

Humanities II and III.

Existentialism
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Notes on Attitudes and Beliefs Common to an
Existential Philosophy and to Existential
Literature.

Existentialism opposes any absolutes; thus, naturalism's "I perceive; therefore, I am" is not acceptable. Existentialism rejects this statement since the individual would have to derive his entire existence from the essence of thought, a faculty outside and beyond man.

Romanticism's "I will; therefore I am" is equally objectionable. The existentialist who is atheist will not accept a God in nature as immanent. The existentialist commences with the "feel" of human existence, with the human restricted to his "personal" existence.

The existentialist starts with experience first; he exists; because he exists, he thinks; he feels; he perceives; Nihil sive deus -- existence before essence.

The existentialist reasons as follows:

- a) To exist is to be caught
- b) To be caught is to be caught in existence
- c) To be caught in his own existence is a predicament.
- d) Man is free because he is the origin of his own state.
- e) Because each man knows that he is free and that he is the origin of his own having, possessing, creating, and existing, he is in anguish, pain, and dread
- f) Nearly all people try to deny their own freedom. They make believe that they are not free; therefore, they bind themselves with moral bonds and bounds which they claim are higher than their wills
 - 1. But each man is isolated, alone with his own freedom
 - 2. No other person or agency--except time--can take this burden, this freedom from him
 - 3. Not to bind himself to these truths is to be dishonest in all respects
 - 4. The only alternative to despairing at the crushing weight of reality is to create, to possess, and to exist; but expressed as creating, possessing, and existing (present tense)
 - 5. Man should never fool himself with any hope of future success
 - 6. Life's meaning is to be derived by the individual from a continual series of engagements and commitments of choosing and acting, the gerundial state

From whence do we derive this agony, despair, and anguish?

- a) Reality has its meaning--assuredly--only with the mind of man, but not all reality is in the consciousness of "awareness-of-Beingness."
- b) The outer or perceptual world exists as real

- c) The existentialist directs himself toward physical objects, keeping in mind that other people are physical objects.
- d) The existentialist desires to achieve unity, complete synthesis, and can do so only with the reality not in his human consciousness.
- e) He is driven to identify himself with all reality. He refuses to give up the central thesis of his "for-itself" as human consciousness. He must yield on the point of human consciousness to achieve unity -- wholeness.
- f) He is caught in a terrible contradiction. To be unified -- synthesized -- and made whole with reality, he will have to look to the tradition which has always made each man partake of the common essence of man. If he surrenders all mental phenomena and human consciousness, he is threatened with the specter of naturalism, his greatest foe.
- g) Thus human existence is replete with lack of fulfillment, emptiness, and frustration.
- h) As individuals we are free; we can be free, and we can stay free. Coming from the bitterness of an anguish we know will always be ours, because we can never be made one with reality, is the concept we have of liberty.
- i) Each man knows that he must always choose his consciousness-- Awareness--of--Beingness--above being unified with reality. He is free to despair; he is free to choose. Since he is cut off from God, from men who are essentialists, and from all reality except his own self-consciousness, he must make all the choices. There are many possibilities from which he can and must choose. He has no jury outside himself. Thus he is completely free. He is free to despair because he must do all the choosing with no criteria as objective to aid him in his choosing. Thus, he must despair because all reality throws itself against him. He can only make his choice and despair as to its possible effectiveness.

The existentialist believes that belief is consciousness of choosing. Thus, there is no belief apart from the choosing, willing, and acting individual.

Sartre's statement is significant. Choice is always possible, but what is not possible is not to choose. I can always choose, but I wought to know that if I do not choose, I am still choosing -- in terms of my own consciousness.

The word "atheistic" is not significant as used, because the atheistic existentialist does not consider that God's reality is significant. Because each man is just what he is by the way of acting, choosing, and willing, he has only his own law. Thus, God, if existent, would not enter the picture.

When he (existentialist man) fulfills himself, he exists. This fulfilling can come only through the agony of choices which uphold his own self-conscious. When a man no longer has the agony, there is no longer BEING, but entire NOTHINGNESS - or entire object.

The conviction of making choices is never one of reason, only one of intense passion: human existence is no more than passion.

The existentialist must make every individual aware of his own nature. He must perceive and suffer the terrible weight of responsibility upon himself.

What counts as real is the individual's inner response to a situation which he has experienced.

Every individual faces the fact of living; he faces this existence through his own consciousness.

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6. Life's meaning is to be derived by the individual from a continual series of engagements and commitments of choosing and acting, the perpetual state

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b) The outer or perceptual world exists as well