

How is life without God?

Jean-Paul Sartre

- How is life without God?
 - Life without God is an abandoned, anguished and absurd life.

4 implications of atheism

- when someone believes that there is no God, some implications follow
- four drastic philosophical implications

- *first*, because there is no God, there is no maker, and no such thing as a divine conception of a human being in accordance with which the individual is created
- there is no such thing as a human nature that is common to all humans
- no such thing as a specific essence that defines what it is to be human

- past philosophers had maintained that each thing in existence has a definite, specific essence
 - Aristotle, for example, believed that the essence of being human is being rational
- for Sartre, the person must produce her or his own essence, because no God created human beings in accordance with a divine concept

- thus, in the case of human beings, Sartre wrote, “existence precedes essence,” by which he meant very simply that
 - you are what you make of yourself

- the *second* implication of the nonexistence of God is this
- because there is no God, there is no ultimate reason why anything has happened or why things are the way they are and not some other way
- this means that the individual, in effect, has been thrown into existence without any real reason for being

- a human being, according to Sartre, is a self-aware or conscious subject that creates its own future

- *third*, because there is no God and hence no divine plan that determines what must happen, “there is no determinism”
 - thus, “man is free;” in fact, he is condemned to be free
 - nothing forces us to do what we do

- thus, “we are alone, without excuses,” by which he meant simply that
 - we cannot excuse our actions by saying that we were forced by circumstances or moved by passion or otherwise determined to do what we did

- *fourth*, because there is no God, there is no objective standard of values:
 - “It is very troubling that God does not exist,” Sartre wrote, “for with him disappears every possibility of finding values . . . there can no longer be any good a priori”
 - consequently, because a Godless world has no objective values, we must establish or invent our own values

- thus,
 - no God-given human nature
 - no reason for existence
 - no divine plan for life
 - no objective standard for values

what do these consequences entail?

- each individual has an awesome responsibility
- *first* of all, we are responsible for what we are
 - “abandonment implies that we ourselves choose our being”

- *second*, we must invent our own values
- *third*, because “nothing can be good for us without [also] being [good] for all,” in inventing our own values we also function as universal legislators of right and wrong, good and evil

anguish and absurdity

- this responsibility for oneself and thus for all humankind we experience as *anguish*:
 - our responsibility is total and profound and absolutely inescapable
- many are hiding or fleeing from their responsibility: they act and live in self-deception or inauthenticity
- this responsibility is overwhelming

- one does not know what to choose, because the world is experienced as *absurd*
- It is experienced as absurd because, since God does not exist, it lacks necessity — it lacks an ultimate reason for being this way and not that way

- the world, therefore, is experienced as fundamentally senseless, unreasonable, illogical, and, therefore, “nauseating”
- it calls forth both revulsion and boredom
 - it is “perfectly gratuitous” and often just simply too much

- nevertheless, it is only through acceptance of our responsibility that we may live in authenticity
- to be responsible, to live authentically, means intentionally to make choices about one's life and one's future
- These choices are made most efficaciously
 - by becoming “engaged” in the world and
 - by selecting a fundamental project

- through this project the individual creates a world that does not yet exist and thus gives meaning to his or her life

- So Sartre's metaphysics, which stood opposed to
 - the belief in God,
 - determinism,
 - necessity, and
 - the objectivity of values,
- in effect leaves the human individual in what may plausibly be called an absurd situation

- there is nothing that one must do; there is nothing that must be done
- to find meaning in life, the individual must create his or her world and its values by making authentic choices
- these choices first take the form of intentions directed toward future events
- then they become actions of an engaged being in a world of people, a political (and politically troubled) world

objections

- if there is no God, then man and the universe are doomed; no God, no immortality; life is without ultimate significance, value, or purpose
- any life, ultimately has no significance and it makes no difference; mankind is doomed in a dying universe

- man finally knows he is alone in the indifferent immensity of the universe; if there is no God, then life itself becomes meaningless
- if life ends at the grave, then it makes no difference whether one has lived as a Stalin or as a saint; one's destiny is unrelated to one's behavior

- ‘If there is no immortality, then all things are permitted’ (Dostoyevski); so, live totally for self; no one holds you accountable! (Ayn Rand)
- any basis for objective standards of right and wrong seems to have evaporated; we are confronted with the bare, valueless fact of existence

- in a world without a divine lawgiver, there can be no objective right or wrong, only our culturally and personally relative, subjective judgments
- if death stands with open arms at the end of life's trail, then what is the goal of life? it is pointless; no goal, no purpose

- vanity of vanities! all is vanity
- man and the universe are simple accidents of chance; a chance explosion; man is a freak of nature, a blind product of matter plus time plus chance; a lump of slime that evolved rationally
- we are the result of certain combinations of heredity and environment; we are victims of a kind of genetic and environmental roulette; life is utterly without reason
- it is impossible to live with such a worldview
- modern man resides in a two-story universe

- modern man lives in the lower story (the finite world without God)
- in the upper story are meaning, value, and purpose
- he continually makes leaps of faith into the upper story to affirm meaning, value, and purpose, even though he has no right to