[Template:Redirect](/wiki/Template:Redirect" \o "Template:Redirect) [Template:Distinguish](/wiki/Template:Distinguish) [thumb|right|From left to right, top to bottom:](/wiki/File:Kierkegaard-Dostoyevsky-Nietzsche-Sartre.jpg) [Kierkegaard](/wiki/Søren_Kierkegaard), [Dostoyevsky](/wiki/Fyodor_Dostoyevsky), [Nietzsche](/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche), [Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre)

**Existentialism** ([Template:IPAc-en](/wiki/Template:IPAc-en))[[1]](#cite_note-1) is a term applied to the work of certain late-19th- and 20th-century [European](/wiki/Europe) philosophers who, despite profound doctrinal differences,<ref name=Crowell-SEoP>[Template:Cite encyclopedia](/wiki/Template:Cite_encyclopedia)</ref>[[2]](#cite_note-2)[[3]](#cite_note-3) shared the belief that philosophical thinking begins with the human subject—not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human [individual](/wiki/Individual).[[4]](#cite_note-4) While the predominant value of existentialist thought is commonly acknowledged to be freedom, its primary virtue is [authenticity](/wiki/Authenticity_(philosophy)).[[5]](#cite_note-5) In the view of the existentialist, the individual's starting point is characterized by what has been called "the existential attitude", or a sense of disorientation and confusion in the face of an apparently meaningless or [absurd](/wiki/Absurdism) world.[[6]](#cite_note-6) Many existentialists have also regarded traditional systematic or academic philosophies, in both style and content, as too abstract and remote from concrete human experience.[[7]](#cite_note-7)[[8]](#cite_note-8) [Søren Kierkegaard](/wiki/Søren_Kierkegaard) is generally considered to have been the first existentialist philosopher,<ref name=Crowell-SEoP/>[[9]](#cite_note-9)<ref name=McDonald2009Stanford>[Template:Cite encyclopedia](/wiki/Template:Cite_encyclopedia)</ref> though he did not use the term existentialism.[[10]](#cite_note-10) He proposed that each individual—not society or religion—is solely responsible for giving [meaning](/wiki/Meaning_(existential)) to life and living it [passionately and sincerely, or "authentically."](/wiki/Authenticity_(philosophy))[[11]](#cite_note-11)[[12]](#cite_note-12) Existentialism became popular in the years following [World War II](/wiki/World_War_II), and strongly influenced many disciplines besides [philosophy](/wiki/Philosophy), including theology, drama, art, literature, and psychology.[[13]](#cite_note-13)

## Contents

* 1 Definitional issues and background[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]
* 2 Concepts[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]
  + 2.1 Existence precedes essence[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]
  + 2.2 The Absurd[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]
  + 2.3 Facticity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]
  + 2.4 Authenticity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]
  + 2.5 The Other and the Look[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]
  + 2.6 Angst and dread[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]
  + 2.7 Despair[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]
* 3 Opposition to positivism and rationalism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]
* 4 Existentialism and religion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]
* 5 Existentialism and nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]
* 6 Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]
* 7 History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]
  + 7.1 19th century[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]
    - 7.1.1 Kierkegaard and Nietzsche[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]
    - 7.1.2 Dostoyevsky[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]
  + 7.2 Early 20th century[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]
  + 7.3 After the Second World War[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]
* 8 Influence outside philosophy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]
  + 8.1 Art[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]
    - 8.1.1 Film and television[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]
    - 8.1.2 Literature[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]
    - 8.1.3 Theatre[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]
  + 8.2 Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]
* 9 Criticisms[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]
  + 9.1 General criticisms[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]
  + 9.2 Sartre's philosophy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]
* 10 See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]
* 11 References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]
  + 11.1 Specific[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=31)]
  + 11.2 Bibliography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=32)]
  + 11.3 Further reading[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=33)]
* 12 External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=34)]
  + 12.1 Journals and articles[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=35)]

## Definitional issues and background[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=1)]

There has never been general agreement on the definition of existentialism. The term is often seen as a historical convenience as it was first applied to many philosophers in hindsight, long after they had died. In fact, while existentialism is generally considered to have originated with Kierkegaard, the first prominent existentialist philosopher to adopt the term as a self-description was [Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre). Sartre posits the idea that "what all existentialists have in common is the fundamental doctrine that existence precedes essence", as scholar [Frederick Copleston](/wiki/Frederick_Copleston) explains.[[14]](#cite_note-14) According to philosopher [Steven Crowell](/wiki/Steven_Crowell), defining existentialism has been relatively difficult, and he argues that it is better [understood](/wiki/Understanding) as a general approach used to reject certain systematic philosophies rather than as a systematic philosophy itself.<ref name=Crowell-SEoP/> Sartre himself, in a lecture delivered in 1945, described existentialism as "the attempt to draw all the consequences from a position of consistent atheism."[[15]](#cite_note-15) Although many outside [Scandinavia](/wiki/Scandinavia) consider the term existentialism to have originated from Kierkegaard himself, it is more likely that Kierkegaard adopted this term (or at least the term "existential" as a description of his philosophy) from the Norwegian poet and literary critic [Johan Sebastian Cammermeyer Welhaven](/wiki/Johan_Sebastian_Cammermeyer_Welhaven).[[16]](#cite_note-16) This assertion comes from two sources. The Norwegian philosopher Erik Lundestad refers to the Danish philosopher Fredrik Christian Sibbern. Sibbern is supposed to have had two conversations in 1841, the first with Welhaven and the second with Kierkegaard. It is in the first conversation that it is believed that Welhaven came up with "a word that he said covered a certain thinking, which had a close and positive attitude to life, a relationship he described as existential".[[17]](#cite_note-17) This was then brought to Kierkegaard by Sibbern.

The second claim comes from the Norwegian historian [Rune Slagstad](/wiki/Rune_Slagstad), who claims to prove that Kierkegaard himself said the term "existential" was borrowed from the poet. He strongly believes that it was Kierkegaard himself who said that "[Hegelians](/wiki/Hegelianism) do not study philosophy 'existentially'; to use a phrase by Welhaven from one time when I spoke with him about philosophy".[[18]](#cite_note-18) On the other hand, the Norwegian historian [Anne-Lise Seip](/wiki/Anne-Lise_Seip) is critical of Slagstad, and believes the statement in fact stems from the Norwegian literary historian [Cathrinus Bang](/wiki/Cathrinus_Bang).[[19]](#cite_note-19)

## Concepts[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=2)]

### Existence precedes essence[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=3)]

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A central proposition of Existentialism is that *existence precedes* [*essence*](/wiki/Essence), which means that the most important consideration for individuals is that they are individuals—independently acting and responsible, conscious beings ("existence")—rather than what labels, roles, stereotypes, definitions, or other preconceived categories the individuals fit ("essence"). The actual life of the individuals is what constitutes what could be called their "true essence" instead of there being an arbitrarily attributed essence others use to define them. Thus, human beings, through their own [consciousness](/wiki/Consciousness), create their own values and determine a meaning to their life.[[20]](#cite_note-20) Although it was Sartre who explicitly coined the phrase, similar notions can be found in the thought of existentialist philosophers such as [Heidegger](/wiki/Heidegger), and [Kierkegaard](/wiki/Kierkegaard):

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Some interpret the imperative to define oneself as meaning that anyone can wish to be anything. However, an existentialist philosopher would say such a wish constitutes an inauthentic existence. Instead, the phrase should be taken to say that people are (1) defined only insofar as they act and (2) that they are responsible for their actions. For example, someone who acts cruelly towards other people is, by that act, defined as a cruel person. Furthermore, by this action of cruelty, such persons are themselves responsible for their new identity (cruel persons). This is as opposed to their genes, or *human nature*, bearing the blame.

As Sartre writes in his work [*Existentialism is a Humanism*](/wiki/Existentialism_is_a_Humanism): "... man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards." Of course, the more positive, therapeutic aspect of this is also implied: A person can choose to act in a different way, and to be a good person instead of a cruel person. Here it is also clear that since humans can choose to be either cruel or good, they are, in fact, neither of these things essentially.[[21]](#cite_note-21)

### The Absurd[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=4)]

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The notion of the [Absurd](/wiki/Absurdism) contains the idea that there is no meaning in the world beyond what meaning we give it. This meaninglessness also encompasses the amorality or "unfairness" of the world. This contrasts with the notion that "bad things don't happen to good people"; to the world, metaphorically speaking, there is no such thing as a good person or a bad person; what happens happens, and it may just as well happen to a "good" person as to a "bad" person.[[22]](#cite_note-22) Because of the world's absurdity, at any point in time, anything can happen to anyone, and a tragic event could plummet someone into direct confrontation with the Absurd. The notion of the Absurd has been prominent in literature throughout history. Many of the literary works of [Søren Kierkegaard](/wiki/Søren_Kierkegaard), [Samuel Beckett](/wiki/Samuel_Beckett), [Franz Kafka](/wiki/Franz_Kafka), [Fyodor Dostoyevsky](/wiki/Fyodor_Dostoyevsky), [Eugène Ionesco](/wiki/Eugène_Ionesco), [Miguel de Unamuno](/wiki/Miguel_de_Unamuno), [Luigi Pirandello](/wiki/Luigi_Pirandello),<ref name=luigitheatre>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref><ref name=understandex>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref><ref name=crisisconsciousness>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref><ref name=masks>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> [Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre), [Joseph Heller](/wiki/Joseph_Heller) and [Albert Camus](/wiki/Albert_Camus) contain descriptions of people who encounter the absurdity of the world.

It is in relation to the concept of the devastating awareness of meaninglessness that Albert Camus claimed that "there is only one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide" in his [*The Myth of Sisyphus*](/wiki/The_Myth_of_Sisyphus). Although "prescriptions" against the possibly deleterious consequences of these kinds of encounters vary, from Kierkegaard's religious "stage" to Camus' insistence on persevering in spite of absurdity, the concern with helping people avoid living their lives in ways that put them in the perpetual danger of having everything meaningful break down is common to most existentialist philosophers. The possibility of having everything meaningful break down poses a threat of [quietism](/wiki/Quietism_(philosophy)), which is inherently against the existentialist philosophy.[[23]](#cite_note-23) It has been said that the possibility of [suicide](/wiki/Suicide) makes all humans existentialists.[[24]](#cite_note-24)

### Facticity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=5)]

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Facticity is a concept defined by Sartre in [*Being and Nothingness*](/wiki/Being_and_Nothingness) as the [*in-itself*](/wiki/Being-in-itself), which delineates for humans the modalities of being and not being. This can be more easily understood when considering facticity in relation to the temporal dimension of our past: one's past is what one is, in the sense that it co-constitutes oneself. However, to say that one is only one's past would be to ignore a significant part of reality (the present and the future), while saying that one's past is only what one was, would entirely detach it from oneself now. A denial of one's own concrete past constitutes an inauthentic lifestyle, and the same goes for all other kinds of facticity (having a human body — e.g. one that doesn't allow a person to run faster than the speed of sound —identity, values, etc.).[[25]](#cite_note-25) Facticity is both a limitation and a condition of freedom. It is a limitation in that a large part of one's facticity consists of things one couldn't have chosen (birthplace, etc.), but a condition of freedom in the sense that one's values most likely depend on it. However, even though one's facticity is "set in stone" (as being past, for instance), it cannot determine a person: The value ascribed to one's facticity is still ascribed to it freely by that person. As an example, consider two men, one of whom has no memory of his past and the other who remembers everything. They both have committed many crimes, but the first man, knowing nothing about this, leads a rather normal life while the second man, feeling trapped by his own past, continues a life of crime, blaming his own past for "trapping" him in this life. There is nothing essential about his committing crimes, but he ascribes this meaning to his past.

However, to disregard one's facticity when, in the continual process of self-making, one projects oneself into the future, that would be to put oneself in denial of oneself, and thus would be inauthentic. In other words, the origin of one's projection must still be one's facticity, though in the mode of not being it (essentially). Another aspect of facticity is that it entails [angst](/wiki/Angst), both in the sense that freedom "produces" angst when limited by facticity, and in the sense that the lack of the possibility of having facticity to "step in" for one to take responsibility for something one has done, also produces angst.

Another aspect of existential freedom is that one can change one's values. Thus, one is responsible for one's values, regardless of society's values. The focus on [freedom](/wiki/Freedom) in existentialism is related to the limits of the responsibility one bears, as a result of one's freedom: the relationship between freedom and responsibility is one of interdependency, and a clarification of freedom also clarifies that for which one is responsible.[[26]](#cite_note-26)[[27]](#cite_note-27)

### Authenticity[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=6)]

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Many noted existentialist writers consider the theme of authentic existence important. Authentic existence involves the idea that one has to "create oneself" and then live in accordance with this self. What is meant by [authenticity](/wiki/Authenticity_(philosophy)) is that in acting, one should act as oneself, not as "one" acts or as "one's genes" or any other essence requires. The authentic act is one that is in accordance with one's freedom. Of course, as a condition of freedom is facticity, this includes one's facticity, but not to the degree that this facticity can in any way determine one's choices (in the sense that one could then blame one's background for making the choice one made). The role of facticity in relation to authenticity involves letting one's actual values come into play when one makes a choice (instead of, like Kierkegaard's Aesthete, "choosing" randomly), so that one also takes responsibility for the act instead of choosing either-or without allowing the options to have different values.[[28]](#cite_note-28) In contrast to this, the inauthentic is the denial to live in accordance with one's freedom. This can take many forms, from pretending choices are meaningless or random, through convincing oneself that some form of [determinism](/wiki/Determinism) is true, to a sort of "mimicry" where one acts as "one should." How "one" should act is often determined by an image one has of how one such as oneself (say, a bank manager, lion tamer, prostitute, etc.) acts. This image usually corresponds to some sort of social norm, but this does not mean that all acting in accordance with social norms is inauthentic: The main point is the attitude one takes to one's own freedom and responsibility, and the extent to which one acts in accordance with this freedom.

### The Other and the Look[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=7)]

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The Other (when written with a capital "O") is a concept more properly belonging to [phenomenology](/wiki/Phenomenology_(philosophy)) and its account of [intersubjectivity](/wiki/Intersubjectivity). However, the concept has seen widespread use in existentialist writings, and the conclusions drawn from it differ slightly from the phenomenological accounts. The experience of the Other is the experience of another free subject who inhabits the same world as a person does. In its most basic form, it is this experience of the Other that constitutes intersubjectivity and objectivity. To clarify, when one experiences someone else, and this Other person experiences the world (the same world that a person experiences)—only from "over there"—the world itself is constituted as objective in that it is something that is "there" as identical for both of the subjects; a person experiences the other person as experiencing the same things. This experience of the Other's look is what is termed the Look (sometimes [the Gaze](/wiki/The_Gaze)).[[29]](#cite_note-29) While this experience, in its basic phenomenological sense, constitutes the world as objective, and oneself as objectively existing subjectivity (one experiences oneself as seen in the Other's Look in precisely the same way that one experiences the Other as seen by him, as subjectivity), in existentialism, it also acts as a kind of limitation of freedom. This is because the Look tends to objectify what it sees. As such, when one experiences oneself in the Look, one doesn't experience oneself as nothing (no thing), but as something. Sartre's own example of a man peeping at someone through a keyhole can help clarify this: at first, this man is entirely caught up in the situation he is in; he is in a pre-reflexive state where his entire consciousness is directed at what goes on in the room. Suddenly, he hears a creaking floorboard behind him, and he becomes aware of himself as seen by the Other. He is thus filled with shame for he perceives himself as he would perceive someone else doing what he was doing, as a [Peeping Tom](/wiki/Peeping_Tom). The Look is then co-constitutive of one's facticity.

Another characteristic feature of the Look is that no Other really needs to have been there: It is quite possible that the creaking floorboard was nothing but the movement of an old house; the Look isn't some kind of mystical telepathic experience of the actual way the other sees one (there may also have been someone there, but he could have not noticed that the person was there). It is only one's perception of the way another might perceive him.

### Angst and dread[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=8)]

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"Existential [angst](/wiki/Angst)", sometimes called dread, anxiety, or [anguish](/wiki/Anguish), is a term that is common to many existentialist thinkers. It is generally held to be a negative feeling arising from the experience of human freedom and responsibility. The archetypal example is the experience one has when standing on a cliff where one not only fears falling off it, but also dreads the possibility of throwing oneself off. In this experience that "nothing is holding me back", one senses the lack of anything that predetermines one to either throw oneself off or to stand still, and one experiences one's own freedom.[[22]](#cite_note-22) It can also be seen in relation to the previous point how angst is before nothing, and this is what sets it apart from fear that has an object. While in the case of fear, one can take definitive measures to remove the object of fear, in the case of angst, no such "constructive" measures are possible. The use of the word "nothing" in this context relates both to the inherent insecurity about the consequences of one's actions, and to the fact that, in experiencing freedom as angst, one also realizes that one is fully responsible for these consequences. There is nothing in people (genetically, for instance) that acts in their stead—that they can blame if something goes wrong. Therefore, not every choice is perceived as having dreadful possible consequences (and, it can be claimed, human lives would be unbearable if every choice facilitated dread). However, this doesn't change the fact that freedom remains a condition of every action.

### Despair[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=9)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

Despair, in existentialism, is generally defined as a loss of hope.[[30]](#cite_note-30) More specifically, it is a loss of hope in reaction to a breakdown in one or more of the defining qualities of one's self or identity. If a person is invested in being a particular thing, such as a bus driver or an upstanding citizen, and then finds his being-thing compromised, he would normally be found in state of despair — a hopeless state. For example, a singer who loses the ability to sing may despair if she has nothing else to fall back on—nothing to rely on for her identity. She finds herself unable to be what defined her being.

What sets the existentialist notion of despair apart from the conventional definition is that existentialist despair is a state one is in even when he isn't overtly in despair. So long as a person's identity depends on qualities that can crumble, he is in perpetual despair—and as there is, in Sartrean terms, no human essence found in conventional reality on which to constitute the individual's sense of identity, despair is a universal human condition. As Kierkegaard defines it in [*Either/Or*](/wiki/Either/Or): "Let each one learn what he can; both of us can learn that a person’s unhappiness never lies in his lack of control over external conditions, since this would only make him completely unhappy."[[31]](#cite_note-31) In [*Works of Love*](/wiki/Works_of_Love), he said: [Template:Quotation](/wiki/Template:Quotation)

## Opposition to positivism and rationalism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=10)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

Existentialists oppose definitions of human beings as primarily rational, and, therefore, oppose [positivism](/wiki/Positivism) and [rationalism](/wiki/Rationalism). Existentialism asserts that people actually make decisions based on subjective meaning rather than pure rationality. The rejection of reason as the source of meaning is a common theme of existentialist thought, as is the focus on the feelings of [anxiety](/wiki/Anxiety) and [dread](/wiki/Angst) that we feel in the face of our own radical [freedom](/wiki/Free_will) and our awareness of death. Kierkegaard advocated rationality as means to interact with the objective world (e.g. in the natural sciences), but when it comes to existential problems, reason is insufficient: "Human reason has boundaries".[[32]](#cite_note-32) Like Kierkegaard, Sartre saw problems with rationality, calling it a form of "bad faith", an attempt by the self to impose structure on a world of phenomena—"the Other"—that is fundamentally irrational and random. According to Sartre, rationality and other forms of bad faith hinder people from finding meaning in freedom. To try to suppress their feelings of anxiety and dread, people confine themselves within everyday experience, Sartre asserts, thereby relinquishing their freedom and acquiescing to being possessed in one form or another by "the Look" of "the Other" (i.e., possessed by another person—or at least one's idea of that other person).

## Existentialism and religion[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=11)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

An existentialist reading of the [Bible](/wiki/Bible) would demand that the reader recognize that he is an existing [subject](/wiki/Subject_(philosophy)) studying the words more as a recollection of events. This is in contrast to looking at a collection of "truths" that are outside and unrelated to the reader, but may develop a sense of reality/God. Such a reader is not obligated to follow the commandments as if an external agent is forcing them upon him, but as though they are inside him and guiding him from inside. This is the task Kierkegaard takes up when he asks: "Who has the more difficult task: the teacher who lectures on earnest things a meteor's distance from everyday life-or the learner who should put it to use?"[[33]](#cite_note-33)

## Existentialism and nihilism[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=12)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

Although [nihilism](/wiki/Nihilism) and existentialism are distinct philosophies, they are often confused with one another. A primary cause of confusion is that [Friedrich Nietzsche](/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche) is an important philosopher in both fields, but also the existentialist insistence on the inherent meaninglessness of the world. Existentialist philosophers often stress the importance of [Angst](/wiki/Angst) as signifying the absolute lack of any objective ground for action, a move that is often reduced to a [moral](/wiki/Moral_nihilism) or an [existential nihilism](/wiki/Existential_nihilism). A pervasive theme in the works of existentialist philosophy, however, is to persist through encounters with the absurd, as seen in [Camus'](/wiki/Albert_Camus) *The Myth of Sisyphus* ("One must imagine Sisyphus happy"),[[34]](#cite_note-34) and it is only very rarely that existentialist philosophers dismiss morality or one's self-created meaning: Kierkegaard regained a sort of morality in the religious (although he wouldn't himself agree that it was ethical; the religious suspends the ethical), and [Sartre's](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre) final words in [*Being and Nothingness*](/wiki/Being_and_Nothingness) are "All these questions, which refer us to a pure and not an accessory (or impure) reflection, can find their reply only on the ethical plane. We shall devote to them a future work."[[35]](#cite_note-35)

## Etymology[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=13)]

The term "existentialism" was coined by the [French Catholic](/wiki/Roman_Catholicism_in_France) philosopher [Gabriel Marcel](/wiki/Gabriel_Marcel) in the mid-1940s.[[36]](#cite_note-36)[[37]](#cite_note-37)[[38]](#cite_note-38) At first, when Marcel applied the term to him at a colloquium in 1945, [Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre) rejected it.[[39]](#cite_note-39) Sartre subsequently changed his mind and, on October 29, 1945, publicly adopted the existentialist label in a lecture to the *Club Maintenant* in [Paris](/wiki/Paris). The lecture was published as [*L'existentialisme est un humanisme*](/wiki/L'existentialisme_est_un_humanisme) ([Existentialism is a Humanism](/wiki/Existentialism_is_a_Humanism)), a short book that did much to popularize existentialist thought.[[40]](#cite_note-40) Some scholars argue that the term should be used only to refer to the cultural movement in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s associated with the works of the philosophers [Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre), [Simone de Beauvoir](/wiki/Simone_de_Beauvoir), [Maurice Merleau-Ponty](/wiki/Maurice_Merleau-Ponty), and [Albert Camus](/wiki/Albert_Camus).<ref name=Crowell-SEoP/> Other scholars extend the term to Kierkegaard, and yet others extend it as far back as [Socrates](/wiki/Socrates).[[41]](#cite_note-41) However, the term is often identified with the philosophical views of Jean-Paul Sartre.<ref name=Crowell-SEoP/>

## History[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=14)]

### 19th century[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=15)]

#### Kierkegaard and Nietzsche[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

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[Søren Kierkegaard](/wiki/Søren_Kierkegaard) and [Friedrich Nietzsche](/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche) were two of the first philosophers considered fundamental to the existentialist movement, though neither used the term "existentialism" and it is unclear whether they would have supported the existentialism of the 20th century. They focused on subjective human experience rather than the objective truths of mathematics and science, which they believed were too detached or observational to truly get at the human experience. Like [Pascal](/wiki/Blaise_Pascal), they were interested in people's quiet struggle with the apparent meaninglessness of life and the use of diversion to escape from [boredom](/wiki/Boredom). Unlike Pascal, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche also considered the role of making free choices, particularly regarding fundamental values and beliefs, and how such choices change the nature and identity of the chooser.[[42]](#cite_note-42) Kierkegaard's [knight of faith](/wiki/Knight_of_faith) and Nietzsche's [Übermensch](/wiki/Übermensch) are representative of people who exhibit [Freedom](/wiki/Free_will), in that they define the nature of their own existence. Nietzsche's idealized individual invents his own values and creates the very terms they excel under. By contrast, Kierkegaard, opposed to the level of abstraction in Hegel, and not nearly as hostile (actually welcoming) to [Christianity](/wiki/Christianity) as Nietzsche, argues through a pseudonym that the objective certainty of religious truths (specifically Christian) is not only impossible, but even founded on logical paradoxes. Yet he continues to imply that a [leap of faith](/wiki/Leap_of_faith) is a possible means for an individual to reach a higher stage of existence that transcends and contains both an aesthetic and ethical value of life. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were also precursors to other intellectual movements, including [postmodernism](/wiki/Postmodernism), and various strands of [psychology](/wiki/Psychology). However, Kierkegaard believed that individuals should live in accordance with their thinking.

#### Dostoyevsky[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

The first important literary author also important to existentialism was the Russian [Fyodor Dostoyevsky](/wiki/Fyodor_Dostoyevsky).[[43]](#cite_note-43) Dostoyevsky's [*Notes from Underground*](/wiki/Notes_from_Underground) portrays a man unable to fit into society and unhappy with the identities he creates for himself. [Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre), in his book on existentialism [*Existentialism is a Humanism*](/wiki/Existentialism_is_a_Humanism), quoted Dostoyevsky's [*The Brothers Karamazov*](/wiki/The_Brothers_Karamazov) as an example of [existential crisis](/wiki/Existential_crisis). Sartre attributes Ivan Karamazov's claim, "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted"[[44]](#cite_note-44) to Dostoyevsky himself, though this quote does not appear in the novel.[[45]](#cite_note-45) However, a similar sentiment is explicitly stated when Alyosha visits Dimitri in prison. Dimitri mentions his conversations with Rakitin in which the idea that "Then, if He doesn't exist, man is king of the earth, of the universe" allowing the inference contained in Sartre's attribution to remain a valid idea contested within the novel.[[46]](#cite_note-46) Other Dostoyevsky novels covered issues raised in existentialist philosophy while presenting story lines divergent from secular existentialism: for example, in [*Crime and Punishment*](/wiki/Crime_and_Punishment), the protagonist Raskolnikov experiences an existential crisis and then moves toward a Christian Orthodox worldview similar to that advocated by Dostoyevsky himself.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

### Early 20th century[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

[Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also)

In the first decades of the 20th century, a number of philosophers and writers explored existentialist ideas. The Spanish philosopher [Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo](/wiki/Miguel_de_Unamuno_y_Jugo), in his 1913 book *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations*, emphasized the life of "flesh and bone" as opposed to that of abstract rationalism. Unamuno rejected systematic philosophy in favor of the individual's quest for faith. He retained a sense of the tragic, even absurd nature of the quest, symbolized by his enduring interest in [Cervantes'](/wiki/Cervantes) fictional character [Don Quixote](/wiki/Don_Quixote). A novelist, poet and dramatist as well as philosophy professor at the University of Salamanca, Unamuno wrote a short story about a priest's crisis of faith, [*Saint Manuel the Good, Martyr*](/wiki/San_Manuel_Bueno,_Mártir), which has been collected in anthologies of existentialist fiction. Another Spanish thinker, [Ortega y Gasset](/wiki/Ortega_y_Gasset), writing in 1914, held that human existence must always be defined as the individual person combined with the concrete circumstances of his life: "*Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia*" ("I am myself and my circumstances"). Sartre likewise believed that human existence is not an abstract matter, but is always situated ("*en situation*").

Although [Martin Buber](/wiki/Martin_Buber) wrote his major philosophical works in German, and studied and taught at the Universities of Berlin and [Frankfurt](/wiki/Frankfurt), he stands apart from the mainstream of German philosophy. Born into a Jewish family in Vienna in 1878, he was also a scholar of Jewish culture and involved at various times in [Zionism](/wiki/Zionism) and [Hasidism](/wiki/Hasidism). In 1938, he moved permanently to [Jerusalem](/wiki/Jerusalem). His best-known philosophical work was the short book [*I and Thou*](/wiki/I_and_Thou), published in 1922. For Buber, the fundamental fact of human existence, too readily overlooked by scientific rationalism and abstract philosophical thought, is "man with man", a dialogue that takes place in the so-called "sphere of between" (*"das Zwischenmenschliche"*).[[47]](#cite_note-47) Two Russian thinkers, [Lev Shestov](/wiki/Lev_Shestov) and [Nikolai Berdyaev](/wiki/Nikolai_Berdyaev), became well known as existentialist thinkers during their post-Revolutionary exiles in Paris. Shestov, born into a Ukrainian-Jewish family in Kiev, had launched an attack on rationalism and systematization in philosophy as early as 1905 in his book of aphorisms *All Things Are Possible*.

Berdyaev, also from Kiev but with a background in the Eastern Orthodox Church, drew a radical distinction between the world of spirit and the everyday world of objects. Human freedom, for Berdyaev, is rooted in the realm of spirit, a realm independent of scientific notions of causation. To the extent the individual human being lives in the objective world, he is estranged from authentic spiritual freedom. "Man" is not to be interpreted naturalistically, but as a being created in God's image, an originator of free, creative acts.[[48]](#cite_note-48) He published a major work on these themes, *The Destiny of Man*, in 1931.

[Gabriel Marcel](/wiki/Gabriel_Marcel), long before coining the term "existentialism", introduced important existentialist themes to a French audience in his early essay "Existence and Objectivity" (1925) and in his *Metaphysical Journal* (1927).[[49]](#cite_note-49) A dramatist as well as a philosopher, Marcel found his philosophical starting point in a condition of metaphysical alienation: the human individual searching for harmony in a transient life. Harmony, for Marcel, was to be sought through "secondary reflection", a "dialogical" rather than "dialectical" approach to the world, characterized by "wonder and astonishment" and open to the "presence" of other people and of God rather than merely to "information" about them. For Marcel, such presence implied more than simply being there (as one thing might be in the presence of another thing); it connoted "extravagant" availability, and the willingness to put oneself at the disposal of the other.[[50]](#cite_note-50) Marcel contrasted *secondary reflection* with abstract, scientific-technical *primary reflection*, which he associated with the activity of the abstract [Cartesian](/wiki/René_Descartes) ego. For Marcel, philosophy was a concrete activity undertaken by a sensing, feeling human being incarnate — embodied — in a concrete world.[[49]](#cite_note-49)[[51]](#cite_note-51) Although [Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre) adopted the term "existentialism" for his own philosophy in the 1940s, Marcel's thought has been described as "almost diametrically opposed" to that of Sartre.[[49]](#cite_note-49) Unlike Sartre, Marcel was a Christian, and became a Catholic convert in 1929.

In Germany, the psychologist and philosopher [Karl Jaspers](/wiki/Karl_Jaspers) — who later described existentialism as a "phantom" created by the public [[52]](#cite_note-52) — called his own thought, heavily influenced by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, *Existenzphilosophie*. For Jaspers, "*Existenz*-philosophy is the way of thought by means of which man seeks to become himself...This way of thought does not cognize objects, but elucidates and makes actual the being of the thinker."[[53]](#cite_note-53) Jaspers, a professor at the University of [Heidelberg](/wiki/Heidelberg), was acquainted with [Martin Heidegger](/wiki/Martin_Heidegger), who held a professorship at [Marburg](/wiki/Marburg) before acceding to Husserl's chair at [Freiburg](/wiki/Freiburg) in 1928. They held many philosophical discussions, but later became estranged over Heidegger's support of [National Socialism](/wiki/Nazism). They shared an admiration for Kierkegaard,[[54]](#cite_note-54) and in the 1930s, Heidegger lectured extensively on Nietzsche. Nevertheless, the extent to which Heidegger should be considered an existentialist is debatable. In [*Being and Time*](/wiki/Being_and_Time) he presented a method of rooting philosophical explanations in human existence (*Dasein*) to be analysed in terms of existential categories (*existentiale*); and this has led many commentators to treat him as an important figure in the existentialist movement.

### After the Second World War[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

Following the [Second World War](/wiki/Second_World_War), existentialism became a well-known and significant philosophical and cultural movement, mainly through the public prominence of two French writers, [Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre) and [Albert Camus](/wiki/Albert_Camus), who wrote best-selling novels, plays and widely read journalism as well as theoretical texts.[[55]](#cite_note-55) These years also saw the growing reputation of Heidegger's book [*Being and Time*](/wiki/Being_and_Time) outside Germany. [thumb|left|upright|French philosophers](/wiki/File:Sartre_and_de_Beauvoir_at_Balzac_Memorial.jpg) [Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre) and [Simone de Beauvoir](/wiki/Simone_de_Beauvoir)

Sartre dealt with existentialist themes in his 1938 novel [*Nausea*](/wiki/Nausea_(novel)) and the short stories in his 1939 collection [*The Wall*](/wiki/The_Wall_(book)), and had published his treatise on existentialism, [*Being and Nothingness*](/wiki/Being_and_Nothingness), in 1943, but it was in the two years following the liberation of Paris from the German occupying forces that he and his close associates — Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others — became internationally famous as the leading figures of a movement known as existentialism.[[56]](#cite_note-56) In a very short period of time, Camus and Sartre in particular became the leading public intellectuals of post-war France, achieving by the end of 1945 "a fame that reached across all audiences."[[57]](#cite_note-57) Camus was an editor of the most popular leftist (former [French Resistance](/wiki/French_Resistance)) newspaper [*Combat*](/wiki/Combat_(newspaper)); Sartre launched his journal of leftist thought, [*Les Temps Modernes*](/wiki/Les_Temps_Modernes), and two weeks later gave the widely reported lecture on existentialism and [secular humanism](/wiki/Secular_humanism) to a packed meeting of the Club Maintenant. Beauvoir wrote that "not a week passed without the newspapers discussing us";[[58]](#cite_note-58) existentialism became "the first media craze of the postwar era."[[59]](#cite_note-59) By the end of 1947, Camus' earlier fiction and plays had been reprinted, his new play [*Caligula*](/wiki/Caligula_(play)) had been performed and his novel [*The Plague*](/wiki/The_Plague) published; the first two novels of Sartre's [*The Roads to Freedom*](/wiki/The_Roads_to_Freedom) trilogy had appeared, as had Beauvoir's novel [*The Blood of Others*](/wiki/The_Blood_of_Others). Works by Camus and Sartre were already appearing in foreign editions. The Paris-based existentialists had become famous.[[56]](#cite_note-56) Sartre had traveled to Germany in 1930 to study the [phenomenology](/wiki/Phenomenology_(philosophy)) of [Edmund Husserl](/wiki/Edmund_Husserl) and [Martin Heidegger](/wiki/Martin_Heidegger),[[60]](#cite_note-60) and he included critical comments on their work in his major treatise [*Being and Nothingness*](/wiki/Being_and_Nothingness). Heidegger's thought had also become known in French philosophical circles through its use by [Alexandre Kojève](/wiki/Alexandre_Kojève) in explicating Hegel in a series of lectures given in Paris in the 1930s.[[61]](#cite_note-61) The lectures were highly influential; members of the audience included not only Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, but [Raymond Queneau](/wiki/Raymond_Queneau), [Georges Bataille](/wiki/Georges_Bataille), [Louis Althusser](/wiki/Louis_Althusser), [André Breton](/wiki/André_Breton), and [Jacques Lacan](/wiki/Jacques_Lacan).[[62]](#cite_note-62) A selection from Heidegger's [*Being and Time*](/wiki/Being_and_Time) was published in French in 1938, and his essays began to appear in French philosophy journals. [thumb|upright|French-Algerian philosopher, novelist, and playwright](/wiki/File:Albert_Camus,_gagnant_de_prix_Nobel,_portrait_en_buste,_posé_au_bureau,_faisant_face_à_gauche,_cigarette_de_tabagisme.jpg) [Albert Camus](/wiki/Albert_Camus)

Heidegger read Sartre's work and was initially impressed, commenting: "Here for the first time I encountered an independent thinker who, from the foundations up, has experienced the area out of which I think. Your work shows such an immediate comprehension of my philosophy as I have never before encountered."[[63]](#cite_note-63) Later, however, in response to a question posed by his French follower [Jean Beaufret](/wiki/Jean_Beaufret),[[64]](#cite_note-64) Heidegger distanced himself from Sartre's position and existentialism in general in his *Letter on Humanism*.[[65]](#cite_note-65) Heidegger's reputation continued to grow in France during the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1960s, Sartre attempted to reconcile existentialism and [Marxism](/wiki/Marxism) in his work [*Critique of Dialectical Reason*](/wiki/Critique_of_Dialectical_Reason). A major theme throughout his writings was freedom and responsibility.

Camus was a friend of Sartre, until their falling-out, and wrote several works with existential themes including [*The Rebel*](/wiki/The_Rebel_(book)), *Summer in Algiers*, [*The Myth of Sisyphus*](/wiki/The_Myth_of_Sisyphus), and [*The Stranger*](/wiki/The_Stranger_(novel)), the latter being "considered—to what would have been Camus's irritation—the exemplary existentialist novel."[[66]](#cite_note-66) Camus, like many others, rejected the existentialist label, and considered his works concerned with facing the absurd. In the titular book, Camus uses the analogy of the Greek myth of [Sisyphus](/wiki/Sisyphus) to demonstrate the futility of existence. In the myth, Sisyphus is condemned for eternity to roll a rock up a hill, but when he reaches the summit, the rock will roll to the bottom again. Camus believes that this existence is pointless but that Sisyphus ultimately finds meaning and purpose in his task, simply by continually applying himself to it. The first half of the book contains an extended rebuttal of what Camus took to be existentialist philosophy in the works of Kierkegaard, Shestov, Heidegger, and Jaspers.

[Simone de Beauvoir](/wiki/Simone_de_Beauvoir), an important existentialist who spent much of her life as Sartre's partner, wrote about feminist and existentialist ethics in her works, including [*The Second Sex*](/wiki/The_Second_Sex) and [*The Ethics of Ambiguity*](/wiki/The_Ethics_of_Ambiguity). Although often overlooked due to her relationship with Sartre,<ref name = Bergoffen-SEoP>[Template:Cite encyclopedia](/wiki/Template:Cite_encyclopedia)</ref> de Beauvoir integrated existentialism with other forms of thinking such as feminism, unheard of at the time, resulting in alienation from fellow writers such as Camus.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

[Paul Tillich](/wiki/Paul_Tillich), an important existentialist theologian following Kierkegaard and [Karl Barth](/wiki/Karl_Barth), applied existentialist concepts to [Christian theology](/wiki/Christian_theology), and helped introduce [existential theology](/wiki/Neo-orthodoxy) to the general public. His seminal work *The Courage to Be* follows Kierkegaard's analysis of anxiety and life's absurdity, but puts forward the thesis that modern humans must, via God, achieve selfhood in spite of life's absurdity. [Rudolf Bultmann](/wiki/Rudolf_Bultmann) used Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's philosophy of existence to demythologize Christianity by interpreting Christian mythical concepts into existentialist concepts.

[Maurice Merleau-Ponty](/wiki/Maurice_Merleau-Ponty), an [existential phenomenologist](/wiki/Existential_phenomenology), was for a time a companion of Sartre. Merleau-Ponty's [*Phenomenology of Perception*](/wiki/Phenomenology_of_Perception) (1945) was recognized as a major statement of French existentialism.[[67]](#cite_note-67) It has been said that Merleau-Ponty's work *Humanism and Terror* greatly influenced Sartre. However, in later years they were to disagree irreparably, dividing many existentialists such as de Beauvoir,[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed) who sided with Sartre.

[Colin Wilson](/wiki/Colin_Wilson), an English writer, published his study [*The Outsider*](/wiki/The_Outsider_(Colin_Wilson)) in 1956, initially to critical acclaim. In this book and others (e.g. *Introduction to the New Existentialism*), he attempted to reinvigorate what he perceived as a pessimistic philosophy and bring it to a wider audience. He was not, however, academically trained, and his work was attacked by professional philosophers for lack of rigor and critical standards.[[68]](#cite_note-68)

## Influence outside philosophy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

### Art[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

#### Film and television[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

[Stanley Kubrick's](/wiki/Stanley_Kubrick) 1957 anti-war film [*Paths of Glory*](/wiki/Paths_of_Glory) "illustrates, and even illuminates...existentialism" by examining the "necessary absurdity of the human condition" and the "horror of war".<ref name=Holt2007>Holt, Jason. "Existential Ethics: Where do the Paths of Glory Lead?". In *The Philosophy of Stanley Kubr*ick. By Jerold J. Abrams. Published 2007. University Press of Kentucky. SBN 0-8131-2445-X</ref> The film tells the story of a fictional World War I French army regiment ordered to attack an impregnable German stronghold; when the attack fails, three soldiers are chosen at random, court-martialed by a "kangaroo court", and executed by firing squad. The film examines existentialist ethics, such as the issue of whether objectivity is possible and the "problem of authenticity".<ref name=Holt2007/>

[Orson Welles'](/wiki/Orson_Welles) 1962 film [*The Trial*](/wiki/The_Trial_(1962_film)), based upon Franz Kafka's book of the same name (Der Process), is characteristic of both existentialist and absurdist themes in its depiction of a man (Joseph K.) arrested for a crime for which the charges are neither revealed to him nor to the reader.

[*Neon Genesis Evangelion*](/wiki/Neon_Genesis_Evangelion_(anime)) is a Japanese [science fiction](/wiki/Science_fiction) animation series created by the [anime](/wiki/Anime) studio [Gainax](/wiki/Gainax) and was both directed and written by [Hideaki Anno](/wiki/Hideaki_Anno). Existential themes of individuality, consciousness, freedom, choice, and responsibility are heavily relied upon throughout the entire series, particularly through the philosophies of [Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre) and [Søren Kierkegaard](/wiki/Søren_Kierkegaard). Episode 16's title, [Template:Nihongo](/wiki/Template:Nihongo) is a reference to Kierkegaard's book, [*The Sickness Unto Death*](/wiki/The_Sickness_Unto_Death).

Some contemporary films dealing with existentialist issues include [*Fight Club*](/wiki/Fight_Club), [*I ♥ Huckabees*](/wiki/I_Heart_Huckabees), [*Waking Life*](/wiki/Waking_Life), [*The Matrix*](/wiki/The_Matrix), [*Ordinary People*](/wiki/Ordinary_People), and [*Life in a Day*](/wiki/Life_in_a_Day_(2011_film)).[[69]](#cite_note-69) Likewise, films throughout the 20th century such as [*The Seventh Seal*](/wiki/The_Seventh_Seal), [*Ikiru*](/wiki/Ikiru), [*Taxi Driver*](/wiki/Taxi_Driver),[*Toy Story*](/wiki/Toy_Story), [*Ghost in the Shell*](/wiki/Ghost_in_the_Shell_(1995_film)), [*Harold and Maude*](/wiki/Harold_and_Maude), [*High Noon*](/wiki/High_Noon), [*Easy Rider*](/wiki/Easy_Rider), [*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*](/wiki/One_Flew_Over_the_Cuckoo's_Nest_(film)), [*A Clockwork Orange*](/wiki/A_Clockwork_Orange_(film)), [*Groundhog Day*](/wiki/Groundhog_Day_(film)), [*Apocalypse Now*](/wiki/Apocalypse_Now), [*Badlands*](/wiki/Badlands_(film)), and [*Blade Runner*](/wiki/Blade_Runner) also have existentialist qualities.[[70]](#cite_note-70) Notable directors known for their existentialist films include [Ingmar Bergman](/wiki/Ingmar_Bergman), [François Truffaut](/wiki/François_Truffaut), [Jean-Luc Godard](/wiki/Jean-Luc_Godard), [Michelangelo Antonioni](/wiki/Michelangelo_Antonioni), [Akira Kurosawa](/wiki/Akira_Kurosawa), [Terrence Malick](/wiki/Terrence_Malick), [Stanley Kubrick](/wiki/Stanley_Kubrick), [Andrei Tarkovsky](/wiki/Andrei_Tarkovsky), [Hideaki Anno](/wiki/Hideaki_Anno), [Wes Anderson](/wiki/Wes_Anderson), [Woody Allen](/wiki/Woody_Allen), and [Christopher Nolan](/wiki/Christopher_Nolan).[[71]](#cite_note-71) [Charlie Kaufman's](/wiki/Charlie_Kaufman) [*Synecdoche, New York*](/wiki/Synecdoche,_New_York) focuses on the protagonist's desire to find existential meaning.[[72]](#cite_note-72) Similarly, in Kurosawa's [*Red Beard*](/wiki/Red_Beard), the protagonist's experiences as an intern in a rural health clinic in Japan lead him to an [existential crisis](/wiki/Existential_crisis) whereby he questions his reason for being. This, in turn, leads him to a better understanding of humanity.

Recently released French film, [*Mood Indigo*](/wiki/Mood_Indigo_(film)) (directed by [Michel Gondry](/wiki/Michel_Gondry)) embraced various elements of existentialism.[Template:Citation needed](/wiki/Template:Citation_needed)

The film [*The Shawshank Redemption*](/wiki/The_Shawshank_Redemption), released in 1994, depicts life in a prison in [Maine](/wiki/Maine), United States to explore several existentialist concepts.[[73]](#cite_note-73)

#### Literature[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

Existential perspectives are also found in modern literature to varying degrees, especially since the 1920s. [Louis-Ferdinand Céline's](/wiki/Louis-Ferdinand_Céline) [*Journey to the End of the Night*](/wiki/Journey_to_the_End_of_the_Night) (Voyage au bout de la nuit, 1932) celebrated by both Sartre and Beauvoir, contained many of the themes that would be found in later existential literature, and is in some ways, the proto-existential novel. Jean-Paul Sartre's 1938 novel [*Nausea*](/wiki/Nausea_(novel))<ref name=SartreNausea>[Template:Cite journal](/wiki/Template:Cite_journal)</ref> was "steeped in Existential ideas", and is considered an accessible way of grasping his philosophical stance.<ref name=Earnshaw2006>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> Between 1900 and 1960, other authors such as [Albert Camus](/wiki/Albert_Camus), [Franz Kafka](/wiki/Franz_Kafka), [Rainer Maria Rilke](/wiki/Rainer_Maria_Rilke), [T.S. Eliot](/wiki/T.S._Eliot), [Herman Hesse](/wiki/Herman_Hesse), [Luigi Pirandello](/wiki/Luigi_Pirandello),[[74]](#cite_note-74)[[75]](#cite_note-75)[[76]](#cite_note-76)<ref name=luigip>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref><ref name=luigi>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref><ref name=playwrights>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> [Ralph Ellison](/wiki/Ralph_Ellison),<ref name=ellison>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref><ref name=existentialamerica>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref><ref name=readinglearning>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref><ref name=ellisongenius>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)</ref> and [Jack Kerouac](/wiki/Jack_Kerouac), composed literature or poetry that contained, to varying degrees, elements of existential or proto-existential thought. The philosophy's influence even reached pulp literature shortly after the turn of the 20th century, as seen in the existential disparity witnessed in Man's lack of control of his fate in the works of [H.P. Lovecraft](/wiki/H.P._Lovecraft).[[77]](#cite_note-77) Since the late 1960s, a great deal of cultural activity in literature contains [postmodernist](/wiki/Postmodernism) as well as existential elements. Books such as [*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*](/wiki/Do_Androids_Dream_of_Electric_Sheep?) (1968) (now republished as [*Blade Runner*](/wiki/Blade_Runner)) by [Philip K. Dick](/wiki/Philip_K._Dick), [*Slaughterhouse-Five*](/wiki/Slaughterhouse-Five) by [Kurt Vonnegut](/wiki/Kurt_Vonnegut), and [*Fight Club*](/wiki/Fight_Club_(novel)) by [Chuck Palahniuk](/wiki/Chuck_Palahniuk) all distort the line between reality and appearance while simultaneously espousing existential themes.

#### Theatre[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

[Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre) wrote [*No Exit*](/wiki/No_Exit) in 1944, an existentialist [play](/wiki/Play_(theatre)) originally published in French as *Huis Clos* (meaning [*In Camera*](/wiki/Wikt:in_camera) or "behind closed doors"), which is the source of the popular quote, "Hell is other people." (In French, "L'enfer, c'est les autres"). The play begins with a Valet leading a man into a room that the audience soon realizes is in hell. Eventually he is joined by two women. After their entry, the Valet leaves and the door is shut and locked. All three expect to be tortured, but no torturer arrives. Instead, they realize they are there to torture each other, which they do effectively by probing each other's sins, desires, and unpleasant memories.

Existentialist themes are displayed in the [Theatre of the Absurd](/wiki/Theatre_of_the_Absurd), notably in [Samuel Beckett's](/wiki/Samuel_Beckett) [*Waiting for Godot*](/wiki/Waiting_for_Godot), in which two men divert themselves while they wait expectantly for someone (or something) named Godot who never arrives. They claim Godot is an acquaintance, but in fact, hardly know him, admitting they would not recognize him if they saw him. Samuel Beckett, once asked who or what Godot is, replied, "If I knew, I would have said so in the play." To occupy themselves, the men eat, sleep, talk, argue, sing, play games, [exercise](/wiki/Physical_exercise), swap hats, and contemplate [suicide](/wiki/Suicide)—anything "to hold the terrible silence at bay".[[78]](#cite_note-78) The play "exploits several archetypal forms and situations, all of which lend themselves to both comedy and [pathos](/wiki/Pathos)."[[79]](#cite_note-79) The play also illustrates an attitude toward human experience on earth: the poignancy, oppression, camaraderie, hope, corruption, and bewilderment of human experience that can be reconciled only in the mind and art of the absurdist. The play examines questions such as death, the [meaning of human existence](/wiki/Meaning_of_life_(philosophy)#Existentialism) and the place of God in human existence.

[Tom Stoppard's](/wiki/Tom_Stoppard) [*Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead*](/wiki/Rosencrantz_&_Guildenstern_Are_Dead) is an [absurdist](/wiki/Theatre_of_the_Absurd) [tragicomedy](/wiki/Tragicomedy) first staged at the [Edinburgh Festival Fringe](/wiki/Edinburgh_Festival_Fringe) in 1966.[[80]](#cite_note-80) The play expands upon the exploits of two minor characters from [Shakespeare's](/wiki/William_Shakespeare) [*Hamlet*](/wiki/Hamlet). Comparisons have also been drawn to [Samuel Beckett's](/wiki/Samuel_Beckett) [*Waiting For Godot*](/wiki/Waiting_For_Godot), for the presence of two central characters who appear almost as two halves of a single character. Many plot features are similar as well: the characters pass time by playing [Questions](/wiki/Questions_(game)), impersonating other characters, and interrupting each other or remaining silent for long periods of time. The two characters are portrayed as two clowns or fools in a world beyond their understanding. They stumble through philosophical arguments while not realizing the implications, and muse on the irrationality and randomness of the world.

[Jean Anouilh's](/wiki/Jean_Anouilh) [*Antigone*](/wiki/Antigone_(Anouilh_play)) also presents arguments founded on existentialist ideas.[[81]](#cite_note-81) It is a tragedy inspired by Greek mythology and the play of the same name (Antigone, by Sophocles) from the 5th century BC. In English, it is often distinguished from its antecedent by being pronounced in its original French form, approximately "Ante-GŌN." The play was first performed in Paris on 6 February 1944, during the Nazi occupation of France. Produced under Nazi censorship, the play is purposefully ambiguous with regards to the rejection of authority (represented by Antigone) and the acceptance of it (represented by Creon). The parallels to the French Resistance and the Nazi occupation have been drawn. Antigone rejects life as desperately meaningless but without affirmatively choosing a noble death. The crux of the play is the lengthy dialogue concerning the nature of power, fate, and choice, during which Antigone says that she is, "... disgusted with [the]...promise of a humdrum happiness." She states that she would rather die than live a mediocre existence.

Critic [Martin Esslin](/wiki/Martin_Esslin) in his book *Theatre of the Absurd* pointed out how many contemporary playwrights such as [Samuel Beckett](/wiki/Samuel_Beckett), [Eugène Ionesco](/wiki/Eugène_Ionesco), [Jean Genet](/wiki/Jean_Genet), and [Arthur Adamov](/wiki/Arthur_Adamov) wove into their plays the existentialist belief that we are absurd beings loose in a universe empty of real meaning. Esslin noted that many of these playwrights demonstrated the philosophy better than did the plays by Sartre and Camus. Though most of such playwrights, subsequently labeled "Absurdist" (based on Esslin's book), denied affiliations with existentialism and were often staunchly anti-philosophical (for example Ionesco often claimed he identified more with ['Pataphysics](/wiki/'Pataphysics) or with [Surrealism](/wiki/Surrealism) than with existentialism), the playwrights are often linked to existentialism based on Esslin's observation.[[82]](#cite_note-82)

### Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

[Template:Main article](/wiki/Template:Main_article)

A major offshoot of existentialism as a philosophy is existentialist psychology and psychoanalysis, which first crystallized in the work of [Otto Rank](/wiki/Otto_Rank), Freud's closest associate for 20 years. Without awareness of the writings of Rank, [Ludwig Binswanger](/wiki/Ludwig_Binswanger) was influenced by [Freud](/wiki/Sigmund_Freud), [Edmund Husserl](/wiki/Edmund_Husserl), [Heidegger](/wiki/Martin_Heidegger), and [Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre). A later figure was [Viktor Frankl](/wiki/Viktor_Frankl), who briefly met [Freud](/wiki/Sigmund_Freud) and studied with [Jung](/wiki/Carl_Jung) as a young man.[[83]](#cite_note-83) His [logotherapy](/wiki/Logotherapy) can be regarded as a form of existentialist therapy. The existentialists would also influence [social psychology](/wiki/Social_psychology), antipositivist micro-[sociology](/wiki/Sociology), [symbolic interactionism](/wiki/Symbolic_interactionism), and [post-structuralism](/wiki/Post-structuralism), with the work of thinkers such as [Georg Simmel](/wiki/Georg_Simmel)[[84]](#cite_note-84) and [Michel Foucault](/wiki/Michel_Foucault). Foucault was a great reader of Kierkegaard even though he almost never refers this author, who nonetheless had for him an importance as secret as it was decisive.[[85]](#cite_note-85) An early contributor to existentialist psychology in the United States was [Rollo May](/wiki/Rollo_May), who was strongly influenced by [Kierkegaard](/wiki/Kierkegaard) and [Otto Rank](/wiki/Otto_Rank). One of the most prolific writers on techniques and theory of existentialist psychology in the USA is [Irvin D. Yalom](/wiki/Irvin_D._Yalom). Yalom states that

Aside from their reaction against Freud's mechanistic, deterministic model of the mind and their assumption of a phenomenological approach in therapy, the existentialist analysts have little in common and have never been regarded as a cohesive ideological school. These thinkers - who include Ludwig Binswanger, [Medard Boss](/wiki/Medard_Boss), [Eugène Minkowski](/wiki/Eugène_Minkowski), V.E. Gebsattel, Roland Kuhn, G. Caruso, F.T. Buytendijk, G. Bally and Victor Frankl - were almost entirely unknown to the American psychotherapeutic community until Rollo May's highly influential 1985 book *Existence* - and especially his introductory essay - introduced their work into this country.<ref name=Yalom1980>[Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book) Note: The copyright year has not changed, but the book remains in print.</ref>

A more recent contributor to the development of a European version of existentialist psychotherapy is the British-based [Emmy van Deurzen](/wiki/Emmy_van_Deurzen).

Anxiety's importance in existentialism makes it a popular topic in [psychotherapy](/wiki/Psychotherapy). Therapists often offer existentialist [philosophy](/wiki/Philosophy) as an explanation for anxiety. The assertion is that anxiety is manifested of an individual's complete freedom to decide, and complete responsibility for the outcome of such decisions. Psychotherapists using an existentialist approach believe that a patient can harness his anxiety and use it constructively. Instead of suppressing anxiety, patients are advised to use it as grounds for change. By embracing anxiety as inevitable, a person can use it to achieve his full potential in life. [Humanistic psychology](/wiki/Humanistic_psychology) also had major impetus from existentialist psychology and shares many of the fundamental tenets. [Terror management theory](/wiki/Terror_management_theory), based on the writings of [Ernest Becker](/wiki/Ernest_Becker) and [Otto Rank](/wiki/Otto_Rank), is a developing area of study within the academic study of psychology. It looks at what researchers claim are implicit emotional reactions of people confronted with the knowledge that they will eventually die.

Also, [Gerd B. Achenbach](/wiki/Gerd_B._Achenbach) has refreshed the socratic tradition with his own blend of [philosophical counseling](/wiki/Philosophical_counseling). So did [Michel Weber](/wiki/Michel_Weber) with his Chromatiques Center in Belgium.

## Criticisms[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]

### General criticisms[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]

[Walter Kaufmann](/wiki/Walter_Kaufmann_(philosopher)) criticized 'the profoundly unsound methods and the dangerous contempt for reason that have been so prominent in existentialism.'[[86]](#cite_note-86) [Logical positivist](/wiki/Logical_positivists) philosophers, such as [Rudolf Carnap](/wiki/Rudolf_Carnap) and [A. J. Ayer](/wiki/A._J._Ayer), assert that existentialists are often confused about the verb "to be" in their analyses of "being".[[87]](#cite_note-87) Specifically, they argue that the verb is transitive and pre-fixed to a [predicate](/wiki/Predicate_(grammar)) (e.g., an apple *is red*) (without a predicate, the word is meaningless), and that existentialists frequently misuse the term in this manner.

[Colin Wilson](/wiki/Colin_Wilson) has stated in his book *The Angry Years* that existentialism has created many of its own difficulties: "we can see how this question of freedom of the will has been vitiated by post-romantic philosophy, with its inbuilt tendency to laziness and boredom, we can also see how it came about that existentialism found itself in a hole of its own digging, and how the philosophical developments since then have amounted to walking in circles round that hole".[[88]](#cite_note-88)

### Sartre's philosophy[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]

Many critics argue Sartre's philosophy is contradictory. Specifically, they argue that Sartre makes metaphysical arguments despite his claiming that his philosophical views ignore metaphysics. [Herbert Marcuse](/wiki/Herbert_Marcuse) criticized [*Being and Nothingness*](/wiki/Being_and_Nothingness) (1943) by [Jean-Paul Sartre](/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre) for projecting anxiety and meaninglessness onto the nature of existence itself: "Insofar as Existentialism is a philosophical doctrine, it remains an idealistic doctrine: it [hypostatizes](/wiki/Hypostatic_abstraction) specific historical conditions of human existence into ontological and metaphysical characteristics. Existentialism thus becomes part of the very ideology which it attacks, and its radicalism is illusory".<ref name=Marcuse1972>Marcuse, Herbert. "Sartre's Existentialism". Printed in *Studies in Critical Philosophy*. Translated by Joris De Bres. London: NLB, 1972. p. 161</ref>

In *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger criticized Sartre's existentialism:

Existentialism says existence precedes essence. In this statement he is taking *existentia* and *essentia* according to their metaphysical meaning, which, from Plato's time on, has said that *essentia* precedes *existentia*. Sartre reverses this statement. But the reversal of a metaphysical statement remains a metaphysical statement. With it, he stays with metaphysics, in oblivion of the truth of Being.[[89]](#cite_note-89)

## See also[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]

[Template:Colbegin](/wiki/Template:Colbegin)

* [Abandonment (existentialism)](/wiki/Abandonment_(existentialism))
* [Disenchantment](/wiki/Disenchantment)
* [Existential phenomenology](/wiki/Existential_phenomenology)
* [Existentiell](/wiki/Existentiell)
* [List of existentialists](/wiki/List_of_existentialists)
* [Meaning (existential)](/wiki/Meaning_(existential))

[Template:Colend](/wiki/Template:Colend)

## References[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=30)]

### Specific[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=31)]

[Template:Reflist](/wiki/Template:Reflist)

### Bibliography[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=32)]

[Template:Refbegin](/wiki/Template:Refbegin)

* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* Albert Camus Lyrical and Critical essays. Edited by Philip Thody (interviev with Jeanie Delpech, in Les Nouvelles litteraires, November 15, 1945). pg 345

[Template:Refend](/wiki/Template:Refend)

### Further reading[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=33)]

[Template:Refbegin](/wiki/Template:Refbegin)

* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
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* Fallico, Arthuro B. (1962). *Art & Existentialism*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
* [Template:Cite book](/wiki/Template:Cite_book)
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## External links[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=34)]

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* [Template:DMOZ](/wiki/Template:DMOZ)
* [Template:Cite IEP](/wiki/Template:Cite_IEP)
* [Template:In Our Time](/wiki/Template:In_Our_Time)
* [Friesian interpretation of Existentialism](http://www.friesian.com/existent.htm)
* [Template:Cite SEP](/wiki/Template:Cite_SEP)
* ["Existentialism is a Humanism", a lecture given by Jean-Paul Sartre](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm)
* [*The Existential Primer*](http://www.tameri.com/csw/exist/)
* [Buddhists, Existentialists and Situationists: Waking up in Waking Life](http://publish.uwo.ca/~dmann/waking_essay.htm)

### Journals and articles[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=35)]

* [Stirrings Still](http://www.stirrings-still.org): The International Journal of Existential Literature
* [Existential Analysis](http://www.existentialanalysis.co.uk) published by The Society for Existential Analysis

[Template:Navboxes](/wiki/Template:Navboxes)

[Template:Authority control](/wiki/Template:Authority_control)

[Category:Existentialism](/wiki/Category:Existentialism) [Category:19th-century philosophy](/wiki/Category:19th-century_philosophy) [Category:20th-century philosophy](/wiki/Category:20th-century_philosophy) [Category:Metaphysical theories](/wiki/Category:Metaphysical_theories) [Category:Modernism](/wiki/Category:Modernism) [Category:Philosophical movements](/wiki/Category:Philosophical_movements) [Category:Philosophy of life](/wiki/Category:Philosophy_of_life) [Category:Postmodernism](/wiki/Category:Postmodernism) [Category:Social theories](/wiki/Category:Social_theories) [Category:Individualism](/wiki/Category:Individualism)