facticity and *Fallenness. Existenz* is defined in terms of possibility and understanding. Facticity is the actual condition that Dasein exists in. Fallenness represents the failure to ask the question of being and forgetting of one's true existential nature.

Heidegger lays out two modes of existing of Dasein: *authenticity and inauthenticity*. These modes refer to Dasein's relationship to himself and his way of existing. Authenticity depends on an adequate acknowledgement of one's Existenz, Facticity and Fallenness. While, inauthenticity usually takes place when Dasein ignores its Existenz and lives in fallenness.

Furthermore, Heidegger claims that the meaning of Being has to be understood in terms of some temporal framework or horizon. Temporality is the ground of Dasein's being. 'Time' therefore constitutes the horizon for the question of Being. Time is also understood in terms of projects undertaken by Dasein.

## 13.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF BEING

Heidegger's question of Being and approach to investigate it is esteemed by many scholars to be revolutionary and original. However, critics point out some limitations in Heidegger's concept of Being.

Taylor Carman writes that some critics dismiss Heidegger's concept of Being as a conflation of different senses of the verb 'to be', namely - existence, predication and identity. Heidegger mostly has in his mind the sense of existence, but he at times seems to use the latter two senses as well.

Although Heidegger understood that Being is the foundation of existence of all entities, however he never succeeded in indicating the nature of Being. Thus, being is put in a mystery. For this reason, Mrinal Kanti Bhadra

writes that Being begins and ends with a mystery in the thought of Heidegger. Moreover, Heidegger expresses the inseparability of man and the outer world in the form: being-in-the-world. This indicates that there is no subject-object distinction in Dasein, for it is always a being-in-the-world. Dasein cannot be distinguished from its existence in the world.MK Bhadra however states that a separability is required in order for man to lead his life. For, only when a man makes a distinction between subject and object, he can understand what he is. And, only when man understands what he is, can he understand his relation with the outer world. Man has to assume the role of a knower as well as a doer in order to go about his practical activities. This indicates that man's relation with the outer world is not inseparability, but separable inseparability.

Additionally, Muhammad Kamal states that Heidegger, by taking Dasein as the mode of access to Being, has resorted to a being rather than inquiring Being per se. Thus, Heidegger begins with a regional ontology (Dasein's ontology), rather than fundamental ontology. Hence although Heidegger's analysis of Dasein reveals the existence and structures of existence of human being, it does not reveal the meaning of Being. Heidegger's initial aim was to inquire into the meaning of Being, but it ended up in an analysis of Dasein.

Furthermore, M. Kamal opines that the meaning of Dasein cannot be understood unless the meaning of Being is first understood. He states that the ontological foundation of Dasein is to be understood first and only after it the meaning of Dasein can be inquired.

Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology is not without perplexity. However, M. Kamal writes that Heidegger's fundamental ontology does not suffer from contradictions, but only from ambiguities and confusion.

Despite the criticisms, Heidegger's thought on Being cannot be ignored or discarded. It invites deep reflection on the concept of Being. Heidegger's legacy in the context of the concept of Being can be acknowledged with the credit for raising the question of Being. His originality lies in having raised the question of Being in a way which is more explicit and systematic than anyone before him. Although Heidegger's answer to

the question of Being may not be agreed upon by many scholars, the question and attempt to search its answer is venerated much. Heidegger's philosophy on Being has profoundly revolutionised contemporary Western thought. Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, etc. have been deeply influenced by Heidegger's works on Being. In addition to this, although Heidegger's initial aim was to inquire into Being, his analysis of Dasein, or the analysis of human existence is quite influential. His analysis of human existence breaks free from traditional theories of human existence, especially the Cartesian theory of self-substance.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** What is the meaning of being in philosophy?

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**Q 2:** Who were the ancient philosophers that talked about being?

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**Q 3:** What did Parmenides mean by Being?

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**Q 4:** What do you understand by Heidegger's Question of Being?

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**Q 5:** What is the difference between Being and being, for Heidegger?

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**Q 6:** What is the correct mode of access to Being, according to Heidegger?

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**Q 7:** What is being-in-the-world?

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**Q 8:** Can Heidegger's concept of Being be understood in terms of some temporal framework?

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**Q 9:** What are the points of criticism regarding Heidegger's concept of Being?

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**Q 10:** Could Heidegger explain the nature of Being, according to critics?

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## 13.5 LET US SUM UP

- The concept of being is one of the primordial issues in philosophy. However, it is also the one which has been unjustifiably ignored in the history of philosophy.
- Being is usually defined as 'existence' and is contrasted with 'non-existence' or 'non-being'.
- Parmenides opined that the multiplicity of things, their movements and changing forms, are merely an appearance of a single eternal reality called - 'Being.'
- Plato drew a distinction between being and becoming.
- Aristotle considered Metaphysics as the 'first philosophy,' namely the study of being qua being. Aristotle explained the meaning of Being by explaining the meaning of the Greek verb 'to be.'
- Aquinas viewed being as the primary subject of philosophy. For him, metaphysics is the study of being as well as certain aspects common to all being.
- Heidegger opines that Western philosophy for a large part ignored and suppressed the question of Being. For him, the question of Being is the most fundamental question.

- Heidegger departs from traditional ontology and advances 'fundamental ontology'.
- Heidegger opines that there is a difference between Being and being.
- The being with lowercase 'b' is ontic and is a concept of entity or entities.
- The Being with uppercase 'B' is not a being; nor it is an entity or class of entities. Being is that which defines entities as entities. Heidegger's project is ontological insofar as his inquiry is about Being as such, rather than beings.
- The correct mode of access to Being, Heidegger argues, is Dasein - the ontological term for man.
- It is Dasein, and Dasein alone, which can raise such a question and examine it.
- Dasein's being consists in its existence. The being of Dasein is characterised by the fundamental structure: being-in-the-world. He uses the term 'care' to express this unitary structure.
- Heidegger lays out three existential structures of Dasein: Existenz, Facticity and Fallenness.
- Heidegger lays out two modes of existing of Dasein: authenticity and inauthenticity. These modes refer to Dasein's relationship to himself and his way of existing.
- Heidegger claims that the meaning of Being has to be understood in terms of some temporal framework. 'Time' therefore constitutes the horizon for the question of Being.
- Some critics dismiss Heidegger's concept of Being as a conflation of different senses of the verb 'to be'.
- Heidegger never succeeded in indicating the nature of Being. Thus, being is put in a mystery.
- Heidegger expresses the inseparability of man and the outer world in the form: being-in-the-world. However, a separability is required in order for man to lead his life.
- Heidegger, by taking Dasein as the mode of access of Being, has resorted to a being rather than inquiring Being per se.

- The meaning of Dasein cannot be understood unless the meaning of Being is first understood.
- Heidegger's fundamental ontology does not suffer from contradictions, but only from ambiguities and confusion.
- Despite the criticisms, Heidegger's thought on Being cannot be ignored or discarded. It invites deep reflection on the concept of Being.
- His originality lies in having raised the question of Being in such a way which is more explicit and systematic than anyone before him.
- Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, etc. have been deeply influenced by Heidegger's works on Being.
- Heidegger's analysis of human existence breaks free from traditional theories of human existence, especially the Cartesian theory of self-substance.



## 13.6 FURTHER READINGS

1) Herbert Spielberg: The Phenomenological Movement, New York, Vols. I&II, The Hague: Martinus NIjhoff,1971 P. Edwards: Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Relevant Articles
2) Bradely: Appearance and Reality
3) H.J. Blackham: Six Existentialist Thinkers, New York,1959
4) Martin Heidegger: Being and Time, New York, 1996.
5) Hubert L. Dreyfus: Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division 1, London, 1995.
6) Christopher Macann: Four Phenomenological Philosophers: Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, India, 2021.
7) Mrinal Kanti Bhadra: A Critical Survey of Phenomenology and Existentialism, Delhi, 2004.
8) Taylor Carman: Heidegger's Analytic: Interpretation, Discourse and Authenticity in Being and Time, Cambridge, 2003.
9) Muhammad Kamal: Critique of Heidegger's Understanding of the Meaning of Being, Indian Philosophical Quarterly, 2001.



## 13.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** The concept of being is one of the primordial issues in philosophy. Being does not have the same meaning as the term 'thing'. Being rather signifies things or objects insofar as they are. The term 'being' is derived from the verb 'to be.' Being is usually defined as 'existence' and is contrasted with 'non-existence' or 'non-being'. Accordingly, being pertains to every entity that exists. However, 'being' also can mean something deeper than mere existence.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** Among the ancient philosophers who prominently talked about being, mention can be made of Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** Parmenides opined that the multiplicity of things, their movements and changing forms, are merely an appearance of a single eternal reality called - 'Being.' The Parmenidean principle 'all is one' is based on this concept of Being.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** Heidegger opines that Western philosophy for a large part ignored and suppressed the question of Being. For him, the question of Being is the most fundamental question. While inquiring into it, he also distances himself from the traditional approaches of dealing with the question of Being. With regard to Being, traditional ontology dealt with questions such as 'what exists' and 'what their is'. Traditional ontology was 'ontic' in the sense that it occupied itself with entities (Seiendes in German) or, what is. Heidegger departs from it and advances 'fundamental ontology' and his question regarding Being is rather - 'What is it to be?' or 'What does Being (Sein in German) mean?'.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** Heidegger opines that there is a difference between Being and being. The being with lowercase 'b' is ontic and is a concept of entity or entities. Western philosophy, Heidegger argues, has been pre-occupied with ontic knowledge of being, but at the expense of

ontological knowledge of Being. The Being with uppercase 'B' is not a being; nor it is an entity or class of entities. Being is rather that which defines or determines entities as entities.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** The correct mode of access to Being, Heidegger argues, is Dasein - the ontological term for man. For, man is the privileged entity who can question its Being. It is Dasein, and Dasein alone, which can raise such a question and examine it.

**Ans to Q. No. 7:** The being of Dasein is characterised by the fundamental structure: being-in-the-world. This demonstrates that Dasein is always in the world or is connected to the world.

**Ans to Q. No. 8:** Yes, Heidegger claims that the meaning of Being has to be understood in terms of some temporal framework or horizon. Temporality is the ground of Dasein's being. 'Time' therefore constitutes the horizon for the question of Being.

**Ans to Q. No. 9:** The points of criticism are as follows. Some critics dismiss Heidegger's concept of Being as a conflation of different senses of the verb 'to be'. He never succeeded in indicating the nature of Being. Heidegger expresses the inseparability of man and the outer world in the form: being-in-the-world. However, a separability is required in order for man to lead his life.

**Ans to Q. No. 10:** According to critics, Heidegger never succeeded in indicating the nature of Being. Being begins and ends with a mystery in the thought of Heidegger.



## 13.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short question**

**Q. 1.** Who were the philosophers who talked about being before Heidegger?

**Q. 2.** Who were the ancient philosophers who talked about being?

**Q. 3.** Who is considered to be the father of phenomenology?

**Q. 4.** What is the name of the book in which Heidegger talked Being in his earlier philosophy?

**Q. 5.** Name two works of Heidegger.

**Q. 6.** Who is the author of the book Being and Time?

**Q. 7.** What is the ontological term for human in Heidegger's philosophy?

**Q. 8.** Name the fundamental structure that characterises Dasein.

**Q. 9.** What is the term that Heidegger uses to express the unitary structure of Dasein with the world?

**Q. 10.** What is the foundational concept that underpins all other philosophical questions, for Heidegger?

**B. Short Questions: (Answer in about 150 words)**

**Q. 1.** What is the fundamental question of philosophy for Heidegger?

**Q. 2.** Are entities and being same for Heidegger?

**Q. 3.** How does Heidegger approach Being?

**Q. 4.** What are the three existential structures of Dasein?

**Q. 5.** What are the points of criticism against Heidegger's concept of Being?

**C. Write Short Notes On: (Answer in about 150 words)**

**Q. 1.** Meaning of Being.

**Q. 2.** Heidegger's philosophy.

**Q. 3.** Heidegger's question of Being.

**Q. 4.** Dasein as understood by Heidegger.

**Q. 5.** Being and being as understood by Heidegger.

**Long Questions: (Answer in about 300 words)**.

**Q. 1.** How did philosophers preceding Heidegger understand Being?

**Q. 2.** Explain the correct mode of access to Being, according to Heidegger?

**Q. 3.** Explain Dasein in light of Being.

**Q. 4.** Could Heidegger satisfactorily answer to the question of Being?

**Q. 5.** What do critics say about Heidegger's concept of Being?

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# UNIT 14: HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF DASEIN

## UNIT STRUCTURE


14.1 Learning objectives

14.2 The Concept of Dasein

14.3 Heidegger's re-interpretation

14.3.1 Dasein as Being-In-The-World

14.3.2 Being- with - Others

14.3.3 Being - as - Care

14.3.4 Existentiality- Facticity- Fallenness

14.3.5 Inauthenticity and Authenticity

14.4 Origin and inspiration

14.5 Critical comments

14.6 Let us sum up

14.7 Further Readings

14.8 Answers to check your progress

14.9 Model Questions


## 14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Explain the concept of Dasein
- Analyse Heidegger's re-interpretation of the concept of Dasein
- Know the origin and inspiration behind it
- Explain the critical comments on Heidegger's concept of Dasein

## 14.2 THE CONCEPT OF DASEIN

Dasein is an important concept in existential phenomenology that analyses the distinctiveness of human existence. The term "dasein" is derived from the German words "da" meaning "there" and "sein" meaning "being". Therefore, dasein signifies the condition of "being-there" that emphasizes the way in which humans exist in relation to the world and

themselves. Dasein is a technical term in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, who was a German philosopher, well known for his contribution to phenomenology and existentialism. Heidegger used this term "dasein" to refer to the mode of being that is particular to human beings. It reflects the dynamic interplay of self-awareness, freedom and the search for authenticity. The concept of "being-in-the-world" is central to dasein, which focuses on the relational nature of human existence. It is interconnected in a web of relationships with its surroundings and other beings, in contrast to objects that merely exist. Dasein is a form of being that is aware of and must deal with issues, such as personhood, mortality and the paradox or dilemma of coexisting with other humans while ultimately being alone with oneself.

Time plays an important role in the structure of dasein. Human existence is inherently temporal because it navigates past experiences, engages with the present and projects itself into the future. Heidegger has emphasized this temporal quality of dasein and argues that dasein's understanding of itself and its potentialities or possibilities is shaped by this temporal movement. The past provides context; choices are made in the present and the future represents a horizon of possibilities. Therefore, dasein is dynamic and always changing because of the interaction of memory, action and anticipation of the future. It suggests reflecting on our being, confronting our mortality and seeking authenticity in a world of interconnected meanings.

## 14.3 HEIDEGGER'S RE-INTERPRETATION

Greek metaphysics rigidly viewed Dasein or Being as the only reality. It considered man basically a fixed natured object that is susceptible to scientific investigation. Heidegger strongly rejects these misconceptions by removing them from his metaphysics, even though these ideas dominated the orientation of the Ancient Greek. He argues that the failure to recognize man as the necessary being is the main cause of the confusion about Being. Heidegger attempts to free man from the rigidity of conventional metaphysics. He radicalizes the intrinsic potentialities and capabilities of a human being to further develop the self and knowledge as the conscious

being that necessarily exists. For Heidegger, man or dasein is not a foreclosed entity, rather it is a "self-making or meaning-making" being.

Martin Heidegger's one of the most primary works "Being and Time" revolves around the question of sense of being and analyses various structures to arrive at it correctly. He raises the problem of how the value of being degraded in the cycle of mundane and mechanical routines and philosophically it is essential to take it through the right path.

Heidegger through the understanding of "dasein" aims at the overcoming of the forgetfulness of being and propounds dasein as the destination of being. Heidegger stands out from his contemporary thinkers with his view that goes against the traditional view of being which is completely independent of the world. This conception of being as the integral part of the world is very unique to him. Thus, it is important to understand the ontological structure and existential analytic of dasein to know about Heidegger's conception of being. The root meaning of the term dasein is "being there" or "being here" and it refers both to human being and the being that we have. But in Heidegger, it is important to note that dasein is not the same as human being since it is presented as "dasein of a man". Dasein's understanding of being is significant for the interpretation of the structure of being. Dasein differs from other entities because it has the potential to comprehend and question the being.

### 14.3.1 Dasein as Being-In-The-World

According to Heidegger, dasein and being-in-the-world are often used together. The existential concept of being-in-the-world emphasizes human existence as a state of living with a very meaningful orientation. Every Individual in this world has a specific destiny to fulfil, which is an important aspect of dasein. It is defined as a priori structure that is grounded in the state of Being. Heidegger replaced the concept of being-in-the-world for terms like subject, consciousness, object and world. Dasein is not an observable being, that is why, in order to understand it, Heidegger suggests examining beings, particularly human existence. We need to examine the

distinctive aspect of our condition as human beings, specifically what differentiates dasein from all other beings, such as animals, plants and rocks etc. According to Heidegger, in order to comprehend this, we need to look into the different aspects of dasein that always remain the same regardless of the time period in the world.

Being as an issue for it, according to Heidegger, is the first feature of dasein. Since it is an ontological being, it regards its own being as an issue. It considers its own existence as an issue. It always asks itself, "what shall I be today, tomorrow, or next year?". Heidegger refers to this as "mineness", the ability to answer these questions on one's own. The only way in which we may perceive the world or ourselves is through our own existence.

### 14.3.2 Being- with - Others

Another basic existential feature of dasein is being-with-others. Ordinarily, we find ourselves surrounded by other people, not alone in this world. Man is unable to fulfill his daily needs on his own, because he is not self-sufficient. He is essentially social or related to others, as Socrates viewed man as a "political animal" (zoo politikon). Aristotle also emphasised the necessity of human existence. He says, a person who cannot live in society and has no needs or who is self-sufficient is either a god or a beast. In this world, no one can survive alone without the other people.

According to Heidegger, the existence of dasein is fundamentally based on "being-with-others (Mit sein). Man will always encounter these "others" and be in the same world as them. Therefore, dasein's being-with-others and being-in-the-world are interrelated. Dasein's being-with-others is not just having "ready-to-hand" things. By "ready-to-hand" things, Heidegger refers to those things that we encounter in this world. Dasein's being-with-others does not refer to anyone else, but those "others" with whom dasein is at home in this world. They are the people one is corresponds to and does not separate oneself from. Man is "being-in-the-world" with

"others". This solicitude, according to Heidegger, is man's care for his fellow humans, which is seen in his interaction with them in day-to-day existence. There are two manifestations of such solicitude:

1) Leaps in and dominates,

2) Leaps ahead and free.

When solicitude leaps in for the other, the other is taken over that which should be a concern to others. It means the other is not free to assume its own dasein, whose essence is care. On the other hand, solicitude restores his care when it leaps ahead for the other. In this case, the other becomes unique and remains undominated. In this potential mood, dasein is subjected to the power of the other in relation to its being with others. Whereas, in the solicitude as leaps in, dasein loses his authenticity. Here dasein is objectified. But dasein in the solicitude as leaps ahead, is authentic in so far it acknowledges as a fellow human being in the world and sustains his existence in that manner.

### 14.3.3 Being - as - Care

Heidegger used the term "care" for demonstrating three fundamental constitutions of human existence as being. Care is the manifestation of the being of "dasein" in the world. It is how we relate to the outside world and how we engage with it in our daily lives. Care is a way of being in the world, which includes both action and intention, not just a feeling or emotion. It is about how we look at the world that shapes the way we interact with the world.

Heidegger's concept of care focuses on the temporal nature of human existence. According to Heidegger, our existence is inherently connected with time and our perception of the world is determined by our engagement with the past, present and future. Therefore, care is not just an experience of the present moment but a way of being that is always oriented towards the future. All our intentions and actions we do, are always directed towards a potential

future and the anticipation of that future influences our understanding of ourselves and the world.

Another important aspect of Heidegger's concept of care is its focus on the interconnection between humans and the environment. He argues that we do not exist as solitary beings, instead we are always embedded in a world, which is significant and meaningful. We have a reciprocal connection with the world. Therefore, care is a mode of being in the world that combines both responsibility and responsiveness. We have an obligation to interact with the world in a meaningful and respectful manner and we are responsive to it. Also, Heidegger highlights the role of language that shapes our understanding of ourselves and the world. According to Heidegger, language is not just a means of communication, but a way of revealing the world to us. Our choice of language influences our perception of the world and ourselves, and care for others requires being aware of how our language choices shape our understanding of the world.

There are three aspects of care, as the totality of the mode of human being's existence in the world: "Existentiality", "Facticity", and "Fallenness".

### 14.3.4 Existentiality- Facticity- Fallenness

Existentiality is the most fundamental dynamic feature of human existence. It gives man the ability to continuously rise above his immediate state or circumstance by providing answers and solutions to problems. The concept of existentiality is dynamic and full of practical applications in human situations. It acts as a continuous reminder that the human mind is capable of any form of creativity in spite of its temporality being determined by time and space. Indeed, existentiality continues to be dasein's strongest asset and resource in terms of an ontological attribute. It could be compared to the armoury and powerhouse that man uses for self-defence in an attempt to keep giving life a meaning, fulfilment and self-actualization.

Facticity, according to Heidegger and the existentialist philosophy in general, is the reality that man is not consulted when making a choice whether to be given birth to or not, whether to be male or female, tall or short, white or black, tive or Idoma, indolent or intelligent, Christian or Muslim, Jew or Palestinian etc. one is simply "thrown into existence in the world among people and things". It has been already mentioned that though man is a fountain of possibilities, his facticity limits these possibilities or potentialities. For example, the facticity of death inevitably limits man's ability to predict the future. Furthermore, limitations include poor health and inescapable natural disasters, which are unanticipated or even when foreseen, man is powerless to stop them. According to Heidegger, to live an authentic life, man has to accept the fact that existence is always factical as he is limited by predetermined conditions of human existence. According to Heidegger, the fallenness of humanity, refers to intertwined with the facticity of human existence. It implies dasein's inauthentic existence. As human beings, we naturally fall into particular tasks. Because of societal norms and people telling us how to behave, makes us adopt a herd mentality. We have all fallen into tasks because it is our nature. Heidegger calls the act of blindly following others as the "das man", which is translated as "they-self" or "the-they", the opposite of the authentic existence of dasein and being-in-the-world. It is a mode of existence of being-with-one-another. We surrender our existence to a formless entity. We do things because that is what one does or that is what they do rather than truly choosing to do something. We live inauthentic lives and become mere numbers in the crowd. Heidegger contrasted the authentic dasein or "owned self" with this inauthentic "das man".

### 14.3.5 Inauthenticity and Authenticity

Dasein continuously projects itself to reach its full potentiality for being. As a being with others in the world, it is found in between two possible ways of existence. According to Heidegger, the

difference between the two can be inferred from the fact that one is a necessary part of man's existence. Both are based on dasein's existence as a concrete personal possibility. Therefore, dasein's attitude towards its potentiality for being determines the nature and mode of its existence. When man starts assuming that he has been given a communal role, he loses the sense of his freedom and the need to make his life meaningful by accepting choice and responsibility. He is dependent on other social factors and becomes unsuccessful in thinking effectively for himself.

In other words, we deceive ourselves. We live an unconscious and deceptive life. Due to social obligation, we don't reject or accept things that we dislike or like, which is a form of self-deception. Inauthenticity, according to Heidegger, "being untrue to oneself". Following another person blindly and living a guided or controlled life is an authentic life. For Heidegger, dasein has two sides: authentic and inauthentic. Both are attributes of humans. The first is "own" and the second is "actual". Heidegger relates the adjective "eigen"(own) with "eigentlich"(actual), which is used in phrases like "having a room of one's own", "being one's own master" and "having a mind of one's own". Being true to oneself, being one's own person and doing one's own thing are all different aspects of authenticity. Heidegger also compares authenticity and inauthenticity with death. Those who are fully aware of the universal truth of death are authentic, whereas those who are unaware or unconscious about death are inauthentic. Death is the only truth of life and inauthentic people deliberately ignore it. Authentic people always consider death as inevitable and ready to accept it at any time.

## 14.4 ORIGIN AND INSPIRATION

Many have argued that Heidegger's concept of dasein has its origin in Japanese and Chinese philosophy. Japanese philosopher Tomonobu Imamichi said that Heidegger's concept of dasein was inspired by Okakura Kakuzo's concept of "das-in-der-Welt-sein"(being in the world) that is

expressed in "The Book of Tea", although Heidegger remained silent on this. "The Book of Tea" is a Japanese harmony of art, culture, and simple life. This book highlights the aesthetic and cultural aspects of Japanese life and protesting against the distorted lens of western towards eastern traditions.

Heidegger, in his later life, grew interested in Eastern Philosophy and especially the philosophy of Lao Tzu. Heidegger's approach to listening to Being, represents an integration of Eastern and Western philosophizing. Lao Tzu and Heidegger, both believed that nature is not human-hearted and that what is called human "knowledge" is mostly ignorance. According to both, what is necessary is to take nature (Being) as a "guide". And it is Lao Tzu, who suggests that "In the clarity of a still and open mind, the truth will be revealed".

## 14.5 CRITICAL COMMENTS

In the field of philosophy, Heidegger's concept of dasein has generated both controversy and influence. Many criticisms can be raised against his theory, even though he emphasizes the unique nature of human existence and how people interact with the outside world. Heidegger's concept of dasein is often criticized for being too individualistic. He focuses mainly on the individual and their experiences in the world, and overlooks the social and historical aspects of human existence. This overlook on the social and historical aspects of human existence has been seen by many critics as a major limitation of Heidegger's theory. According to critics, humans are social beings who exist in relation to others. In other words, human existence is shaped by social relationships.

Heidegger's theory is criticized for being extremely abstract and disconnected from concrete human experiences. He focused on understanding the distinct nature of nature of human existence, but his theory often uses abstract terms and concepts, which are hard to understand for those without a strong philosophical background. This has made some people question if his theory has any practical value and if it can truly help us in our understanding of human existence in a meaningful way.

Moreover, Heidegger emphasizes the value of authenticity and living an authentic life also has been criticized. This emphasis on authenticity, critics argued, can result in a narrow and rigid understanding of what it is to be human and can be used as a justification for unfair or oppressive behaviour. For example, if one's authentic self is perceived as violent or aggressive, it could potentially lead to destructive acts being justified in the name of authenticity.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** What does Heidegger mean by the term dasein?

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**Q 2:** What is meant by dasein as being-in-the-world?

.....

**Q 3:** What does dasein relate to others in being-with-others?

.....

**Q 4:** What does Heidegger mean by being-as-care?

.....

**Q 5:** What are the three fundamental structures of dasein?

.....

**Q 6:** How does Heidegger differentiate between inauthenticity and authenticity in dasein?

.....

**Q 7:** What philosophical traditions influenced Heidegger's concept of dasein?

.....

**Q 8:** How does fallenness affect dasein's understanding of itself?

.....

**Q 9:** How does dasein experience authenticity in its existence?

.....

**Q 10:** What are some common criticisms of Heidegger's concept of dasein?

.....



## 14.6 LET US SUM UP

- Dasein signifies the condition of "being-there" that emphasizes the way in which humans exist in relation to the world and themselves.
- For Heidegger, man or dasein is not a foreclosed entity, rather it is a "self-making or meaning-making" being.
- According to Heidegger, dasein and being-in-the-world are often used together. The existential concept of being-in-the-world emphasizes human existence as a state of living with a very meaningful orientation.
- Being as an issue for it, according to Heidegger, is the first feature of dasein. Since it is an ontological being, it regards its own being as an issue. It considers its own existence as an issue.
- According to Heidegger, the existence of dasein is fundamentally based on "being-with-others (Mit sein). Man will always encounter these "others" and be in the same world as them. Therefore, dasein's being-with-others and being-in-the-world are interrelated.
- Care is the manifestation of the being of "dasein" in the world. It is how we relate to the outside world and how we engage with it in our daily lives. Care is a way of being in the world, which includes both action and intention, not just a feeling or emotion. It is about how we look at the world that shapes the way we interact with the world.
- There are three aspects of care, as the totality of the mode of human being's existence in the world: "Existentiality", "Facticity", and "Fallenness".
- Existentiality is the most fundamental dynamic feature of human existence. It gives man the ability to continuously rise above his immediate state or circumstance by providing answers and solutions to problems.
- Facticity, according to Heidegger and the existentialist philosophy in general, is the reality that man is not consulted when making a choice whether to be given birth to or not, whether to be male or female, tall or short, white or black, tive or Idoma, indolent or intelligent, Christian or Muslim, Jew or Palestinian etc. one is simply "thrown into existence in the world among people and things".

- According to Heidegger, the fallenness of humanity, refers to intertwined with the facticity of human existence. It implies dasein's inauthentic existence. As human beings, we naturally fall into particular tasks. Because of societal norms and people telling us how to behave, it makes us adopt a herd mentality. We have all fallen into tasks because it is our nature.
- For Heidegger, dasein has two sides: authentic and inauthentic. Both are attributes of humans. The first is "own" and the second is "actual". Heidegger relates the adjective "eigen" (own) with "eigentlich" (actual), which is used in phrases like "having a room of one's own", "being one's own master" and "having a mind of one's own". Being true to oneself, being one's own person and doing one's own thing are all different aspects of authenticity.
- Japanese philosopher Tomonobu Imamichi said that Heidegger's concept of dasein was inspired by Okakura Kakuzo's concept of "das-in-der-Welt-sein" (being in the world) that is expressed in "The Book of Tea", although Heidegger remained silent on this.
- Heidegger's concept of dasein is often criticized for being too individualistic. He focuses mainly on the individual and their experiences in the world, and overlooks the social and historical aspects of human existence.
- Heidegger's theory is criticized for being extremely abstract and disconnected from concrete human experiences. He focused on understanding the distinct nature of nature of human existence, but his theory often uses abstract terms and concepts, which are hard to understand for those without a strong philosophical background.



## 14.7 FURTHER READINGS

1) HEIDEGGER: A Very Short Introduction
2) The Heidegger Reader (Studies in Continental Thought)
3) Heidegger's Way of Being
4) The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger
5) Heidegger: Basic Writings

## 14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** According to Heidegger, dasein signifies the condition of "being-there" that emphasizes the way in which humans exist in relation to the world and themselves. For him, man or dasein is not a foreclosed entity, rather it is a "self-making or meaning-making" being.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** According to Heidegger, dasein and being-in-the-world are often used together. The existential concept of being-in-the-world emphasizes human existence as a state of living with a very meaningful orientation.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** Dasein's being-with-others does not refer to anyone else, but those "others" with whom dasein is at home in this world. They are the people one is corresponds to and does not separate oneself from. Man is "being-in-the-world" with "others". This solicitude, according to Heidegger, is man's care for his fellow humans, which is seen in his interaction with them in day-to-day existence.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** According to Heidegger, care is the manifestation of the being of "dasein" in the world. Care is a way of being in the world, which includes both action and intention, not just a feeling or emotion. It is about how we look at the world that shapes the way we interact with the world.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** According to Heidegger, there are three aspects of care, as the totality of the mode of human being's existence in the world: "Existentiality", "Facticity", and "Fallenness". They are also known as three fundamental structures of dasein.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** Inauthenticity, according to Heidegger, "being untrue to oneself". Following another person blindly and living a guided or controlled life is an authentic life. Whereas, being true to oneself, being one's own person and doing one's own thing are all different aspects of authenticity.

**Ans to Q. No. 7:** Many have argued that Heidegger's concept of dasein has its origin in Japanese and Chinese philosophy. Japanese philosopher Tomonobu Imamichi said that Heidegger's concept of dasein was inspired by Okakura Kakuzo's concept of "das-in-der-Welt-sein" (being in the world).

**Ans to Q. No. 8:** Fallenness, according to Heidegger, is a mode of existence of being-with-one-another, where we surrender our existence to a formless entity. We live inauthentic lives and become mere numbers in the crowd. Heidegger contrasted the authentic dasein or "owned self" with this inauthentic "das man".

**Ans to Q. No. 9:** Dasein experiences authenticity in its existence by being true to oneself, being one's own person and doing one's own thing are all different aspects of authenticity. Those who are fully aware of the universal truth of death are authentic. For them, death is the only truth of life. Authentic people always consider death as inevitable and ready to accept it at any time.

**Ans to Q. No. 10:** Heidegger's theory is criticized for being extremely abstract and disconnected from concrete human experiences. He focused on understanding the distinct nature of nature of human existence, but his theory often uses abstract terms and concepts, which are hard to understand for those without a strong philosophical background.



## 14.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short question**

**Q. 1.** What is Dasein?

**Q. 2.** What does Being-In-The-World mean?

**Q. 3.** What are the three structures of Dasein?

**Q. 4.** What is fallenness in Heidegger's philosophy?

**Q. 5.** How does Heidegger define authenticity?

**B. Short Questions: (Answer in about 150 words)**

**Q. 1.** How does Heidegger conceptualize "Being-as-Care" in Being and Time?

**Q. 2.** What is the significance of existentiality, facticity, and fallenness in understanding dasein?

**Q. 3.** How does Heidegger differentiate between inauthenticity and authenticity in human existence?

**Q. 4.** What are the philosophical influences behind Heidegger's concept of deing?

**Q. 5.** What are some critical perspectives on Heidegger's analysis of dasein?

**C. Long Questions: (Answer in about 300 words)**

**Q. 1.** How does Heidegger define "Being-as-Care" in Being and Time, and how does this concept shape his understanding of dasein's existence?

**Q. 2.** How does existentiality, facticity, and fallenness function as structural components of dasein, and what role do they play in shaping human existence?

**Q. 3.** What does Heidegger mean by inauthentic and authentic existence, and how does one transition from an inauthentic to an authentic mode of Being?

**Q. 4.** What are the key philosophical influences on Heidegger's concept of Being, and how do they contribute to his existential analysis in Being and Time?

**Q. 5.** What are the major criticisms of Heidegger's existential phenomenology?

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# UNIT 15: TIME OF HEIDEGGER

## UNIT STRUCTURE


15.1 Learning objectives

15.2 Meaning of Time

15.3 Heidegger's Concept of Time

15.4 Time and Being

15.5 Concluding Remark

15.6 Let us sum up

15.7 Further Readings

15.8 Answers to check your progress

15.9 Model Questions


## 15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- Understand the meaning of time and its significance in human experience
- Examine Heidegger's concept of time, especially in relation to dasein and temporality
- Investigate the ontological connection between time and being

## 15.2 INTRODUCTION

Everyone is familiar with time, yet it is difficult to define and understand. Philosophy, religion, science and the arts have defined time in different ways, but the system used to measure it is mostly the same. Heidegger's concept of time can be fully appreciated if we understand the traditional conception of time, which has shaped both the tradition of philosophy and our everyday understanding of time. Heidegger questions the long tradition of western thought, which has viewed time as "a movable image of Eternity" since Plato. He expresses doubts about whether we can ever use eternity as our point of departure for understanding the

meaning of time. Time, the tradition regards, is a linear series of measurable points of "now". Thus, time can be understood as a modification of presence. We call "past" what is no longer present and "future" what is not yet present.

The nodal moment that makes the past and future intelligible is the present. The tradition has taught us that because the present is the nodal point that first enables the follow of time, it can never be a moment of time. Tradition has considered this "stable indeed non-flowing or timeless moment" as eternity. According to Saint Augustine, in "eternity", there is neither past nor future, which determines both past and future time. Therefore, time is nothing but a moving image of eternity.

Such an understanding of time adheres to a philosophical worldview that seeks to go beyond the sensible world. It embarks on the pure path of light in order to reveal the eternal realm of truths that is non-changing and immutable. The tradition argues that unlike the world of appearances, truths do not change, they are timeless. Thus, philosophers understand that eternity is the feature of the ideal world, whereas time is the feature of the phenomenal world. For example, Plato in the Timaeus, highlights that the sensible world is the world of becoming that is visible, temporal and tangible, and the intelligible world is the world of Being, which is unchanging (though living), self-existent and fully present. Parmenides argues for a timeless nature of being that lies behind the flow of time. If time is an image of eternity, then understanding the original is the best way to understand the image, just as the sensible world is an image of the intelligible world. Therefore, philosophy teaches us that it can only find its adequate origin if it transcends the world of Change to determine the intelligible world that initially made the appearance of the sensible world possible. For example, in order to understand the original that has made the moving image of time possible, which is timeless, Plato aims to take our imagination to a point "before the beginning of years when time was not". Thus, the desire to transcend time and mortality can be considered a defining characteristic of the Western metaphysical tradition. The goal is to say farewell to mortality and create an opening

into eternity and eternal life, in which everything is truly present to itself and, thus, without duration and extension.

## 15.3 HEIDEGGER'S CONCEPT OF TIME

Heidegger proposes a new understanding of the concept of time. According to Heidegger, the tradition of philosophy mistakenly viewed time as a movable image of eternity. We are informed that this description of time can only be understood if we have eternity as a departure point to understand the meaning of time. However, Heidegger thinks that we are barred from adopting such a viewpoint. For him, we can only understand the phenomenon of time from our mortal or finite vantage point. In contrast to the tradition of philosophy, Heidegger argues that time finds its meaning in death, not in eternity.

Heidegger questions whether it is ever possible to say farewell to mortality, when he asks whether it is possible to derive the meaning of time from eternity. As humans, we never experience eternity. According to Heidegger, what defines us humans, is our finitude, indeed the fact that we are temporal. We can never separate ourselves from our temporal existence, that is "eternity as a point of departure is never at our disposal". The only viewpoint that is at our disposal is the temporal one. Therefore, time, indeed even eternity, can only be understood from time. Our understanding of time can only be derived from our temporal vantage point.

Heidegger seems to follow Kant's Copernican Turn, as Kant has already illustrated the impossibility of shifting from the human perspective (sensible intuition) to the viewpoint of the eternal (intellectual intuition). Indeed, Kant makes it clear in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" that time and space define the human world and does not pertain to the things-in-itself. Time does not exist by itself. Therefore, apart from the subject, time is nothing in itself, because it is only a subjective condition of human intuition. Time is nothing, apart from the human subject. Therefore, it would appear that the Kantian project is reflected in Heidegger's first few lines of the concept of time.

Hence, the main question is not, "what is time?" but "who is time?". Specifically, we first need to consider what kind of being, other than the eternal, is capable of understanding the concept of time? We soon realize that only a being that lives with an understanding of a limit can understand time. Because when we think of time, we think of it in terms of restriction. As in Twelfth Night, Shakespeare said, "Youth's stuff will not endure", or as we say in everyday discourse, "we cannot turn the clock back". These phrases suggest that we conceive time as having a limit. As time goes on, so do our possibilities. Indeed, the passing of time and such restrictions are meaningful for a being that lives with an understanding of a limit.

Heidegger argues that only we human beings, or what he refers to as "Dasein", are capable of such an understanding. Which sets us apart from other living beings is that our whole existence is informed by the fact that we are mortal. According to Heidegger, all possibilities are time intelligible because we humans are destined for death. Here, death should not be understood as something outstanding; rather, humans understand death as something that we live. "As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die". We live our not-yet, or end, it is for this reason that our life is defined by death that we have an understanding of a limit and thus time.

In this way, Heidegger has been able to explain why time is fundamentally human and why it is meaningless without us humans. "Time itself has no meaning, time is temporal". The only reason we are finite is that there is something called time. Heidegger even goes further as to argue that time is not a linear series of now points. Time is not rooted in the present; rather, our understanding of presence and eternity itself is derivative. As Heidegger remarks, "the "now" is not pregnant with the "not-yet-now", but the Present arises from the future". It means that the "now" is not filled with or determined by what is yet to come. Instead, the present emerges from the future. Time is not an image of eternity, rather time is reflected in our finitude. Time has no significance in eternity, which is beyond our control. Instead, time lies in an end that is within our grasp.

## 15.4 TIME AND BEING

The concept of time, according to Heidegger, is only relevant to beings and not to inanimate objects. As shown by his theory, humans are the only entities that exist in the world, all other objects do not have access to the surrounding world. Heidegger has used the German word "Dasein", which means "human existence" or "state of being" in his entire work. Martin Heidegger's one of the most primary works "Being and Time" revolves around the question of sense of being and analyses various structures to arrive at it correctly. He raises the problem of how the value of being degraded in the cycle of mundane and mechanical routines and philosophically it is essential to take it through the right path.

Heidegger through the understanding of "dasein" aims at the overcoming of the forgetfulness of being and propounds dasein as the destination of being. Heidegger stands out from his contemporary thinkers with his view that goes against the traditional view of being which is completely independent of the world. This conception of being as the integral part of the world is very unique to him. Thus, it is important to understand the ontological structure and existential analytic of dasein to know about Heidegger's conception of being.The root meaning of the term dasein is "being there" or "being here" and it refers both to human being and the being that we have. But in Heidegger, it is important to note that dasein is not the same as human being since it is presented as "dasein of a man". Dasein's understanding of being is significant for the interpretation of the structure of being. Dasein differs from other entities because it has the potential to comprehend and question the being.

According to Heidegger, in order to comprehend this, we need to look into the different aspects of dasein that always remain the same regardless of the time period in the world. Heidegger's concept of being focuses on the temporal nature of human existence. According to Heidegger, our existence is inherently connected with time and our perception of the world is determined by our engagement with the past, present and future. Therefore, being-in-the-world is not just an experience of the present

moment but a way of being that is always oriented towards the future. All our intentions and actions we do, are always directed towards a potential future and the anticipation of that future influences our understanding of ourselves and the world.

## 15.5 CONCLUDING REMARK

Heidegger's Being and Time is more than just a dense philosophical text-it's an invitation to rethink what it means to exist. By introducing the idea of Dasein, he shifts our focus from abstract discussions about being to something deeply personal. For him, our own existence, shaped by time, history, and the choices we make. He shows that we don't simply exist; we are always in the process of becoming, moving toward an inevitable end. Concepts like authenticity, anxiety, and care aren't just theoretical-they reflect the struggles we face in trying to live meaningfully. His analysis of time reminds us that life is not infinite, and that realization should push us to live more intentionally. Of course, Being and Time is not without its difficulties. Heidegger's writing is famously complex, and his ideas have sparked debates for decades. Some criticize his lack of clear ethical guidance, while others find his approach to metaphysics unsettling. Still, his influence is undeniable. Thinkers like Sartre and Derrida took his ideas in new directions, shaping existentialism and postmodernism. But beyond academic discussions, what makes Being and Time so powerful is its ability to make us reflect on our own lives. It forces us to ask: Am I living authentically? Am I aware of my own mortality? Am I truly present in the world? Whether we agree with Heidegger or not, his work challenges us to confront these questions-and that alone makes it worth reading.



### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q 1:** What is Heidegger's main focus in Being and Time?

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.....

**Q 2:** How does Heidegger define the concept of "time"?

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.....

**Q 3:** What role does "being" play in Heidegger's understanding of time?

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.....

**Q 4:** How does Heidegger differentiate between ordinary and existential time?

.....

.....

**Q 5:** What does Heidegger mean by "being-toward-death"?

.....

.....

**Q 6:** How does Heidegger's interpretation of time relate to human existence?

.....

.....

**Q 7:** Why does Heidegger argue that time is central to understanding "being"?

.....

.....



## 15.6 LET US SUM UP

- Heidegger questions the long tradition of western thought, which has viewed time as "a movable image of Eternity" since Plato. He expresses doubts about whether we can ever use eternity as our point of departure for understanding the meaning of time.
- Time, the tradition regards, is a linear series of measurable points of "now". Thus, time can be understood as a modification of presence. We call "past" what is no longer present and "future" what is not yet present.

- According to Heidegger, the tradition of philosophy mistakenly viewed time as a movable image of eternity. We are informed that this description of time can only be understood if we have eternity as a departure point to understand the meaning of time.
- Heidegger thinks that we are barred from adopting such a viewpoint. For him, we can only understand the phenomenon of time from our mortal or finite vantage point.
- In contrast to the tradition of philosophy, Heidegger argues that time finds its meaning in death, not in eternity.
- According to Heidegger, what defines us humans, is our finitude, indeed the fact that we are temporal. We can never separate ourselves from our temporal existence. Our understanding of time can only be derived from our temporal vantage point.
- Heidegger seems to follow Kant's Copernican Turn, as Kant has already illustrated the impossibility of shifting from the human perspective (sensible intuition) to the viewpoint of the eternal (intellectual intuition).
- Time is nothing, apart from the human subject. Therefore, it would appear that the Kantian project is reflected in Heidegger's first few lines of the concept of time.
- As time goes on, so do our possibilities. Indeed, the passing of time and such restrictions are meaningful for a being that lives with an understanding of a limit.
- Heidegger argues that only we human beings, or what he refers to as "Dasein", are capable of such an understanding. Which sets us apart from other living beings is that our whole existence is informed by the fact that we are mortal.
- According to Heidegger, all possibilities are time intelligible because we humans are destined for death. Here, death should not be understood as something outstanding; rather, humans understand death as something that we live.
- According to Heidegger, time is fundamentally human and it is meaningless without us humans. "Time itself has no meaning, time is temporal". The only reason we are finite is that there is something called time.

- Heidegger even goes further as to argue that time is not a linear series of now points. Time is not rooted in the present; rather, our understanding of presence and eternity itself is derivative.
- Time is not an image of eternity, rather time is reflected in our finitude. Time has no significance in eternity, which is beyond our control. Instead, time lies in an end that is within our grasp.
- The concept of time, according to Heidegger, is only relevant to beings and not to inanimate objects. As shown by his theory, humans are the only entities that exist in the world, all other objects do not have access to the surrounding world.



## 15.7 FURTHER READINGS

1) 1. Inwood, M. (2000). *Heidegger: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
2. Heidegger, M. (Ed.). (2004). *The Heidegger reader (J. Veith, Trans.)*. Wiley-Blackwell.
3. Capobianco, R. (2005). *Heidegger's way of being*. Oxford University Press.
4. Guignon, C. (Ed.). (2006). *The Cambridge companion to Heidegger (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge University Press.
5. Heidegger, M. (2008). *Basic writings (D. F. Krell, Ed.)*. HarperCollins.



## 15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q. No. 1:** In Being and Time, Heidegger's main focus is human existence. It makes us reflect on our own lives. It forces us to ask: Am I living authentically? Am I aware of my own mortality? Am I truly present in the world? Whether we agree with Heidegger or not, his work challenges us to confront these questions-and that alone makes it worth reading.

**Ans to Q. No. 2:** According to Heidegger, time is fundamentally human and it is meaningless without us humans. "Time itself has no meaning, time is temporal". The only reason we are finite is that there is something called time.

**Ans to Q. No. 3:** In Heidegger's view, "being" and "time" are deeply interconnected. He argues that our understanding of time is based on our own existence (or "being"). Time is not just a series of moments, but is instead experienced through our "being-toward-death," where the awareness of our finitude shapes how we live and experience time. Essentially, our understanding of time is tied to the way we exist in the world.

**Ans to Q. No. 4:** Heidegger distinguishes between ordinary time (the measured, chronological time we use to track events) and existential time, which is the time experienced through our own being. Existential time is more fundamental, tied to our lived experience and awareness of our mortality. It's about how we relate to the past, present, and future in a way that reflects our existence and choices, rather than just ticking away on a clock.

**Ans to Q. No. 5:** "Being-toward-death" refers to Heidegger's idea that our awareness of our own mortality shapes our existence. It's the recognition that death is inevitable and personal, and this awareness shapes how we live, make choices, and understand time. It emphasizes the importance of living authentically, fully confronting our finitude, and embracing the freedom that comes with it.

**Ans to Q. No. 6:** Heidegger's interpretation of time is central to human existence because he argues that time is not just an external measure, but is intimately connected to how we experience and understand our lives. Time, for Heidegger, is existential-it's through our experience of time that we come to understand our own existence, including our finitude and our potential for authentic living.



## 15.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**(A) Very Short question**

**Q. 1.** What is Heidegger's primary focus regarding time?

**Q. 2.** How does Heidegger view time in relation to being?

**Q. 3.** What is "being-toward-death"?

**Q. 4.** How does Heidegger differentiate between ordinary time and existential time?

**Q. 5.** How does time shape human existence, according to Heidegger?

**Q. 6.** What role does the future play in Heidegger's concept of time?

**Q. 7.** How does Heidegger relate time to human freedom?

**Q. 8.** In what way does Heidegger connect time with authenticity?

**Q. 9.** What does Heidegger mean by "temporality"?

**Q. 10.** How is Heidegger's concept of time different from a purely chronological view?

**B. Short Questions (Answer in 400 words)**

**Q. 1.** Discuss Heidegger's critique of the traditional Western philosophical concept of time. How does he challenge the notion of time as a "moving image of eternity"?

**Q. 2.** Explain Heidegger's concept of Dasein and its significance in understanding the relationship between time and human existence. How does Dasein differ from other forms of being?

**Q. 3.** How does Heidegger's understanding of time differ from the linear concept of time? Discuss the role of mortality and finitude in shaping Heidegger's concept of temporality.

**Q. 4.** Analyse the connection between time, death, and human existence in Heidegger's philosophy. Why does Heidegger believe that time can only be understood from a finite, mortal perspective?

**Q. 5.** Evaluate the impact of Heidegger's "Being and Time" on modern philosophy. How has his existential analysis of time influenced later thinkers and contemporary discussions about human existence?

**C. Long Questions: (Answer in about 300 words)**

**Q. 1.** How does Heidegger redefine the concept of time in Being and Time, and what are the key differences between ordinary, chronological time and existential time in his philosophy?

**Q. 2.** How does Heidegger's interpretation of temporality challenge traditional views of time, and what are the implications of this shift for our understanding of authenticity, freedom, and the nature of being?

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