Introduction

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> A philosophizing that begins by casting light on the situation remains in flux because the situation is nothing but a ceaseless flow. . . . If I take the illumination of the situation for the starting point of philosophizing, I renounce objective explanations that would deduce existence from principles as one whole being. Instead each objective thought structure has its own function.
>
> Awaking to myself, in my situation, I raised the question of being.
> —Karl Jaspers, "Philosophizing Starts with Our Situation,"
> in *Philosophy*, vol. 1

Existentialism Is an Anti-Ism

Situating Existentialism is a history of the process of systematizing and canonizing existentialism as a movement of thought. As such, it reconstructs a shared dialogue about the human condition in the form of a series of reception histories. But it does so in a somewhat disjointed set of frames, for the process of establishing existentialism as a distinctive brand of theorizing about the human predicament in modernity was welded together only in hindsight.

One might assume that an overview of the history of existentialism would offer a definition of its subject at the outset. But existentialism, in principle, rejects a neat dictionary definition or formulation. It is not a consistent or systematic philosophy or approach to thought.[1] If anything, existentialism defined itself *against* systems: systems of thought like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's or "scientific" schemas like racism or positivism; systems of behavior like those of the mob mentality of the masses as in nationalism or

the narrow norms of the bourgeoisie; or systems of production like those created by the industrial revolution. As summarized by Søren Kierkegaard, the thinker most consider to be the prime mover of existentialism: "A logical system can be given, an existential system is impossible."[2]

Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialism's most famous exponent, rejected the invitation to define existentialism: "It is in the nature of an intellectual quest to be undefined," he wrote. "To name it and to define it is to wrap it up and tie the knot. What is left? A finished, already outdated mode of culture, something like a brand of soap, in other words an idea."[3] Moreover, as Marjorie Grene put it in a work that helped introduce existentialism to English readers, "the more fashionable a philosophy becomes, the more elusive is its definition."[4] Indeed, as Friedrich Nietzsche—one of the prophets of what emerged as existentialism—argues in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, "only that which has no history is definable."[5] *Situating Existentialism* seeks to reconstruct the history that has led to how existentialism has come to be defined, systematized, and canonized.

So rather than a definition, we offer a description of existentialism. This description is historically informed, porous, and sensitive to national variation. That is, to describe existentialism is to reconstruct an interchange among a group of thinkers from different regions who came to share a vocabulary for naming a set of problems in the shared setting of modernity.

Our approach is the only viable one given that the writers grouped together as existentialists offer no coherent creed or body of thought or doctrine. There is surely no clear party line. Neither is existentialism, as is so often claimed, reducible to an intellectual mood. In fact, among those thinkers generally lumped together and labeled "existentialists" there are profound differences on foundational issues: irreconcilable positions on God and religion; widely divergent views on politics; and oftentimes opposed outlooks regarding ethics.

Albert Camus, for example, believed that God's existence had little bearing on the human condition. In his notebooks, Camus remarked that "I often read that I am atheistic; I hear people speak of my atheism. Yet these words say nothing to me; for me they have no meaning. I do not believe in God and I am not an atheist."[6] Martin Heidegger, in contrast, once famously claimed that "only a God can save us."[7] In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that much of modern theology in the Christian and Jewish traditions is a footnote to Kierkegaard, so influential was he on the thought of such Christian existentialists as Karl Barth, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Dietrich

Bonhoeffer and Jewish thinkers such as Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Emmanuel Levinas.

Kierkegaard also was a thoroughgoing critic of all collective movements, insisting that where the crowd goes, untruth reigns.[8] In *The Present Age*, he warned against the dangers of modern politics launched in the name of the people or the public. On the other hand, politics became a cornerstone of Sartre's philosophy. He maintained that existentialism "is precisely the opposite of quietism, since it declares that reality only exists in action" and, moreover, that "I cannot set my own freedom as a goal without also setting the freedom of others as a goal." In his 1946 essay "Materialism and Revolution," Sartre stated bluntly that "the philosophy of revolution" represents "the philosophy of *man* in the general sense."[9] As such, Sartre was a fellow traveler of communism, Third World radicalism, and Maoism—in short, the ambassador of theory to revolutionary politics throughout the postwar period. At the other extreme of the political spectrum, Heidegger—who profoundly influenced not only Sartre's ideas but also much of existentialism—was a card-carrying member of the Nazi Party, which has posed a recurrent problem for those inspired by his thought.

If there is no coherence on matters of religion or politics, there is also no unity when it comes to questions of ethics. A distinguishing feature of the existentialists' ontological and ethical projects is the importance they give to *alterity*: the being of "the other." But there were extensive variations in how the relationship between the self and other (both individually and collectively) was understood.[10] For Sartre, "Hell is the other" (as Garcin, the protagonist of *No Exit*, famously proclaims), for others see us as we do not see ourselves. Sartre's ontology reworked Hegel's master–slave dialectic from his *Phenomenology of Spirit* in terms of the intersubjective dialectic of "the gaze" in such a way that relations with others were competitive by nature, an incessant struggle for recognition. For Gabriel Marcel, in contrast, "love as the breaking of the tension between the self and the other, appears to me to be what one might call the essential ontological datum."[11] Likewise for Martin Buber; in *I and Thou*, love is not a feeling but rather a relation: "Love does not cling to an I, as if the You were merely its 'content' or object; it is between I and You."[12] Karl Jaspers put this in a different way: "What I am, I can become only with the other—the act of opening myself to the other is at the same time, for the I, the act of realizing itself as a person."[13] So for Marcel, Jaspers, and Buber, unlike for Sartre, all relationships can move beyond seeing others as objects.

When it comes to ethics per se, these differing notions of alterity entail differing stances on morality. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Simone de Beauvoir rejected any form of absolutist ethics: there are no absolute values before they are embodied in action. The epigraph from Michel de Montaigne to de Beauvoir's *Ethics* sums up her view: "Life in itself is neither good nor evil. It is the place of good and evil, according to what you make it." Rather than seeking absolutes (or absolution), de Beauvoir called for us to engage in a process of "permanent liberation" because we live in "permanent tension," always caught in ambiguity. As such, "morality resides in the painfulness of an indefinite questioning."[14]

In *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard, like de Beauvoir and Sartre, emphasized the centrality of choice within the ethical sphere of life. In *Fear and Trembling*, however, he suggested that the universal dictums of ethics are transcended when it comes to the dictates of faith. He termed this "leap of faith" the "teleological suspension of the ethical." In retelling the biblical narrative of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, Kierkegaard insisted on how shaken we ought to be by Abraham's acceptance of God's commandment that he kill his only son as the paradigmatic example of faith. The reason Abraham should arouse fear and trembling is that his act entails obscuring the previously clear line between right and wrong, good and evil.

These examples demonstrate that there is no accord between some of the most famous figures associated with existentialism on matters as fundamental as God, politics, and morality. Yet despite these immense differences, there is a certain existential lexicon that informs the shared themes one finds across a wide array of thinkers. Indeed, it is Kierkegaard's terminology that makes him a founding figure, for he gave a new valence to a set of notions that were determinative for existentialism, including the variously translated *Angest* (rendered in English as angst, anxiety, anguish, or dread). But perhaps even more basic for the development of *Existenzphilosophie* was Kierkegaard's revalorization of the term "*Existenz*" itself, especially in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Kierkegaard used the term to protest against Hegel's encompassing *Geistphilosophie*, a comprehensive philosophical idealism "in which the individual disappeared like a wave in the sea. He [Kierkegaard] introduced existence as a specifically religious category, meaning by it the single, finite, responsible, simple, suffering and guilty creature, who has to make a decision in the face of God and who consequently is more interested in ethical questions and in salvation than in abstract speculations."[15]

Dostoevsky, in his turn, provided brooding novelistic jabs at liberalism and socialism; tirades against the prevailing Victorian ethos that underpinned the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie; rants on rationalism and reductionist scientism; and, perhaps most profoundly, reflections on the problem of theodicy. In contrast to both Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky, Friedrich Nietzsche, the third major nineteenth-century precursor of existentialism, boldly declared that "God is dead." Nietzsche went on to tackle the nihilist repercussions that stemmed from this declaration, radically rejecting the ramparts of religion and the absolutes of any metaphysical or epistemological system.

Edmund Husserl, the father of modern phenomenology, was certainly no existentialist, but in the early twentieth century he enjoined philosophers to return "back to the things themselves." This was a call to reflect on how phenomena are experienced by consciousness removed from the commonsensical and scientific understanding of them to something more primordial: how they appear to us in consciousness as a result of human intentionality. This entreaty had a profound impact on existentialism, which from Kierkegaard forward was critical of abstracting philosophy from the concrete concerns of human existence.

Karl Jaspers, who left the normalizing confines of modern psychiatry, pushed his readers to examine life from the viewpoint of "limit situations" that involve suffering, struggle, guilt, and death. In these extreme circumstances, Jaspers claimed, individuals are pressed against the social conventions that encase them and forced to decide anew on the existential issues that define their lives. Following Jaspers, Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) introduced a technical vocabulary that sought a new way to formulate existential concerns within the philosophical tradition, introducing or reconsidering concepts (several of which are difficult to render in translation) like *Dasein* (human existence), *Mitsein* (Being-with-others), temporality, Being-in-the-world, Being-toward-death, and authenticity and inauthenticity. On the French side of the Rhine, a key term picked up by Camus from Kierkegaard was the notion of the *absurd*. For Camus it indicated the irreconcilability between our desire for rationality and order and the maddening contingency of how things actually unfold in the world. Sartre, too, coined a number of concepts that expressed a set of ideas that other existentialists have pursued. These concepts include *nausea*, the visceral sense of the world's haphazard nature; *bad faith*, or lying to yourself by refusing to assume responsibility for your freedom; and, as alluded to previously, a social ontology predicated on *the gaze* of others.

These are some examples of what became a common vocabulary. Part of the history that we reconstruct in *Situating Existentialism* is how these terms or insights were shared and understood across a variety of otherwise quite different thinkers. As succinctly stated by William Barrett, whose *Irrational Man* helped introduce existentialism to America, what existentialists held in common were "such matters as anxiety, death, the conflict between the bogus and the genuine self, the faceless man of the masses, [and] the experience of the death of God."[16] In short, existentialists addressed the most fundamental concerns of human existence: suffering, loneliness, dread, guilt, conflict, spiritual emptiness, the absence of absolute values or universals, the fallibility of human reason, and the tragic impasses of the human condition.

This shared terminology and set of themes cohered into points that queried the grounds of modern philosophy. When so much in modern thought seemed sterile and removed from ultimate issues, existentialists asked us to consider again an array of searching problems: Who am I? What is my purpose in existing? What does human existence mean? How should I live? How should I relate to others? Is there a God? Is there a relation between God's existence (or not) and how one lives? Why is there evil in the world? These are questions that can unsettle individuals to the core of their being, awaken them from the somnambulism of their lives, and direct us all to assume responsibility to create meaning from our situation in the world.

In responding to these questions, it is often claimed that existentialists begin with individualism: the solitary person living in the world. But this is untrue. Existentialism is plainly critical of Leibniz's monads or liberalism's abstract individual defined by universals (whether reason or rights) or romanticism's solitary subject seeking connection with a greater whole. It would be more accurate to say that existentialism starts with the problem of subjectivity: the question of human nature and the critical examination of how selfhood is constructed.

What existentialists came to share in common, Sartre famously averred, was that "existence precedes essence." This has emerged as the bumper sticker for existentialism, and with good reason. By this, Sartre meant that the choices we make in the situations in which we find ourselves (where we are never alone) determine our essence. In other words, humans are not born with a pre-scripted personality or a preordained purpose or plan or a prefabricated essence conferred by God or nature or history. Instead, it is our actions that define our identity, and it is our values that inform our acts. Human beings are like artists who creatively fashion the projects that constitute the

meanings of their existence. This is true even for religious existentialists like Nicolas Berdyaev, who provided an existential twist on Genesis 1:27. Berdyaev maintained, as would other religious existentialists, that if God created human beings in Her own image, then humans are creative entities like God and thus endowed by their creator with the capacity to choose their path in life.

The Archimedean point for existentialism is thus the question, "Who am I?" In order to reply, we must first reject the predigested mores, rules, orders, and routines of the modern world, all of which divert our focus from making purposeful choices. Pursuing this thought in his *Journal*, Kierkegaard wrote:

> What I really need is to get clear about *what I must do*, not what I must know, except insofar as knowledge must precede every act. What matters is to find a purpose . . . the crucial thing is to find a truth which is truth *for me*, to find *the idea for which I am willing to live and die*. Of what use would it be to me to discover a so-called objective truth . . . constructing a world I did not live in but merely held up for others to see . . . if it had no deeper meaning *for me and for my life*?[17]

At twenty-three, Kierkegaard was asking the pivotal question: What should I do with my life, and how can it be purpose driven? In doing so, he shared with unbelievers and atheistic existentialists the assumption of individual responsibility for "becoming what I am."

If this assumption is valid, then it immediately poses the question of what criteria govern what choices we ought to make. As we have already suggested, matters are murky here. Existentialists had no agreement on the solutions, but the whole assemblage of voices in the existential canon questioned the metaphysical underpinnings of ethics. Even so, they sought to establish an axiology, the study of values. And all of the existentialists were concerned about the problem of nihilism: they wondered whether the transformations that structured the modern world had eviscerated the sacred, and paved over the *terra mundi*, so that meaning and valuation were at best relative and at worst groundless.

When they approached these concerns, existentialists did so in a new style. They were not driven to establish valid proofs or to systematize their convictions. Instead they sought to cultivate a clearing in life where posing these vital concerns came to the fore. Each reflected on how he or she could write in a way that would force readers to reevaluate staid convictions

and spent solutions. George Pattison has itemized some of their differing modes of expression. These include "Kierkegaard's own indirect communication, Dostoevsky's dialogical art, Bultmann's concern for a demythologized *kerygma*, Tillich's doctrine of symbolism and his promotion of the visual arts, Berdyaev's insistence on the aphoristic nature of philosophy, Buber's retelling of Hasidic tales, Unamuno's paradoxical prose and Marcel's plays."[18] These were some of the stylistic signatures of thinkers whose desire was to spur their readers from complacency to comprehension.

Doing so involved "philosophizing with a hammer," as Nietzsche put it.[19] What were to be smashed were the new idols worshipped by modern thought: most emphatically unbridled rationalism and its twin, the idol of progress. When Francis Bacon declared "knowledge is power" as the mantra of modernity, he did so as the herald of a new scientific method, believing it would lead to domination over nature and constant improvement of the human lot. Yet even though the natural and human sciences have led to vast collections of data about all aspects of life, the result has not been coherence, comprehension, and certainty so much as confusion, malaise, and perhaps a technical sophistry by which we seek to stave off the piercing predicaments faced in the night's sleepless hours. Kierkegaard taught that, from the vantage point of existential concerns, "truth is subjectivity," and "all essential knowledge relates to existence, or only such knowledge as has an essential relationship to existence is essential knowledge."[20]

The progress stemming from political attempts at human liberation has led to greater independence but no less often to terror committed in the name of revolutionary violence, as Camus diagnosed in *The Rebel*.[21] Even when turning from totalitarian regimes (which were Camus's target) to the promises of liberalism and the neoliberal world order, we see that individuals today are more often mired in bureaucracy and commercialism than empowered by self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment. As Pattison notes, existentialists thus "questioned the view that the satisfaction of material needs and comforts and the fulfillment of political hopes, whether nationalistic or class based, could satisfy the human question for meaning."[22] Indeed, the tenor of the existentialists has been to refuse prevailing models of social and political change while holding firmly to what Camus called "rebellion." The existential tendency has been to celebrate the rebel without a utopian belief in final solutions or the end of history and to waylay any politics of power that fails to recognize human frailty.

So while existentialists offer no consistent creed, code, or common program, they do share a lingo tied to a set of modern problems: the question

of subjectivity, how to forge a postmetaphysical ethics, how to ground truth in differing perspectives, how to theorize in ways that are not reducible to a constricting logic or mode of rationality, how to establish social systems that do not lead to crushing conformity or homogenizing uniformity, and how to communicate this in a way that speaks to others so that they pick up the hammer and begin to smash those elements that are stultifying their own lives.

These themes, relentlessly pursued by those we have come to call existentialists, continue to have relevance for those who desire to break from the soul-constricting numbness of social norms and for those who are sickened by identifying worth with wealth or success with jobs, which are usually the iron cages of our bourgeois zoo. These concerns still resonate for those of us in search of individuality in a society saturated by mass media, for those of us ready to assume responsibility for a world where genocide and racism continue after Auschwitz and apartheid, for those of us who rebel against the absurdity of a world in which a few hundred of the richest people have more wealth than half of humanity. These concerns still speak to those of us in search of something transcendent after Darwin, after industrialization, and after the reduction of meaning to television sound bites and the diminution of communication to text messages. In short, existentialism remains germane because our very humanity, as Heidegger suggested, is such that humans are the beings that continue to ask: What is the meaning of my existence?

Existentialism Is a Modernism

What "defined" existentialism, then, was less a shared school of thought than a shared situation. This situation was both discursive and material: dependent on a set of conversations about changes in the modern world. Summarily but not simply, it was a response to the atmosphere captured in T. S. Eliot's famous poem "The Waste Land." Like Eliot, existentialists asked: "What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow / Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man, You cannot say, or guess, for you know only / A heap of broken images."[23] The broken world to which existentialism gave expression was the feeling that those who had lived through two world wars, totalitarianism, the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb felt in their bones: that traditional systems of thought and politics had crumbled in the trenches or the gas chambers or the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima. Existentialism was a quixotic

howl in the night—about the extreme situations of modernity—that might yet open the ears of those who listened and yearned for a more humane existence.

In saying this we can clarify some terms that help to explain the situation that existentialists spoke about. The *modern* world was shaped by the axial shift that followed in the wake of Columbus. The processes of *modernization* that followed from and buttressed this shift—the growth of the nation-state, urbanization, science as the primary mode of producing and legitimizing knowledge, secularization, and the bureaucratization of individual life—transformed modern existence. These changes were impelled by technological renovations based on the steam engine, which forever altered what people do, where they work, how they labor, who reaps the benefits, and how families are ordered. Harnessed to rail and then ships and airplanes, the steam engine brought about a revolution in transportation that shrank the planet and created the mechanical clock as the modern taskmaster that presides over every minute of our lives.[24] Harnessed to modes of communication, the steam engine ushered in a mass-media revolution that created global megaphones: the rise of the mass press (itself made possible by the cable wire, the telephone, and the camera) followed by film, radio, television, and, today, the Internet and wireless communications.

Modernity was the ontological outcome of these forces: the state of being that defined existence in the modern age. And the *moderns* were the artists and writers who expressed this new zeitgeist. The moderns forged *modernism*, which comprised the artistic movements in literature, architecture, visual art, and other cultural forms that responded to the processes of modernization. What these art forms shared was an assault on the *mimetic model of representation* that had characterized the West since the Renaissance—a model claiming that art ought to represent nature, that knowledge was a reflection of the laws of nature, and that aesthetic forms should strive for the harmony ostensibly found in nature. However, Einstein's theory of relativity and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle questioned the Newtonian view of nature on which that model was based.

Yet even before this new scientific picture of reality emerged, modernists were rejecting the objective certainty of nature. Freud and psychoanalysis critiqued the unity of consciousness, and the new discipline of sociology doubted the integration of modern society. All insisted on a multiplicity of frames of reference. Modernism suggested that reality could not be easily separated from its fictive construction and that modern identity was certainly not ontologically stable. Art forms, the moderns maintained, were

a product of fictive habits whose formulas were outdated. Old structures and old themes needed to be overturned. Piece by piece, in every artistic field, every element of the old model gave way: "narrative, character, melody, tonality, structural continuity, thematic relation, form, content, meaning, purpose"—all were questioned and rethought.[25] The different forms of modernism turned away from the external world to represent the modern psyche and often to reflect on the process of perception, representation, and its structures. The solidity of naturalism and realism in the arts consequently yielded to cubism, surrealism, and abstract expressionism. In the novel, the omniscient narrator gave way to the shifting viewpoints of multiple characters whose perspectives were as fractured as their streams of consciousness. Truth was a matter of conventions, reality ungraspable, and subjectivity malleable.

Existentialists were a disunified group of moderns who were nonetheless kindred spirits in the endeavor to kindle a light in what Hannah Arendt termed the "dark times" of modernity.[26] Existentialists became a major cultural force among the intellectual vanguard in the era of the two world wars, which W. H. Auden famously dubbed the "Age of Anxiety."[27] In the wake of Auschwitz and Hiroshima and in the long shadow of King Leopold's ghost, existentialism—modernism's philosophical discourse (even when this philosophy was advanced by literary, theatrical, or other art forms)—became among the most visible of the postwar cultural movements as the Iron Curtain descended. The Cold War was an epoch dominated by two power blocs and a binary system of thinking, dividing the world into absolutes between us and them, good and evil, freedom and tyranny. It was also a period during which the concrete of the German economic miracle and *les trentes glorieuses*, the thirty years of unparalleled economic growth in Europe following the Nuremberg Trials, covered over the ashes of the crematoria and the ruins of the atomic bomb.

Existentialists—as did modernists in philosophy, literature, and theater—railed against burying our humanity beneath this dust cloud. French, Hispanic, African American, Jewish, and Christian existentialists were often dissonant voices in the midst of the freedom struggles of the colonized, women, homosexuals, and other outsiders that Ralph Ellison termed "invisible men."[28] Existentialism thus limned modernity and exposed its hollowness, revealing that it rested on a void. In reflecting on this nothingness, existentialists pulled up the anchors that ostensibly undergirded the European culture of high modernity.

As a label for a set of tendencies found in the modern writers discussed so far, "existentialism" arrived as a global cultural phenomenon in October 1945 following Sartre's famous lecture titled *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Simone de Beauvoir recounted the moment:

> The origin of the term was contingent and capricious. It was in fact Gabriel Marcel who first applied the term to Sartre, in the course of a discussion with a group of Dominicans at Le Cerf. At the time Sartre rejected this definition of himself saying that he was indeed a philosopher of existence but that "Existentialism" did not mean anything. But subsequently, Sartre and I, and his followers, were described as being Existentialists so often that we stopped objecting to this definition of ourselves. Finally we even agreed to define ourselves as such. And just after the war ended Sartre gave a lecture which he entitled "Is Existentialism a Humanism?" which shows how completely he had adopted this definition himself by then.[29]

Sartre's lecture and its subsequent publication came to define existentialism as it burst onto the world stage. The talk wove together the names of a set of thinkers whose work was now repackaged as *existentialism*, a postwar cultural fashion. Along with Sartre's lecture, Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* was also much discussed and likewise carved out a legacy of precursors. In 1947, the best-selling book by the Catholic personalist Emmanuel Mounier, *Introduction aux existentialismes*, marked the construction of an existentialist canon. Mounier even offered a diagram of the existentialist "family tree" that shows how Socrates, St. Augustine, and the Stoics were harbingers of existentialism (see figure I.1).

The Gallic version of existentialism thus stamped its seal of approval on the systemization of the collection of texts, figures, themes, concepts, and contexts that defined existentialism. But a German story about what was called *Existenzphilosophie* had already been produced by Fritz Heinemann in a 1929 book titled *Neue Wege der Philosophie: Geist/Leben/Existenz: Eine Einführung in die Philsophie der Gegenwart* (New paths of philosophy: Spirit/life/existence: An introduction to contemporary philosophy).[30] Heinemann argued that the philosophies of spirit (the *Geistphilosophien* of Hegelianism) and *Lebensphilosophie* (from the tradition of German romanticism, including Herder, Hamann, and Jacobi) were ceding place in contemporary thought to *Existenzphilosophie*, a term he coined to describe the approach of Jaspers and

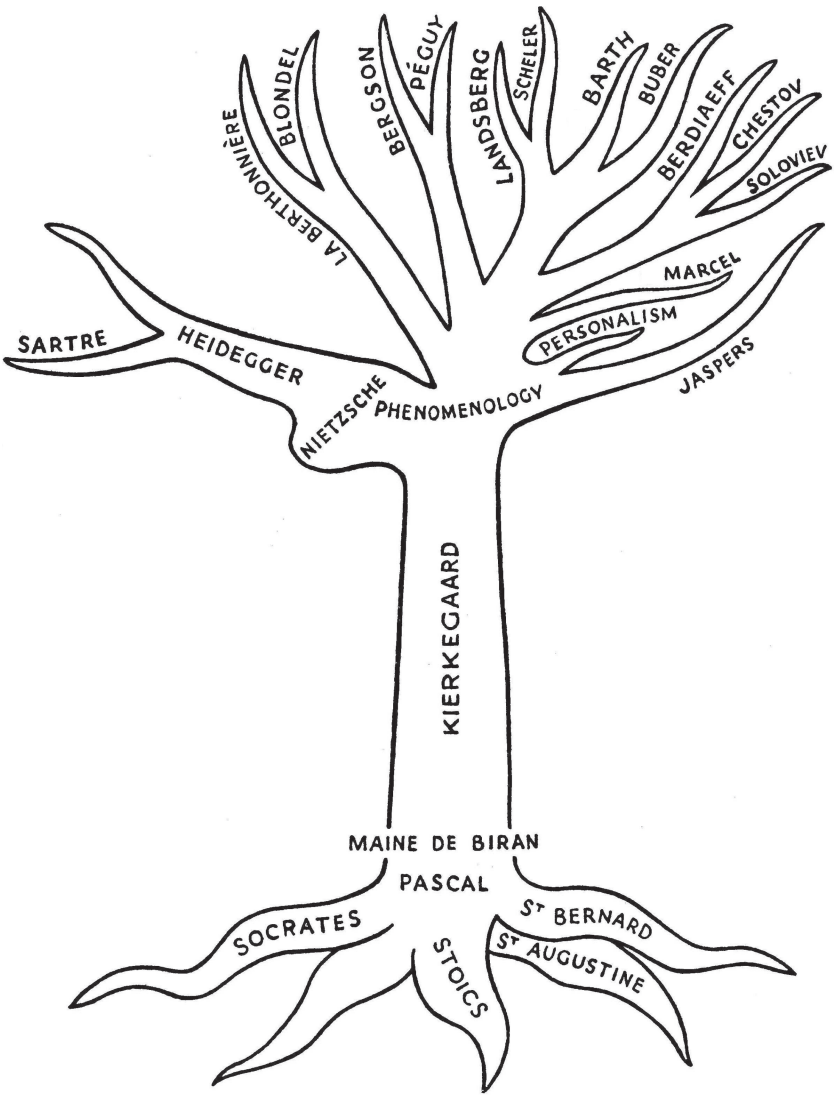

FIGURE 1.1 The Existentialist Tree. Reproduced from Emmanuel Mounier, *Introduction aux existentialismes*, © 1960 Éditions Denoël. Reproduced by permission.

Heidegger and that would also be applied to the work of Buber and Franz Rosenzweig.[31]

Heinemann's book was not widely read, but his term and the interpretation of how the currents in modern German thought led to the development of *Existenzphilosophie* stuck. In the 1930s, Heinemann (who was Jewish) left Germany for Great Britain, where he continued to explain this new brand of

philosophy. Eventually, his *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* (1958) would be a widely read introduction in English. Heinemann maintained that Heidegger's existential phenomenology was strongly influenced by Kierkegaard and was the basis for Heidegger's critique of Husserl's phenomenology. A decade after Heinemann, Jaspers—who had already written much in this vein and had also produced individual works on Kierkegaard and Nietzsche—published a book of lectures simply titled *Existenzphilosophie* (1938).[32] These lectures captured aspects of *Existenzphilosophie* that were remixed with a French accent before World War II, integrating splices of Spanish and Russian thought as existentialism migrated to and from Paris and across the globe. Summing up the construction of existentialism as an "ism," Walter Kaufmann wrote: "After the arrival of Sartre, a number of other writers who had not called themselves existentialists or been so labeled before 1945 became identified with this label and triumphed *in hoc signo*."[33]

Situating Existentialism

In spite of the preceding reconstruction of how existentialism was constituted, *Situating Existentialism* does not proceed as a linear, chronological review of existentialism from a retrospective viewpoint. This is not a work in which you will find a neat lineup that links one existentialist thinker to the next. Nor is it a book in which we discuss individual philosophers who communicated only with one another. In none of the chapters do individual master thinkers stand for a whole generation or a type of approach, as one might find in the Cambridge companion series devoted to major movements of thought. Instead, each chapter explores the key existentialists by situating their positions (socially, politically, culturally, and philosophically) and examines how peers responded to them. The discussion is framed within the context provided by the book's three parts (national, religious, and migratory). It is precisely by situating existentialism in this way that each chapter can also discuss how existentialism still speaks to us today.

The three parts of this volume form a triptych. Part 1 includes essays that consider the (trans)national frameworks for the development of existentialism, for it was often a national situation that circumscribed the contours of the conversations that encapsulated existentialism. Part 2 considers religion and existentialism; it includes chapters on Christians, Jews, and nonbelievers.

Part 3 examines the national and religious borderlines that were crossed as existentialism was consolidated and canonized.

It is important to bear the chapter template in mind while reading this book. Every chapter opens with a classic text in the existential canon that we suggest be read in tandem with the chapters: Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (chapter 1), Heidegger's *What Is Metaphysics?* (chapter 2), Sartre's *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (chapter 3), Norman Mailer's "The White Negro" (chapter 4), Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (chapter 5), Miguel de Unamuno's *The Tragic Sense of Life* (chapter 6), Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* (chapter 7), Buber's *I and Thou* (chapter 8), Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (chapter 9), Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety* (chapter 10), Nietzsche's riff on "the death of God" in *The Gay Science* (chapter 11), Frantz Fanon's "The Lived Experience of the Black Man" in *Black Skin, White Masks* (chapter 12), de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (chapter 13), and Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" (chapter 14).

Each contributor provides a fresh reading of these texts. They do so not only by viewing them as solitary works but also by setting them in the context they inhabited. This contextualization deepens our understanding of the flash points that established the history of existentialism, the production of some of its pivotal texts, and the subsequent reception of these ideas.

However, the chapters also go beyond this exercise in intellectual history to explore a set of philosophical questions. The nature of the human subject and the problem of theodicy are taken up in Val Vinokur's exploration of Dostoevsky's role in Russian existentialism. Peter Gordon suggests that metaphysics persists within existentialism's critique of essentialism, if the case of Heidegger is illustrative. In my reconsideration of the Christian existentialist challenge to Sartre and the Paris school, I discuss how Christian thinkers depicted as fallow the functionalist understanding of the relation to the other that Sartre articulated. George Cotkin examines how American intellectuals critiqued the narrowness of the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism in their existentially tinged works, often while denying their allegiance to a European tradition that was ostensibly being surpassed by the rising American superpower. Martin Woessner reflects upon how existentialism challenged the dry academicism of the analytic tradition's emphasis on logic and positivism. Eduardo Mendieta excavates from Cervantes's *Don Quixote* a set of philosophical claims from which all philosophical modernisms could be elaborated in creative and powerful ways as an expression of being Hispanic and

Latino in a world made by Columbus and remade by decolonization. Pattison's overview of Christian existentialism proceeds by tracing how a number of thinkers take on the troubling theme of "the exception," which is entailed by Kierkegaard's argument concerning the "teleological suspension of the ethical." For Paul Mendes-Flohr, Jewish existentialism is an alternative tradition within existentialism because its focus on dialogue opens a trajectory of thought that is markedly different from the mainstream of Western philosophy. Samuel Moyn explicitly raises the issue of canonization and how it intersects with the problem of secularization. Charles Bambach, in his comments on the tradition of interpreting Nietzsche, argues that Nietzsche ought to be understood as a central pivot for the reconsideration of Western thought more generally, as claimed by Karl Löwith, Jaspers, and Heidegger. Robert Bernasconi's reading of Fanon in dialogue with Sartre reveals that, although Fanon appreciated the critical project of the negritude writers, he ultimately explored an existential methodology that made his influential philosophy of race a novel approach to the shifting structures of racism in a post-Holocaust and postcolonial world. Debra Bergoffen provocatively claims that de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* still speaks to us today not only as an analysis of patriarchy but also because it is grounded in the categories and claims of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* about the need to confront evil, which continue to provide insight into a host of contemporary issues (only one of which is gender oppression). Finally, Ethan Kleinberg's overview of the three traditions of reading Heidegger in postwar France indicates why Levinas's approach transcended both the existentialist and the antihumanist interpretation of Heidegger, offering simultaneously a critique of Western metaphysics and the opening to ethics that has preoccupied so many of the late Continental thinkers of note. Thus, as Jaspers suggests in this chapter's epigraph, each of the following chapters first situates existentialism and then, from this situation, philosophizes.

Before turning to a summary of the contents, a last point worth mentioning is that, although *Situating Existentialism* is addressed to those just beginning to explore existentialism, it seeks also to push the scholarly discussion forward. We hope that the result will challenge readers regardless of their familiarity with existentialism. Readers who have never been exposed to these ideas ought to find themselves tested: awakened to the possibility of ways of thinking that call into question what they take for granted—as natural, true, God-given, or essential to the order of things—by encountering a set of clear expositions of complex philosophical works. But each chapter also seeks to reconsider the interpretation of these foundational works of existentialism by

reading them in dialogue within the wider tradition they share, whose full contours are less appreciated today than before.

Part 1 is composed as a set of national contexts in which existentialism emerged as a centerpiece of cultural exchange. In each case it turns out that ideas, thinkers, themes, books, and eventually a shared vocabulary crossed borders and migrated in different directions that cannot be mapped to neat geographical boundaries. Existentialism was nomadic and exilic, and existential insights spurred new conversations in new settings. Existentialism was thus transnational. That being said, nation-states were a determining influence on the cultural map of European modernity, and this was also the case for existentialism. Interlocutors often shared a language and institutional zones of contact (publishers, journals, universities, conversational circles, cafés, bars) as well as generational frameworks of understanding. These frameworks are considered in the opening part of *Situating Existentialism*.

Val Vinokur mulls over certain themes among the Russian novelists Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and how these themes were picked up by later epigones of Russian existentialism writing in France. Focusing on Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and *The Brothers Karamazov* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Vinokur unpacks how these Russian writers portrayed the cleaving of consciousness, so important to later existentialist thinkers, and raised questions about the meaning of life by dwelling on the issue of theodicy: how to sustain belief in God given the merciless evil that one encounters in the world. These themes are explored in terms of how they are woven into the work of Lev Shestov and Berdyaev as well as that of Camus, Sartre, and Levinas.

Vinokur draws our attention to the architectural metaphors in *Notes from Underground* to show that this was the trope that Dostoevsky repeatedly employed to elucidate the questions that the underground man wanted to provoke. In a searing and sardonic rip on the values of Western culture, Dostoevsky's character spits on the smarminess of the bourgeoisie and their Victorian verities. For the underground man, these are the vices of a consciousness unaware of how conformity leads to the deformation of character. Vinokur takes us on an architectural tour of the underside of consciousness, as characterized by Dostoevsky, in the name of a more profound examination of the life worth living.

Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's characters, Vinokur reveals, come to see how life can be valued after witnessing situations where children are the victims of the brute forces of nature or of brutal treatment by men. Thus Vinokur

weaves together insights on how the theme of the torn subject is connected to a schism between the positions of Ivan and Alyosha in *The Brothers Karamazov* and between the skeptic about religion and the naïve believer—a typology Berdyaev referred to as the split between nihilists and apocalypsists. Vinokur's reading is a powerful antidote to cavalier dismissals of either side, and it demonstrates why this schism spoke to the existentialist readers of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

In Germany, existentialism cohered not so much from the overlap between philosophy and literature but in dialogue with the sociology of modernity and modern psychology. In elucidating this trajectory, Peter Gordon's chapter zeroes in on Heidegger's inaugural lecture ("What Is Metaphysics?") at the University of Marburg in order to illuminate his audacious challenge to the prevailing neo-Kantianism of academic philosophy. Yet Heidegger's critique did not stop there, for he threw down a philosophical gauntlet to the dominance of science more generally and, by extension, to the instrumental rationality that he insisted was at the root of disenchantment within modernity. In establishing the precursor for this position, Gordon returns us to another seminal university lecture, "Science As a Vocation," which was delivered in Munich by Max Weber in 1918.

Weber sought to convey to those university students who came to hear his talk, many of them veterans of the bloody World War I trenches, that science "is a 'vocation' organized in special disciplines in the service of self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts. It is not the gift of grace of seers and prophets dispensing sacred values and revelations, nor does it partake of the contemplation of sages and philosophers about the meaning of the universe."[34] Weber was suggesting to those who heard the call of science that it demanded a certain stoical ethos, a renunciation of revelation and transcendence because the "iron cage" of modernity was ineluctable.

In Gordon's telling, much hinges on this famous Weberian phrase. Jaspers would pick it up and convert it to the cause of his properly existential formulations, translating Weber's sociological observations into psychological terms that became the heartbeat of his *Existenzphilosophie*. In turn, Heidegger would take up Jaspers's project, recognizing it as a new beginning for philosophy but also criticizing it for not going far enough.[35] Gordon shows that the theory of anxiety—the centerpiece of Heidegger's existential project in *Being and Time*—was "a radicalized and ontologized re-working of the *psychological* idea of the 'limit-situation' that Heidegger borrowed from Jaspers."

In reconstructing this pedigree, Gordon turns the tables on Heidegger by suggesting that, far from overcoming metaphysics, Heidegger remained entangled with it: he not only ascribes a certain essence to being human (as revealed in anxiety) but also reintroduces the transcendental subject as the core of that essence. Along the way, we learn much about the German legacy of *Existenzphilosophie* as a response to the stultifying strictures of modernity and about the quest to find an opening in thought that would allow the reclamation of authenticity in a cookie-cutter world.

Although Jaspers and Heidegger were its two German master thinkers, Paris became the epicenter of existentialism in the postwar period. The thinkers of the Paris school of existentialists were the seismographers of an earthquake in Western thought. I map this tectonic shift from its *locus classicus*, Sartre's statement in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. More than any others, that text and Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* established the existential canon. Here were sewn together the names of Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky as well as the ideas of Nietzsche, Jaspers, and Heidegger—all in an idiom that echoed across the cultural landscape and that was exported from Paris around the world.

The aftershocks of this movement were evident in the Marxist and Catholic camps, whose members were Sartre's intellectual rivals. When they were not simply polemicizing against existentialism in scatological terms, Marxists tried to dismiss it as another form of bourgeois false consciousness. On the other hand, in perhaps the most underappreciated bit in the history of French existentialism, Catholics (who were already rethinking the Christian tradition while borrowing from the existential lexicon) posed powerful challenges to Sartre and, by extension, to Camus, de Beauvoir, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

In newspaper articles, radio shows, and even film scripts—but most successfully in their plays, their novels, and their joint journal (*Les temps modernes*, which became the leading Left periodical)—the Paris school of existentialism came to define the intellectual debate of a generation. The chapter closes by tracing the lineage within French thought that was a precursor of the postwar generation's discussions of subjectivity, freedom, morality, and the purpose of human existence. I thus sketch the antecedents and interlocutors among a clutch of writers and artists—the Paris school of existentialism—whose work came to characterize the most audacious and challenging claims of existentialism in the postwar period.

The shock waves of existentialism emanated far beyond the shores of the Seine. Across the Atlantic, reports about existentialism appeared in such leading American magazines and journals as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* and *Partisan Review*. Yet because it was rooted in American experience, the cultural mix that came to define existentialism in America was different from its French counterpart. Indeed, George Cotkin maintains that there were three periods of existential musing in America. Going back to the Colonial Period and through World War I, writers like Jonathan Edwards, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville, and William James reflected on the "drizzly November" of the American soul. The Great War was also a watershed moment for the appreciation first of Nietzsche and then of Kierkegaard, whose works washed ashore as major intellectual influences in the early twentieth century.

It was the post-Hiroshima period that saw the flourishing of existentially inflected writing in America. Cotkin explores this dynamic in Norman Mailer's "The White Negro" as a window into the broader landscape. In the essay, Mailer emphasized that the American existentialist came onto the scene after Hiroshima and Auschwitz, when everyone should already have internalized the threat of instant mass death but when few were cognizant of the "slow death of conformity" in postwar America. For Mailer, as for the Beat poets, an idealized version of the black hipster was the antidote to the stifling rigidity of burgeoning suburban conventionality. Existentialism in American literature was evident not only in writers like Mailer, Allan Ginsberg, and Jack Kerouac but also in the work of groundbreaking African American novelists like Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin.

In the American philosophical academy, however, existentialism was still an underground tradition. It raided the hallways of the dominant analytic tradition, making way for Barrett and for women like Grene and Hazel Barnes, each of whom became translators and systematizers of existentialism. They mixed American pragmatism with a meliorist sensibility that still insisted upon taking responsibility for the pressing moral and political questions Americans faced as the new dominant power in the Western world. Beyond the academy, the blossoming feminist movement (led by figures such as Betty Friedan) learned much from the likes of de Beauvoir about the structural and existential forces that conditioned women to accept their role as "the second sex," and it encouraged women to remake their condition along more egalitarian lines. Existential psychoanalysis would also take hold; its jumping-off point was the work of Rollo May and Irvin Yallom. In

addition, both Christian and Jewish theologians—especially in the work of Reinhold Niebuhr, Robert McAfee Brown, and Will Herberg—would transmit existential themes and the notable players to a new generation. By the 1960s, an existentially informed lexis was intrinsic to the student movement that assailed the American establishment from the barricades of antiwar activism, ultimately informing the counterculture and eventually pop culture itself. Such icons as Woody Allen might claim to have no direct relationship to existentialism, but his films are replete with dialogue based on the pages of Kierkegaard and Sartre.

Existentialism never had quite the same attraction in England as in America. "Angst Across the Channel," as Martin Woessner titles his chapter on existentialism in Great Britain, was greeted as much with bemusement as with serious deliberation. So the sensation of the London debut of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is a perfect port of entry for Woessner's overview. Beckett's play would become the most famous link between existentialism and the theater of the absurd. It was an enduring staging of the encounter with nothing, the void in a meaningless universe that appears to be abandoned by God-ot. Beckett's protagonists tramp along nonetheless in the struggle to make meaning. The characters were snipped from vaudevillian types, and their dialogue ultimately goes nowhere but still manages to provide glosses on death, language, God, and providence. Beckett thus seamlessly merged the droll with the profound.

In more formal terms, Woessner explains, existentialism was introduced to British philosophers by two German Jewish émigrés, Werner Brock and Heinemann. Restoring these forgotten cultural translators to the historical record helps us understand the transmission of the German philosophers of life and *Existenz* to the island off the continent, which thereby challenged the dominant analytic trends of logical positivism and empiricism. Outside the academy, however, it was the novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch who popularized existentialism by introducing Sartre and the themes of the Paris school to British readers. Colin Wilson, along with the novelists and playwrights dubbed the Angry Young Men, rode this short-lived tide of enthusiasm. Their thematization of the alienated outsiders of British society would be picked up by R. D. Laing, who emerged as a countercultural icon by the mid-1960s after welding the existential critique of alienation to the powerful insights of the antipsychiatry movement. In tracing this impact, Woessner reveals that existentialism was given a robust sounding in ways that would affect British writers to the present day.

Eduardo Mendieta's chapter on existentialism in the Spanish tongue reveals a significantly longer, more robust, and influential tradition of existentialism than ever existed in English. In many respects, Hispanic and Latin American existentialism preceded the work of even the French and German existential tradition. The key source text for Hispanic and Latin American existentialists, Mendieta argues, was Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*. This is because *El Quixote* embodied four key philosophemes that made it a spur to the modern novel *tout court* and by extension to key themes that existentialists writing in Spanish would explore: a reflection on liberty and specifically the freedom to fashion the self; a consideration of the power of personal narrative to make and recreate the world (for what are we, after all, but the stories we tell about ourselves?); the establishment in *El Quixote* of the paradigm for what the Spanish philosopher Julián Marías called "the existentialist novel," or "the type of novel in which we are not given characters or archetypes, but in which the personhood" of the characters are traced on the basis of the projects they undertake; and Don Quixote's capturing of the limits of reason—the duplicity of revealed or enlightened truth in the face of the world's absurdity.

With such perspicacity, Cervantes's *Don Quixote* anticipated Spanish existentialism and was a constant source for its leading expositors. Miguel de Unamuno offered its first philosophical articulation, most famously in *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations* (1912). Unamuno had few direct followers, but José Ortega y Gasset (the leading figure of the so-called School of Madrid) was the inspiration for Spanish and Latin American philosophers who followed in his wake. Before Heidegger and Sartre, he had formulated a set of existential axioms that influenced his disciples. Summarizing his insights, Ortega y Gasset concluded that "we find that life is always personal, circumstantial, untransferable, and responsible." By this he meant that, like the deeds of Don Quixote, life is a quest that is uniquely personal and undertaken in specific circumstances that are a check on freedom—which nonetheless is absolute, making our life a *que hacer* (a doing) that we alone are responsible for undertaking.

Following these inroads, existentialism was articulated in Spain earlier than elsewhere and hence also was sooner integrated and superseded. As Latin American philosophy and literature came into its own, existential and phenomenological insights were fused to hermeneutics alongside such indigenous traditions as liberation philosophy and magical realism. For this rich mixture, still largely unknown and underexplored, Mendieta provides the map.

Part 2 of the book turns from transnational frames to the issue of religion in the modern world. Religious existentialists are thoroughly marginalized by most treatments of existentialism per se, or they are treated in isolation as if they were of interest only to the religiously inclined. But religion proves to be a central pulse of existentialism—and not only for Kierkegaard, who is included in every existentialist's pantheon. What distinguished religious existentialists from their liberal and conservative or orthodox religious counterparts was that, instead of ignoring the profound challenges to faith already evident by the nineteenth century, existentialists took them as starting blocks. The scientific revolution and the Enlightenment provided a basis for the rational critique of religion that made belief in revealed truth unconvincing or even unintelligible. Coupled with capitalism, the material world and the materialism of science became the new idols. In this context, institutionalized forms of religion were often bunkers of comfort and solace that insulated believers from the troubling questions of human existence.

Religious existentialists argued that faith in such a world was and ought to be scandalous. Christianity, claimed Kierkegaard, demands that the Christian become a "witness to the truth," someone whose life "is unacquainted with everything which is called enjoyment . . . experiencing inward conflicts . . . fear and trembling . . . trepidation . . . anguish of soul . . . agony of spirit."[36] Faith is not belief in the objective certainty of God. Quite to the contrary, wrote Kierkegaard, "faith is . . . the contradiction between inwardness's infinite passion and the objective uncertainty. If I can grasp God objectively, I do not have faith."[37] Faith in the modern world means to live in "objective uncertainty." This is the paradox of not only Christian but also Jewish existentialism.

Pattison charts the Christian lineage beginning from the profound issues raised by Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. He focuses specifically on how Kierkegaard treated the problem of "the exception" to systems of universal ethics in his discussion of Abraham's response to God's call to sacrifice his son as a sign of faith. In doing so, Kierkegaard raised a nested set of dilemmas that were later taken up by Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. Thus the nineteenth century formed the backdrop for a Christian existential theology that Pattison explores most closely in the work of Paul Tillich and Berdyaev, showing that this nexus of concerns set the stage on which Christian theorists explored the possibility of faith in a world where God is invisible or absent.

In such an absurd world, a "leap of faith" was required of Christian existentialists writing after Kierkegaard. For Jewish existentialists, in contrast, the pursuit of a dialogic relationship with the transcendent other (both human

and divine) was the way to reorient thinking in the direction of fundamental questions. Both Buber and Rosenzweig rejected theological and philosophical speculation on timeless, universal essences in favor of the truths that emerge from the acts between subjects in a relationship. Paul Mendes-Flohr charts this "new thinking," as Rosenzweig termed it, which emerged from consideration of Buber's emphasis on the I–Thou (*Ich und Du*) encounter.

For Buber and Rosenzweig, this "new thinking" correlated with the biblical encounter with God, which always amounted to a specific relationship involving individuals. "The Hebrew Bible," Mendes-Flohr explains, "presents God—the Eternal One—not as an object of rational reflection but as an independent subject, the 'I am,' as a partner in dialogue. God addresses us in our individual, temporal existence, and within the reality we find ourselves. This 'new thinking' inspired subsequent Jewish thinkers." Its themes were reflected in the work of the most important Jewish intellectuals of the twentieth century—including Franz Kafka, Chaim Soloveitchik, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Hans Jonas, and Levinas, among others—who pursued a form of the "Jewish co-existentialism" that Mendes-Flohr sketches.

Thus religious faith was rearticulated in an existential direction by some of the most important Christian and Jewish theological and philosophical minds. But even for those existentialists who jettisoned the ballast of religion, how one responded to "living without God" was a significant concern. Ronald Aronson takes up this question via "Camus the nonbeliever," for whom an overtly antagonistic view of religion might only result in the return of the repressed. For Aronson, there are deeper lessons to be learned from existentialism than the mere dismissal of God and religion, and these insights were first offered by the nineteenth-century precursors of existentialism—especially Nietzsche.

Despite Nietzsche's appropriation by fascists,[38] Camus was one of his great champions. After all, it was Nietzsche who had announced the "death of God." This meant, as Charles Guignon pithily states it, "that people have lost the ability to believe in a transcendent basis for values and belief . . . [and that] all the things people previously thought of as absolutes—the cosmic order, Platonic forms, divine will, Reason, History—have been shown to be human constructions, with no ultimate authority in telling us how to live our lives."[39] Along with Marx and Freud, Nietzsche was thus one of the "masters of suspicion" of religious dogma,[40] lambasting religion's otherworldliness and its resignation of the here-and-now in the name of the afterlife. Christianity was a "slave morality," a philosophy of *ressentiment* induced by a sense of "bad conscience"

whereby people are taught to become ashamed of their instincts and their embodiment, which are then redirected either internally or to the otherworldly.

All of these intuitions would be picked up and developed by Sartre and de Beauvoir, who insisted that only an atheistic existentialism had the courage to assume responsibility for the creation of values at the heart of the human condition. Without God and religion, de Beauvoir argues, the moral burden that falls on each of us is even greater, for a "God can pardon, efface, and compensate. But if God does not exist, man's faults are inexpiable."[41] Yet, Aronson maintains, it was Camus the nonbeliever who had the most sustained and nuanced engagement with religion. His chapter is an overview of its various permutations. From his earliest writings (such as *Nuptials*), Camus taught his readers—in powerful prose steeped in the joy of the body, life, and nature—to revel in the moment and the pleasures of the world. In such works as *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus enjoined what he called *mésure*, which consisted of "dwelling in the tension our limitations impose on us even while we rebel against them, and accepting the bitterness with which we experience these. Wisdom lies in accepting this bitterness as the human condition. Failing this, the other path beckoning is to go haywire—by seeking to take God's place and hoping to dominate creation according to abstract ideas about what the world should look like."

Following upon the presentments of Dostoevsky, especially as addressed in *The Demons*, Camus in *The Rebel* diagnoses the guises that religion could assume even among nonbelievers. Revolutionary politics, he maintained, was a secularized form of messianism, replacing the sacred center of God with a utopian message no less likely to enslave than religion. Nietzsche had warned in *The Gay Science* that "God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown."[42] Camus's insight was to appreciate that any politics of salvation that sought final solutions to the messiness of finite and limited people would not only cause people to miss the warmth of the sun on their bodies by wallowing in the cave but may well result in people bashing their heads against its rocks before they were done.

The chapters in part 3 discuss some of the transcultural migrations that forged existentialism as a school of thought. Samuel Moyn's contribution is a *Begriffsgeschichte*: a history of the fate of Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety. Moyn's study is neither a plodding detail of the publishing history of Kierkegaard's text *The Concept of Anxiety* nor a simple commentary on this key existential category; rather, his chapter operates on three intertwined levels.

First, he elucidates how the reaction to Kierkegaard's concept of anxiety reveals the unforeseen events involved in the establishment of the philosophical canon. Specifically, he shows how Kierkegaard, who made little splash in his own lifetime, would come to occupy a central place in the existential canon in the years straddling World War II. To trace the story of the concept of anxiety is thus to outline how Kierkegaard was invented as an existential philosopher—indeed, as the forebear of existentialism. Second, Moyn considers how the category of anxiety vacillated in meaning and significance when deployed in the works of various thinkers (Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger, Ludwig Binswanger, Shestov, Jean Wahl, and Sartre among them) and describes the contextual ambiance in which it was picked up and used, especially in the aftermath of World War I.

A third aspect of Moyn's account is assessing how Kierkegaard's concept shifted from a theological to a secular terrain. In Kierkegaard's text, anxiety was wedded to a theological consideration about the meaning of original sin. As the translation of Kierkegaard's subtitle—*A Simple Psychologically Orienting Deliberation on the Dogmatic Issue of Hereditary Sin*—makes plain, the work was concerned with the psychology of sin and the metaphysical freedom of the sinner. Kierkegaard's concept was, for the most part, relegated to the backwaters of philosophy; "anxiety" did not become a key term until after the massive trauma of World War I and the subsequent widespread sense of civilization in crisis. Remaining within the realm of psychology, Moyn considers how first Sigmund Freud and then the forefather of existential psychoanalysis, Ludwig Binswanger, cogitated on anxiety as the dis-ease that comes with the contingency and freedom to define the self in modernity.

This trajectory was reinforced by Heidegger, whose *Being and Time* fatefully reworked Kierkegaard's concept by separating it from its theological and psychological framework and then inserting it into a work of philosophy focused on "fundamental ontology," where its significance was secularized. Heidegger maintained that anxiety was a mood that opened human beings to cognizance of their being-in-the-world and ultimately their possible authenticity. In the 1930s, Shestov and Wahl—the two individuals most instrumental in introducing Kierkegaard to the world of French philosophy—feuded over whether anxiety could be separated from Kierkegaard's theology. In the Gallic discussion, Sartre cut the Gordian knot and from the pieces tied together Kierkegaard's emphasis on soul-searching freedom and Heidegger's considerations of being and nothingness. The result gave rise to Sartre's exis-

tential subjectivity, wherein he contended that it is "in anxiety that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself." With Sartre's international celebrity, existential anxiety migrated around the world as a global theme. By the time it reached Cold War America, this anxiety was a free-floating social category, an expression of postwar cultural malaise.

Resignation to cultural malaise was already at the center of Nietzsche's philosophical concerns in the nineteenth century. Charles Bambach's chapter, which can usefully be read in tandem with Gordon's on German existentialism, considers the fate of Nietzsche in the canon. In commenting upon Nietzsche's famous claim that "God is dead," Bambach peels away layer upon layer of Nietzschean allusion to show that all of Western thought is at stake. In the process, the reader is taken on a journey through Western philosophy from bourgeois morality to the Enlightenment, from rationalism à la Leibniz to Christian theology, until we arrive at its base in Platonism. Bambach explains that "God is dead" is neither a theological statement nor an axiom of atheism. Instead, it is a statement about Western metaphysics, epistemology, and morality—not only in the sense of a system of ethics but also in the sense of conventional values. All these earlier endeavors, Nietzsche suggested, need to be rethought in light of the meaning of human existence. In the spirit of Diogenes's cynicism, Nietzsche was calling for a philosophy that embraced *amor fati*, a love of one's fate; this life-affirming form of creative critical thinking is why he was so embraced by Camus. Nietzsche believed that what contributed to the affirmation of life had power and perhaps even the capacity to transform all values. Anything that constrained this dynamic was weak or decadent and needed to be overturned, like the soil that would serve as the deity's grave site. Bambach proceeds to enrich and enliven his reading of Nietzsche with the interwar commentaries of Löwith, Jaspers, and Heidegger, whose interpretations responded to how Nietzsche had been coopted to serve the ends of Nazism. These three thinkers ultimately consecrated Nietzsche not only as a proto-existentialist but also as a foundational figure in response to whom the stakes of the whole Western philosophical tradition were unearthed for reconsideration.

Robert Bernasconi's chapter considers another foundational figure for contemporary thought: Frantz Fanon, a central source for postcolonialism and for the critical philosophy of race. He explores Fanon against the backdrop of the French negritude writers Aimé Cesaire and Leopold Senghor via Fanon's engagement with the work of Sartre. In doing so, he elucidates the power of Fanon's existential phenomenological analysis of racism as a system.

Bernasconi begins his careful tracing of the evolution of Fanon's writing on race with his first published work, "The Lived Experience of the Black." He suggests that, even though it mobilized a powerful critique of Sartre's own writing on negritude in "Black Orpheus," it was ultimately a failure. Bernasconi then takes us step-by-step through the rest of the Fanonian oeuvre—from *Black Skin, White Masks* to *The Wretched of the Earth*—seen as Fanon's effort to formulate a response to the impasses of his earlier position and to racism more generally. Fanon's seminal insight was to see racism interweaved with its institutionalized forms in colonialism, which meant that racism could be overcome only through a violent revolt against that system of oppression. In this, Fanon and Sartre walked parallel roads to freedom. Fanon's path, Bernasconi explains, involved wrestling with a significant problem inherent to phenomenology: how to integrate the description of concrete experiences like racism, which is always situationally specific, with an account of formal structures that can empower others to recognize their own experiences in these accounts, thereby mobilizing them to join the journey to freedom.

The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir's account of patriarchy, is likewise not a work whose scope was confined to the outmoded gender inequities of the 1950s. As Debra Berghoffen explains, this is because de Beauvoir's account was grounded in her previous book, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, which fleshed out a response to Dostoevsky's claim—that without God, anything is possible—by developing "a logic of freedom, reciprocity and responsibility that contests the terrors of a world ruled only by the authority of power." In reading the claims of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) side by side with *The Second Sex* (1949), written while de Beauvoir was traveling in the United States, Berghoffen locates these works as responses to the anti-Semitism of World War II, the patriarchy of the Cold War, the racism of Jim Crow America, and the exploitation of the colonial system.

In thus situating de Beauvoir's major works, Berghoffen is able to show how her analysis of oppression drew links between different dynamics of domination and contested the logics of subjugation in terms of an existential analytic that de Beauvoir claimed was the philosophy of her time. Berghoffen illustrates how the phenomenological, ethical, and political analyses of *The Second Sex*, much like the dilemmas of racism exposed by Fanon, "may be read as a way of capturing the particularities of women's lives, of resisting the reifying powers of the myth of woman, without, however, abandoning the importance of the category woman for a politics of resistance." Hence

de Beauvoir's existential phenomenology of the lived body of women, like Fanon's account of the lived experience of blackness, captured a singularity that was paradoxically the basis for forms of solidarity.

Having explicated how de Beauvoir understands the categories of freedom and oppression in existentialist terms that move between a psychic and a sociological phenomenology and also between an ethics and a politics, Berghoffen proceeds to establish de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* as the key work responded to and built upon by the different theoretical trajectories of postwar French feminists Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. Rather than emphasizing the disagreements among these feminist intellectuals, as is typically done, Berghoffen outlines a genealogy of postwar French feminism that interprets their critical voices as commentators on the tensions already signaled in de Beauvoir's scrutiny of gender oppression, which created multiple avenues for feminist thought.

Ethan Kleinberg traces a slightly different genealogy of postwar French philosophy by examining readings of Heidegger in France. The varying reception that Heidegger's work received stemmed from alternative treatments of the ramifications of Heidegger's affiliation with Nazism in the 1930s. Kleinberg shows that three differing conduits of Heidegger interpretation flourished before the 1960s. Although Heidegger was first introduced to the French by Levinas, who had studied with him in Freiburg in 1928 and 1929, the first sounding of the German master that had significant cultural resonance was in the seminar offered by Alexandre Kojève and attended by (among many others) Raymond Aron, Merleau-Ponty, the surrealist André Breton, and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. In charismatic tones, Kojève mixed his familiarity with Heidegger into his humanist and politicized elucidation of the work of Hegel, employing an existentialist phraseology to illuminate a philosophy that placed into the center of human history a subject in the throes of a conflict of consciousness. This presentation profoundly affected Aron and Merleau-Ponty, and their influence on Sartre would soon result in the popularization of an existentialist Heidegger.

The anthropological and subjectivist existential rendering of Heidegger put forward by the Paris school would be called into question by Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism," his response to Sartre's *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Written to Jean Beufret in the fall of 1946, in the "Letter" Heidegger interpreted his earlier work from the perspective of a turn in his thought (a *Kehre*) toward the themes of language, technology, and a critique of metaphysics. Heidegger stressed that subjectivity—even as explored by Sartre's flipping of

Descartes to suggest that "I am, therefore I think"—was the *locus centrum* of what continued to occlude Western thought. In doing so, Heidegger insisted that Sartre's and de Beauvoir's emphasis on the ethical implications of an existential analysis of ontology was just another way in which a purposive rationality foreclosed the thinking on Being that Heidegger's *destruktion* of Western metaphysics sought to reevaluate. This antihumanist treatment of Heidegger would influence another line of postwar French thinkers.

The third reading of Heidegger couples the consideration of Heidegger's Nazi past together with his critique of Western metaphysics by reversing the hierarchy that Heidegger established between ontology and ethics. The work of Maurice Blanchot and especially that of Levinas came to place ethics prior to ontology, radicalizing the existentialist consideration of subjectivity by emphasizing how the other constituted the self. Doing so displaced the Cartesian *ego cogito*, decentering the subject in ways that would influence the poststructuralist generation of Heidegger's readers: Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jean-Luc Nancy, Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida.

By the end of this volume, readers should appreciate that to situate existentialism in this way is to value not only the multiple routes that led to its crystallization but also the vistas in thought that it opened. At stake is the genealogy of existentialism itself, and we can now provide a retrospective view of existentialism's family tree. Best appreciated as a weed—a wild plant growing where it might not be wanted and struggling for existence with what has been normatively sanctioned for cultivation—existentialism has planted the seeds for ways of being human that are nourished by a return to foundational issues. The fruits of its offspring are forms of life worth living. Its seeds are hereby placed in the hands of you, the reader.

Notes

1. David Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 8 and chapter 2, suggests that at the heart of existentialism is the effort to overcome the problem of alienation and, on this basis, excludes Camus (and much of existentialist literature) from the canon in the process of treating existentialism as a philosophically coherent school of thought.

2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 109; based on the Swenson and Lowrie translation, I have modified the quotation.

3. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Vintage, 1968), xxxiii.

4. Marjorie Grene, *Introduction to Existentialism* (1948; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 1.

5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), 80.

6. Albert Camus, *Notebooks, 1951–1959* (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), 112.

7. Martin Heidegger, "*Der Spiegel* Interview with Martin Heidegger," trans. Lisa Harries, in *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*, ed. Gunther Neske and Emil Kettering (New York: Paragon, 1990), 41–66; originally published as "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten," *Der Spiegel* (May 31, 1976): 193–219. The phrase "Only a god can still save us" is found on page 57 of the English version.

8. Søren Kierkegaard, "The Point of View for My Work As an Author," in *The Point of View*, ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 106–12.

9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), 36–37, 49; Sartre, "Materialism and Revolution," in *Literary and Philosophical Essays* [*Situations I* and *II*], trans. Annette Michelson (New York: Criterion, 1955), 237.

10. Paige Arthur emphasizes the importance of this shift in Sartre's work in her *Unfinished Projects: Decolonization and the Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (London: Verso, 2010), chapter 1.

11. Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 167.

12. Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Scribner's, 1970), 66.

13. Quoted in Max Charlesworth, *The Existentialists and Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: St. Martin's, 1976), 8.

14. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (1948; New York: Citadel, 1994), 133.

15. F. H. Heinemann, *Existentialism and the Modern Predicament* (New York: Harper, 1958), 2.

16. William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (1958; New York: Doubleday, 1962), 9.

17. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, vol. 5, *Autobiographical Part One, 1829–1848*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 34–45, dated August 1, 1835 (emphasis in original).

18. George Pattison, *Anxious Angels: A Retrospective View of Religious Existentialism* (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), 6.

19. See Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols or How One Philosophizes with a Hammer*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1968).

20. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 176.

21. Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage, 1956).

22. Pattison, *Anxious Angels*, 4.

23. T. S. Elliot, *The Waste Land and Other Poems* (New York: Harvest, 1930), 29–30.

24. For an overview on the links between changes in technology and culture between 1880 and World War I, see Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

25. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Ballantine, 1991), 392.

26. The concept of "dark times" was a key notion for Arendt. David Luban has skillfully explicated how for Arendt it was an epistemic and moral condition of modernity that defined the horizon in which her own interventions were to serve as illuminations. The term comes from Brecht's poem "An Die Nachgeborenen," in which he spoke of how wisdom and goodness have been ripped asunder in modernity—a time of disorder, hunger, uprisings, and massacres. The poet railed against "old books" that encourage living a moderate life indifferent to horror and suffering. For Arendt, our "dark times" are such that traditional categories and moral frameworks, far from leading to understanding, may actually occlude comprehension. See David Luban, "Explaining Dark Times: Hannah Arendt's Theory of Theory," *Social Research* (Spring 1983): 214–48.

27. W. H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety* (New York: Random House, 1946).

28. Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1947; New York: Vintage, 1995).

29. de Beauvoir to Pierre Vacary, in Charlesworth, *The Existentialists and Jean-Paul Sartre*, 6. See the most famous version of this account in de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstances*, trans. Richard Howard (1963; New York: Penguin, 1968), 45–46.

30. This paragraph is based on Walter Kaufmann, "The Reception of Existentialism in the United States," in *Existentialism, Religion, and Death* (New York: New American Library, 1976), 90–119, especially 93–98.

31. In addition to Kaufmann, see Heinemann, *Existentialism*, 1 (where Heinemann indicates that he coined the term).

32. Karl Jaspers, *Existenzphilosophie: Drei Vorlesungen Gehalten am Freien Deutschen Hochstift in Frankfurt a.m. September 1937* (1938; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1956); Jaspers, *Philosophy of Existence*, trans. Richard F. Grabau (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971).

33. Kaufmann, "Reception of Existentialism," 115.

34. Max Weber, "Science As a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 129–56.

35. See Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982), 64.

36. *Kierkegaaard's Attack upon "Christendom," 1854–1855*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1944), 7.

37. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1941), 182 (translation altered).

38. For Nietzsche's appropriation by fascism and Nazism, see Steven Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), especially chapter 8; Aschheim, "Nietzsche, Anti-Semitism and Mass Murder," in Aschheim, *Culture and Catastrophe* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), chapter 4; and Jacob Golumb and Robert Wistrich, *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism: On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002).

39. Charles Guignon, "Existentialism," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig (New York: Routledge, 1998), 493–94.

40. On the notion of the three masters of suspicion, see Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), 32. On the influence of these masters on contemporary French thought, see Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 3.

41. de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 15.

42. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974), section 108, 167.