



Existentialism

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Existentialism

- ❑ Existentialism can be understood in contrast to an established principle of metaphysics that *essence* precedes *existence*
- ❑ From Plato (absolute monism) to Hegel (concrete monism)
 - Distinction between appearance and reality
- ❑ The essence (the nature) of a thing is more fundamental and immutable than its existence (the mere fact of its being)
- ❑ Priority is given to the essence of a thing
- ❑ Rejection of the essence
- ❑ Existentialism differs from essentialism
- ❑ Nothing is fixed and a priori
- ❑ Aim: to understand the nature of human existence

Existentialism

- ❑ Existentialism is a philosophy which claims:
 - there is no god, morality is relative and meaning comes from the individual rather than a higher power
 - it is up to the individual to give their life meaning because if they do not do so, then their life will be meaningless.
- ❑ Existentialism is a theory of individual meaning
- ❑ It asks each man to ponder the reason for his own existence
- ❑ It emphasizes the importance of man as an individual and his/her freedom and responsibility
- ❑ It emerged as a reaction against both naturalism and idealism
- ❑ According to naturalism:
 - Material phenomena are governed by mechanical laws, and matter, though they are different from each other
 - They are nothing but different functions of material phenomena

Existentialism

- ❑ The actions of man are determined by motives and impulses, which are ultimately functions of matter
- ❑ Man's sense of freedom is illusory
- ❑ According to idealism:
 - Mind, spirit, or consciousness are the ultimate reality; Absolute is the ultimate ground of everything including the human minds; the Divine Will swallows up the human wills
- ❑ Hence, human freedom is only an illusion
- ❑ Both naturalism and idealism deny human freedom
- ❑ Existentialism is a reason against this falsification of human nature
- ❑ According to Plato:
 - essence, form, 'idea' are only real

Existentialism

- the world of phenomena is a shadow
- An individual is unreal; an idea is universal
- According to Existentialism;
 - existence in space and time is real; as essence is unreal
 - an individual is real; a universal is unreal
- Existence opposes essence
- Man doesn't have any essential characters
- Man is always free; he/she chooses its essence
- Hence, essence is not fixed and a priori
- Human essence is freedom
- Man creates his/her own value
- It rejects universal moral commands and social rules

Characteristics of Existentialism

- ❑ Existentialism does not aim at system-building
 - It doesn't prescribe any code of conduct for living being (human being)
 - Emphasis is given to freedom
- ❑ Existentialism emphasizes human existence
 - Its intimate relation with the world and society
 - Man is the central theme of existentialism
- ❑ Existence precedes essence. What you are (essence) is the result of your choices (your existence) rather than the reverse
 - Existence is prior to essence
 - Essence is not destiny. You are what you make yourself to be
 - Man chooses his essence; essence is not fixed
 - Man should not be idealized and conceptualized
 - I am not what I am and I am what I am not

Characteristics of Existentialism

- I am nothing; but I am everything
- Man is the collection of all the possibilities
 - Essence is incomplete
 - Man is unpredictable in nature
 - His/her choice keeping on changing as he/she is more free
- Existentialism stresses on freedom of the individual. It is our choice how we respond to determining tendencies. Human beings—through their freedom—create their own values and determine a meaning for their life because the human being does not possess any inherent identity or value
- RESPONSIBILITY. Each of us is responsible for everything we do. If we seek advice from others, we choose our advisor and have some idea of the course he or she will recommend. “I am responsible for my very desire of fleeing responsibilities”

Characteristics of Existentialism

- ❑ CHOICE. I am my choices. I cannot not choose. If I do not choose, that is still a choice. If faced with inevitable circumstances, we still choose *how we are* in those circumstances
- ❑ SUBJECT RATHER THAN OBJECT. Humans are not objects to be used by God or a government or corporation or society. Nor we to be "adjusted" or molded into roles --to be *only* a waiter or a conductor or a mother or worker. We must look deeper than our roles and find *ourselves*
- ❑ In *Being and Nothingness*, Jean-Paul Sartre explains about freedom and responsibility of man
 - His main argument seems to be that all of us are always free and thus responsible for not only our actions but for our present circumstances
 - We are more than what we are. But we are as responsible as we are free

Characteristics of Existentialism

- ❑ WE CONTINUALLY MAKE OURSELVES AS WE ARE. A "brave" person is simply someone who usually acts bravely. Each act contributes to defining us as we are, and at any moment we can begin to act differently and draw a different portrait of ourselves.
 - There is always a possibility to change, to start making a different kind of choice
 - OUR POWER TO CREATE OURSELVES. We have the power of transforming ourselves indefinitely.
- ❑ CONDEMNED TO BE FREE. We are condemned because we did not create ourselves. We must choose and act from within whatever situation we find ourselves
- ❑ ABANDONMENT. "I am *abandoned* in the world... in the sense that I find myself suddenly alone and without help
- ❑ When your are thrown into the world, you are alone here

Characteristics of Existentialism

- ❑ ANGUISH. "It is in anguish that we become conscious of our freedom. ...My being provokes anguish to the extent that I distrust myself and my own reactions in that situation"
 - We must make some choices knowing that the consequences will have profound effects on others (like a commander sending his troops into battle)
 - In choosing for ourselves we choose for all humankind.
- ❑ BAD FAITH is the psychological **phenomenon** whereby individuals **act inauthentically**, by yielding to the external **pressures** of society to **adopt false values and disown their innate freedom** as sentient **human beings**
- ❑ *Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does*
 - because once he/she is thrown into the world, he/she is responsible for everything he does

Characteristics of Existentialism

- ❑ Sartre believes that Human beings live in constant anguish, not solely because life is miserable, but because we are 'condemned to be free'. While the circumstances of our birth and upbringing are beyond our control, he reasons that once we become self-aware (and we all do eventually), we have to make choices — choices that define our very 'essence'
- ❑ Human beings—through their consciousness—create their own values and determine a meaning for their life
 - because the human being does not possess any inherent identity or value
 - that identity or value must be created by the individual.
 - by posing the acts that constitute him or her, he or she makes his or her existence more significant
 - only by existing and acting a certain way do we give meaning to our lives

Characteristics of Existentialism

- ❑ According to Sartre, there is no fixed design for how a human being should be and no God to give us a purpose.
- ❑ Therefore, the onus for defining ourselves, and by extension humanity, falls directly on our shoulders
- ❑ This lack of pre-defined purpose along with an 'absurd' existence that presents to us infinite choices is what Sartre attributes to the “anguish of freedom”
- ❑ With nothing to restrict us, we have the choice to take actions to become who we want to be and lead the life we want to live. According to Sartre, each choice we make defines us while at the same time revealing to us what we think a human being should be

Characteristics of Existentialism

- ❑ And this incredible burden of responsibility that the free man has to bear is what relegates him to constant anguish.
- ❑ Living in bad faith
 - ***Everything has been figured out, except how to live***
- ❑ Sartre condemned the idea of living without pursuing freedom.
- ❑ The phenomenon of people accepting that things have to be a certain way, and subsequently refusing to acknowledge or pursue alternate options, was what he termed as "living in bad faith"
- ❑ According to him, people who convince themselves that they *have to* do one particular kind of work or live in one particular city are living in bad faith

Characteristics of Existentialism

- ❑ Sartre explains the concept of bad faith through the example of a waiter who is so immersed in his job that he considers himself to be first a waiter rather than a free human being. This waiter is so convinced that his present job is all that he can do, that it's all that he's *meant* to do, that he never considers the option of doing anything else in life.
- ❑ He believes that we alone are responsible for everything that we really are, and by not exploring the infinite possibilities life presents to us we alone are responsible for restricting our freedom
- ❑ “We are left alone without an excuse”
- ❑ Sartre to describe the phenomenon in which human beings, under pressure from social forces, adopt false values and disown their innate freedom, hence acting inauthentically.

Characteristics of Existentialism

- ❑ Sartre makes a distinction between *being-in-itself* and *being-for-itself*
- ❑ Being-in-itself: it is self-identical and has no reference beyond itself, which is generally associated with a material object
 - It is determine or has definite properties
 - Being-in-itself is the self-contained and fully realized Being of objects. It is passive and inert
 - It is not consciousness
- ❑ Being-for-itself: it is ordinarily understood by consciousness
 - It is nonself-identical, and dynamic
 - It is indeterminate, which is generally associated with subject
 - It has no definite properties and is always what it is not

Types of Existentialism

- ❑ Two Perspectives of Existentialism:
 - Theistic perspective (Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Marcel, Bubber, Tillich)
 - Atheistic perspective (Heidegger, Sartre, Nietzsche)

The atheist perspective

- ❑ Man is free to choose what he wants to be
- ❑ Man is defined by his action
- ❑ There is no fixed and prior value
- ❑ Man has no pre-ordained destiny
- ❑ Each man's life does not unfold in accordance with God's grand plan and His mysterious ways
- ❑ It unfolds the way each man chooses it to unfold

The atheist perspective

- ❑ Man creates his values through his choices
- ❑ Even a value held universally by everyone would still find its origin in each individual person
- ❑ According to Sartre, man's choice can never be an evil choice
- ❑ His choice can never go against any established notion of good because it is man who determines what is good
- ❑ With death of God any possibility of a priori standard of good and evil has disappeared
- ❑ So, man always chooses the good but he is also ultimately and entirely responsible for what he has chosen
- ❑ It is therefore, said that man is free, not to be free
- ❑ Any attempt to obscure or divert oneself of the freedom and responsibility is called as bad faith

The atheist perspective

- ❑ In order for man to disclose his/her being, he/she must first create it through his/her values and actions
- ❑ If he/she then acts in keeping his/her values, he/she lives authentically
- ❑ He/she discloses his/her being because he/she coincides with himself/herself
- ❑ This coincidence refers to the momentary meeting of the being-for-itself with being-in-itself
- ❑ Nietzsche says, “God is dead”
- ❑ Sartre says, “The past dead”
- ❑ It is wrong to suppose that we can be made by the past. Each of our acts is free; it is entirely disconnected from the past events
- ❑ Nothing comes to him from within or within

The atheist perspective

- ❑ A man exists as nothing
- ❑ For a man, to be is to choose himself
- ❑ Sartre aims at a complete freedom of human consciousness from conceptual, empirical, and theological consciousness.
- ❑ It is concerned with the total voidness or nothing
- ❑ A man is possibility
- ❑ His existence is in the choice of the possibilities open to him
- ❑ But his choice is never final and therefore, his existence is indeterminate
- ❑ The individual achieves self-transcendence through ethical choice
- ❑ Self transcendence is transcendence of the world through active participation
- ❑ It is also transcendence of relations to other individuals through direct intercourse with them

The theist perspective (Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Marcel, Bubber, Tillich)

- ❑ believes in god.
- ❑ God is Infinite, benevolent, and sovereign
- ❑ God has created the universe and it has given a purpose
- ❑ Man is created in image of God
- ❑ existentialism focuses on subjective, personal human experience.
- ❑ True religion is acted out by showing love to others.
- ❑ Ethics and religion are not concerned with objective but are related to subjectivity
- ❑ God is not an externality
- ❑ Man is to be realized inwardly
- ❑ Religious talk in terms of collective/universal spirit/humanity are unspiritual

The theist perspective

- ❑ The gap between ‘what I am’ and ‘what I want’ creates tension for the finite being leading to faith in the infinite, the benevolent God
- ❑ Religion emerges out of man’s sense of finitude
- ❑ His inability to stay connected with God brings a sense of guilt
- ❑ They would suggest to maintain and renew God consciousness (personal God) in every humble act of life with increasing faith that it would please Him
- ❑ Man must transform his outward activities into inward contemplation
- ❑ True religion is a personal inward relation of individual with God
- ❑ The objective or universal God is a myth

The theist perspective

- ❑ Man has to discover, invent and create values and there is no escape from choosing in the world
- ❑ Even to choose not to choose is a choice
- ❑ In act of choosing man brings values into being
- ❑ He is an existential chooser
- ❑ He creates something out of nothing
- ❑ Before he chooses a course of action, there are no values in that situation, a value free set of circumstances
- ❑ Once he chooses, he brings something new into existence, a way of responding to that situation
- ❑ According to Jaspers, men do not exist in isolated units, but as members of group

The theist perspective

- ❑ The true nobility of human beings is not found in an isolated unit
- ❑ It exists in the inter-linkage of independent human beings
- ❑ People are tied together by developing things in common
- ❑ It is by creating and strengthening ties between human beings that a community is formed
- ❑ Each person achieves his destiny by building and maintaining healthy relations or ties with others
- ❑ The self is a being-in-community
- ❑ Man become whole not by of a relation to himself, but only by virtue of a relation to another self

Conclusion

- ❑ Existentialism is a humanism
 - Man is the center of the whole world
 - Man is the creator of values
 - His/her responsibility is very great for he/she is legislating for the whole world. He can choose what is better for himself and the whole world.
- ❑ I exist because of what others' think of me
- ❑ I am not only conscious of my own existence but also conscious of others' existence