

# Facing Existentialism: A Personal Reflection

By: The Theological Maniac

Existentialism first hit me late at night, in the kind of silence that makes everything feel bigger and stranger. The world did not seem to hand me a script or a map, just questions. At its heart, existentialism is about facing life with honesty and courage, even when it feels empty or confusing. It does not pretend there are easy answers, and in that honesty, I find both comfort and discomfort.

When I first encountered Jean-Paul Sartre's work, I felt a mix of relief and unease. He wrote that "existence precedes essence," which means you show up in the world first, and only afterward do you decide what you are going to be. Nobody else gives you a pre-made meaning, and that can be freeing but also deeply unsettling (Sartre, 1946/2007). If meaning is not handed to you, then you are the one who must make choices, and those choices define you. That is empowering, but it can also feel like too much responsibility.

Sometimes, when I am faced with a big decision, I catch myself wishing someone else would tell me what to do. Existentialism does not allow for that. It insists that I choose, and even doing nothing is still a choice. Sartre called this being "condemned to be free." I can run from my freedom, or pretend that my path is set by others, but at the end of the day, it is my life and my responsibility.

Søren Kierkegaard wrote about the anxiety that comes from freedom. He called it the "dizziness of freedom." He saw it as proof that we are alive, not as a problem to be solved but as a part of being human (Kierkegaard, 1846/1992). I try to remind myself that the fear I feel when facing possibilities is normal. Everyone faces it, whether they admit it or not.

Authenticity is another idea that runs through existentialism. Philosophers like Sartre and Heidegger warn about the danger of "bad faith," which is the habit of lying to ourselves and living by default instead of by choice (Heidegger, 1927/1962). I have caught myself doing this more than once. Sometimes it feels safer to go along with the crowd or to do what is expected, rather than take a risk and be honest about what I want. But existentialism challenges me to live more openly and to accept the consequences of my decisions.

Albert Camus described the universe as absurd, meaning it does not offer us reasons or explanations. Life does not come with instructions or promises. He wrote about Sisyphus, a man condemned to roll a boulder up a hill forever, and said we have to imagine Sisyphus happy. Sisyphus makes his own meaning by embracing his struggle and living in defiance of meaninglessness (Camus, 1942/1955). That story gives me hope, even when I feel like I am going in circles.

People sometimes think existentialism is pessimistic or bleak. For me, it is actually the opposite. It recognizes that life is difficult and uncertain, but it also says that meaning is possible. I do not have to wait for someone or something to give my life value; I can create it myself. The fear, confusion, and doubt are all signs that I am awake and engaged with life, not running from it.

I do not always live up to these ideas. There are days when I just want to hide, or when I go through the motions without thinking. But existentialism reminds me that each moment is an opportunity. I can choose how to respond, even if the world is uncertain. That is what makes existentialism matter to me.

## References

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