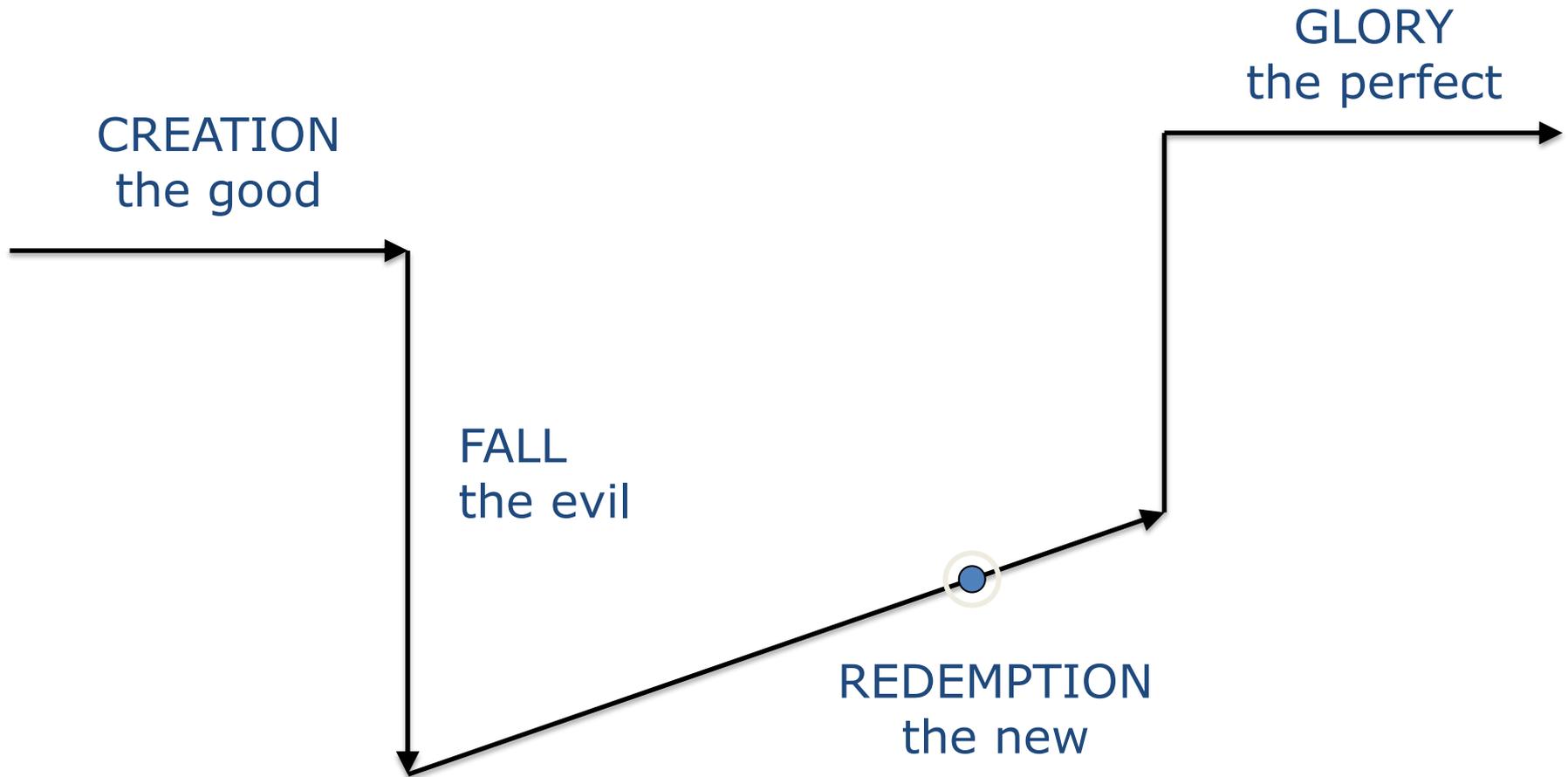


# How People Think Week 3

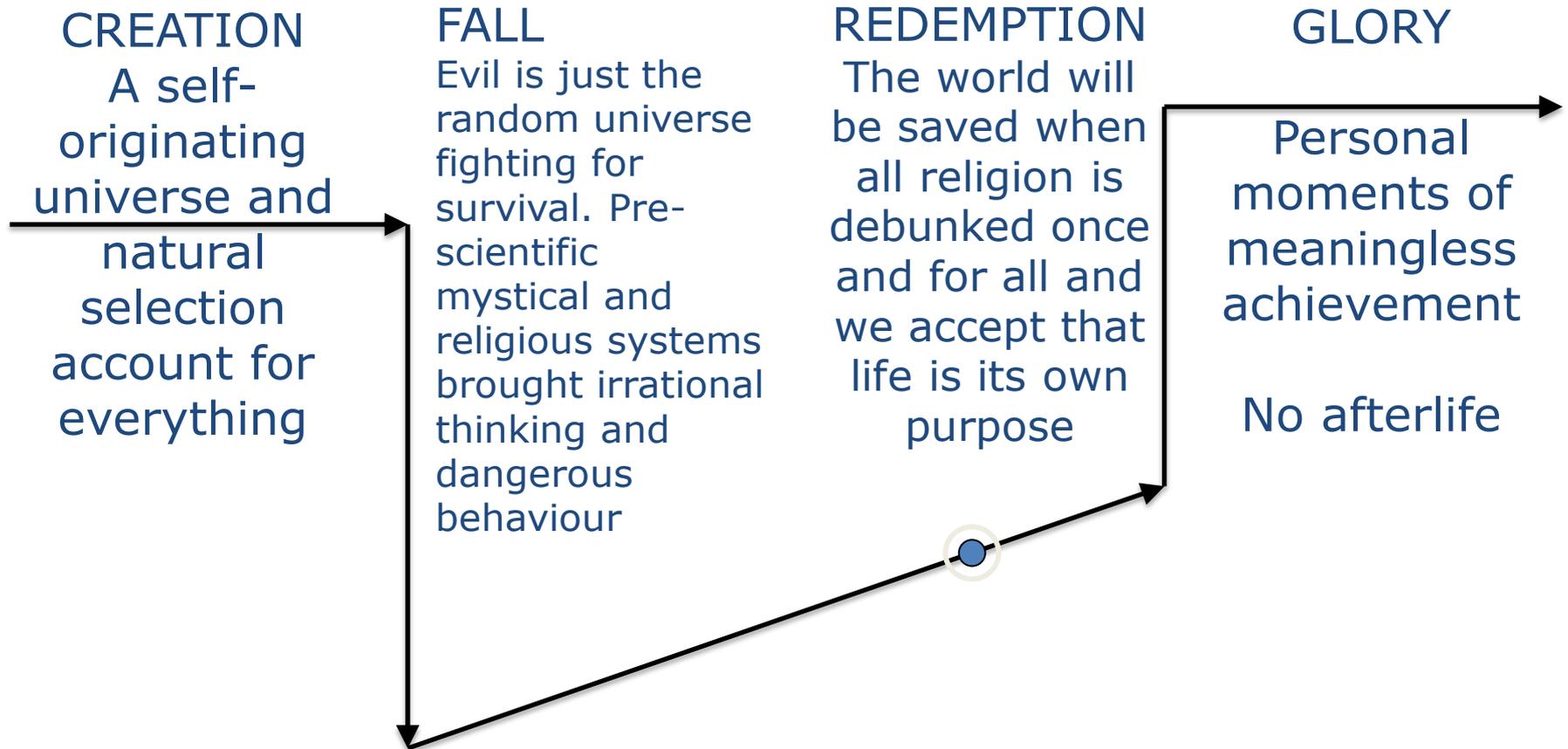
## Existentialism and Post-Modernism

# Christian Worldview



How People Think

# Secular Worldview



# Common sayings

- That's just your interpretation!
- That's great if that works for you!
- Let's hear what others think!
- History is written by the victors!
- He would say that wouldn't he?

LOSS OF CONFIDENCE IN OBJECTIVE  
TRUTH

# Subjectivity

- I am the subject; all else is object
- There are many subjects doing the knowing
- If knowledge differs or conflicts, the objectivity of knowledge is called into question

# Limits of Language

- Human knowledge can only be expressed in human language which is a human construct
  - all language is essentially subjective
  - therefore, all knowledge is essentially subjective
- the possibility of objective knowledge recedes over the horizon

# Post-Modern Conclusion

- knowledge is not a reliable reflection of reality
- We create truth as we construct languages that serve our purpose
- Objective truth about reality is forever hidden from us
- We can never know with certainty
- All we can do is tell stories

# The 'truth' is what works

- 'Get out of the way – there's a bus coming!'
  - Does the story work?
  - Does it satisfy the story-teller?
  - Does it get you what you want?
- No one person's story is 'truer' than anyone else's story
  - Does it work for them within their community? Shared belief in the basic stories holds communities together internally
- Ethics is a linguistic construct
- Social good is whatever society decides

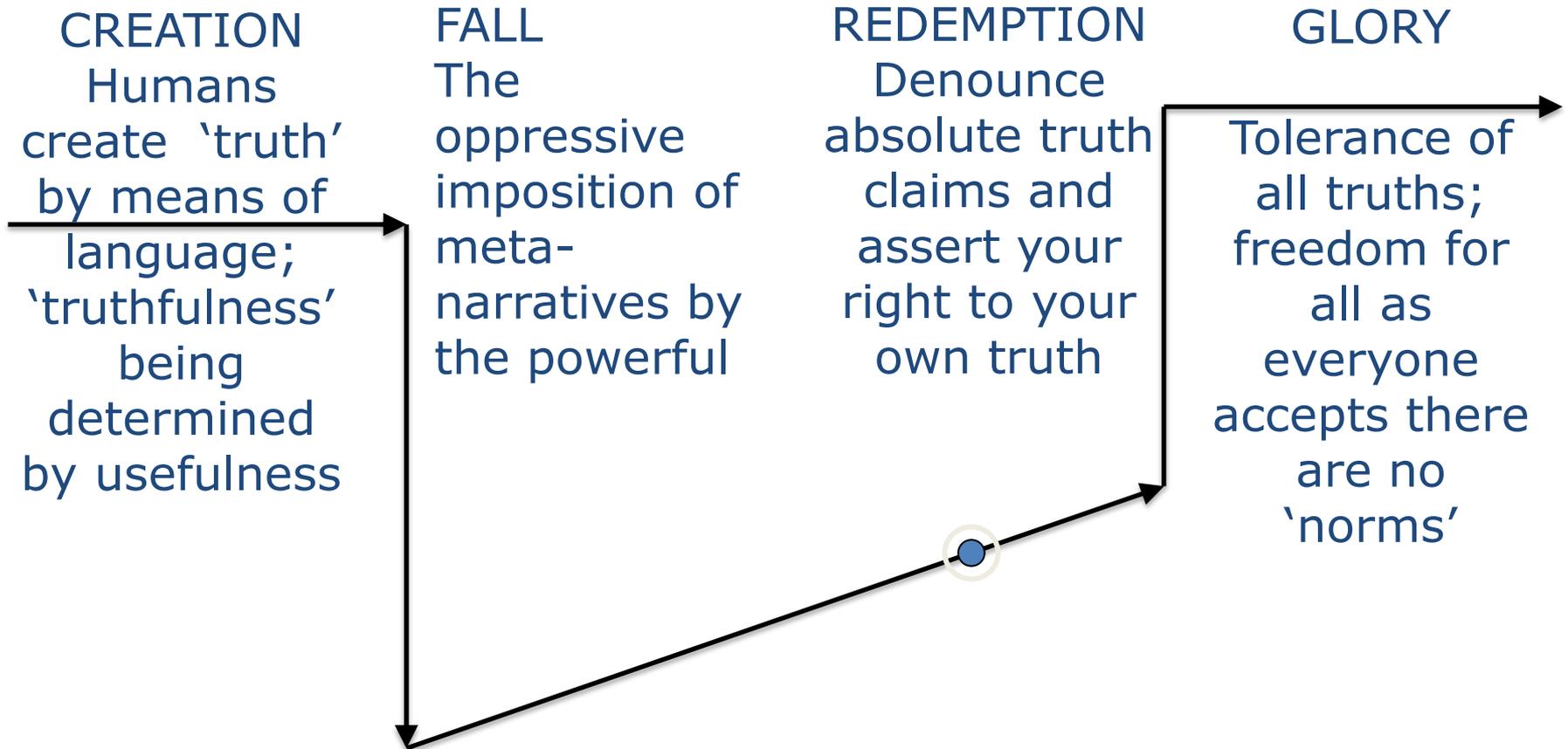
# The 'truth' is what people believe

- The truth is what we can get our colleagues (our community) to believe
- If we can get them to use our language then our story is as true as any story can get

# All stories are about power

- story-teller's power over others
- Incredulity towards 'metanarratives' as means of oppression
  - The Christian story
  - The naturalist's story
  - The pantheist story

# Postmodern Worldview



# What's good about Postmodernism?

- Too much confidence has been placed in human reason and the scientific method
- Language is closely associated with power
- Our perspective as finite human beings is limited and culturally-conditioned

# What's wrong with postmodernism?

- The rejection of all meta-narratives is itself a meta-narrative
- The idea that we have no access to reality it cannot account for itself
- How can we use language to make the certain claim that language cannot make unambiguous claims?
- Postmodernism's critique of human reason rests on human reason
- Postmodernism offers a false choice between knowing absolutely and knowing nothing

# What's wrong with postmodernism?

- The fundamental false step made by **modernism** was to reject revelation and enthrone reason
- Postmodernism dethrones reason but fails to repent of rejecting revelation

# Opportunities for gospel communication

- Modernism was no friend to Christianity
  - The Postmodernist critique is helpful
- The marginalized and excluded are included
  - Sometimes includes Christians
- Postmodernist analysis fits with the biblical doctrine of fallen human reason
  - See Eph 4:17-19
- Post Modernism leads to fragmentation and loss of coherence
  - Christianity offers coherence and community

# Challenges for gospel communication

- The inadmissibility of any truth claim: the gospel is rejected because it claims to be truth not because it has been found to be false
- Increasing acclimatization to lack of absolutes
- Less and less interest in moral categories
- Evangelism seen as a bullying power-play with words
  - let your speech always be gracious (Col 4:6)
  - always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you, but do it with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15-16)

# Approaches to gospel communication

- Maintain confidence in the truth/Christ
- Give personal testimony
  - show that the truth of the gospel 'works'
- Teach the big story of the Bible
  - there is a meta-narrative that rings true
  - essential for the gospel to make sense
- Press home the reality of objective sin
  - appeal to conscience
  - let the word of God convict

# Approaches to gospel communication

- Make sure you don't sound like a bully
  - let your speech always be gracious (Col 4:6)
  - always be prepared to give a reason for the hope that is in you, but do it with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15-16)
- Authenticate the message personally and corporately
  - by this shall all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one another (John 13:35)
- Preach/speak of Christ
  - our need of Christ
  - God's provision in Christ

# What people believe

## Existentialism

# Atheist and Christian

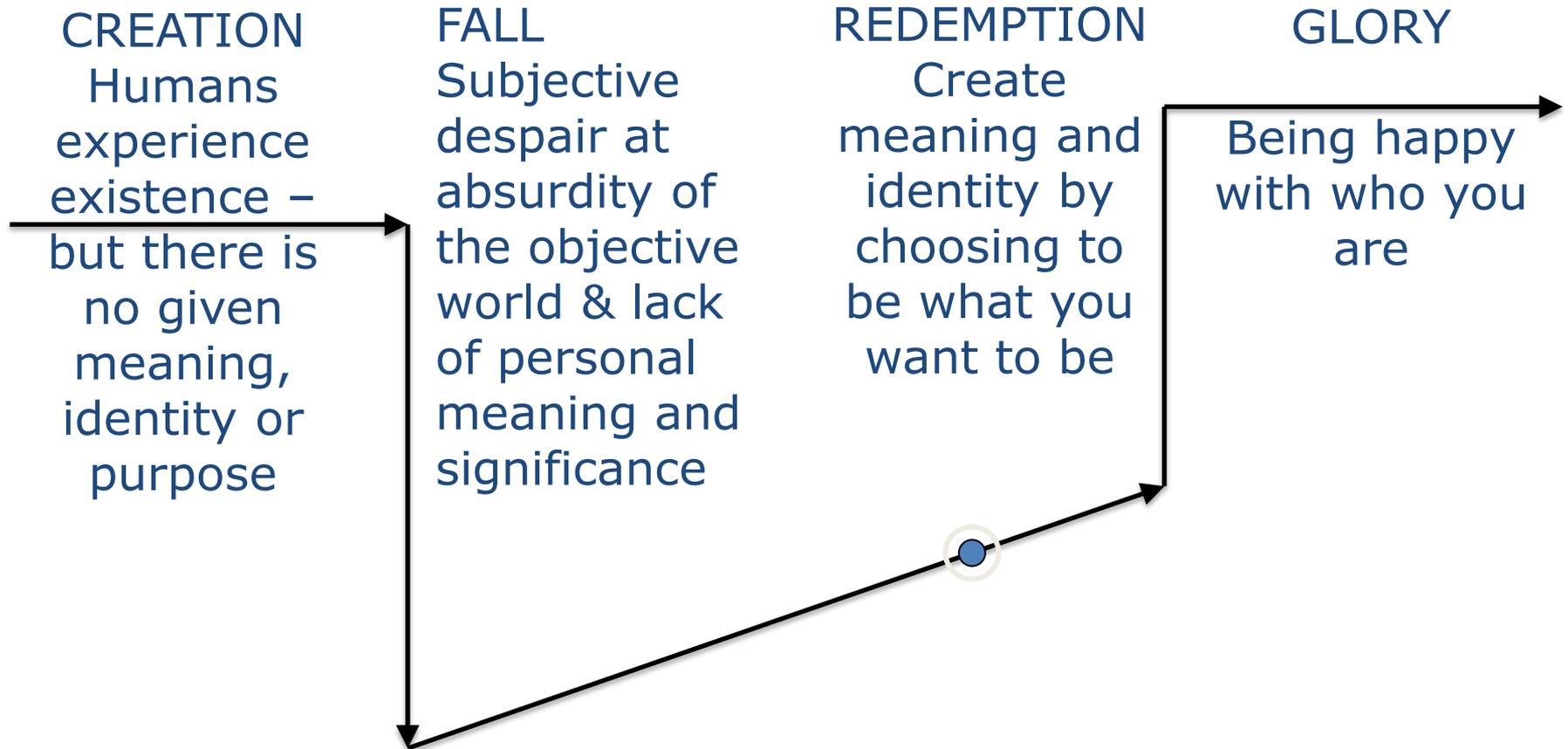
## **Friedrich Nietzsche**

- there are no facts, only interpretations
- Hope in reality is the worst of all evils because it prolongs the torments of man.
- To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering

## **Soren Kierkegaard**

- Life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced.
- Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays.
- The highest and most beautiful things in life are not to be heard about, nor read about, nor seen but, if one will, are to be lived.

# Existentialist Worldview



# reality appears in two forms

## Subjective world

mind, consciousness, self-awareness  
freedom  
the constant now  
stability

**Value**  
**Meaning**  
**Significance**

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## Objective world

matter and mechanism  
laws of cause and effect;  
chronological sequence  
unconscious, endless movement

**Science**  
**and logic**

# Each person is totally free as regards their nature and destiny

- We are radically free to do what we wish with our subjectivity
- We can think, will, imagine, dream, project visions, consider, ponder, invent
- Each of us is KING in our own subjective world
- The authentic person must revolt and create value: nothing is of value in the objective world, but while we are conscious we create value

# The failure of existentialism

- to provide a measure for what is morally good or bad that goes beyond the individual.
  - Is the good action really any action passionately chosen?
  - Can we call no freely chosen action evil?
  - Can we live with such a concept of morality?
- to provide a basis for human society.
  - Creates the problem of self-fulfilment pursued at the expense of social cohesion.
  - What if everyone 'did their own thing'?
- To provide a real basis for value
  - A self-defeating argument: There are no objective values
  - We must assert our freedom and create meaning
  - This is the authentic (valuable) way to live
  - But how can we call anything authentic when there is no objective standard by which to judge it?
  - Who is to say that this is what constitutes authenticity?

# Failure to explain how we can live with the objective world?

- Why should we believe that sensations, moods, emotions, self-belief and personal opinions are more real than objective reality?
- How can teaching people to believe in themselves prepare them for failure or equip them to face reality?
- Ultimately, death still mocks all our dreams.
- Human significance grounded in subjectivity places it in a realm divorced from reality, but the objective world keeps on intruding.

# Existentialism is an exercise in self-deception.

- Another world
- Value, Meaning, Significance
- Man can be happy but not consistent

Leap  
of faith

- 
- The finite world without God
  - Life is absurd
  - Man can be consistent but not happy

# Biblical response

- The self-delusion that lies at the heart of Existentialism shows that it is yet another human exercise in suppressing the truth about God.
  - *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them... their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools... They exchanged the truth of God for a lie. (Romans 1:18ff.)*

# Biblical response

- Existentialism is an idolatry that can never satisfy
  - *My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*  
(Jeremiah 2:13)

# Biblical response

- Man's relentless search for freedom, meaning, dignity, significance and values testifies to the fact that he is created by God.

*I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here: and this idea of a creating hand refers to God.*

**Jean-Paul Sartre**

# Biblical response

- Man's desire to establish own significance without God has been doomed since Babel

*Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, **so that we may make a name for ourselves.**" (Genesis 11:4)*

- Only our Creator can establish our significance

*The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; **I will make your name great,** and you will be a blessing."  
(Genesis 12:1-2)*

# Biblical response

- Only the truth can truly set us free

*'Man is condemned to be free.'*

Jean Paul-Satre

*'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'*

Jesus Christ

# Questions and Comments