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BASICS OF EXISTENTIALISM: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE PHILOSOPHY OF EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE

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Abstract: *Amid an abundance of studies that probe the applications of Existentialism, few venture back to its origins, which are often neglected. For this, present research paper dares to return to that primal soil—where meaning quivers, freedom weighs heavy and existence begins without apology. Grounded in the raw tension between absurdity and purpose of life, it explores Existentialism not as a finished doctrine but as a living, breathing question. Tracing its intellectual evolution from the meditative inquiries of ancient Eastern and Western traditions to its defiant articulation by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, and de Beauvoir, this study uncovers the philosophy's beating heart: anguish, freedom, authenticity, the Other, and death. Through a deeply interdisciplinary approach that blends textual interpretation, philosophical critique, and literary analysis, it examines not only canonical texts like Being and Nothingness and The Myth of Sisyphus but also the existential tremors found in Dostoevsky, Kafka, and Beckett. The silenced voices—non-Western, religious, and feminist—are brought into the fold to complete the portrait of philosophy too often framed narrowly. This research does not merely describe Existentialism—it embodies it. It speaks to a fractured age, offering not comfort but courage. In a world of masks and mechanisms, it calls individuals to live awake, to live deliberately.*

Keywords: *Authenticity, Facticity, Thrownness, The Other and the Look, Proto-Existentialists, Mauvaise Foi, Sein, Dasein, Übermensch, Geworfenheit, Eigentlichkeit, Uneigentlichkeit, Nausea*

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INTRODUCTION

Existentialism, a stirring and often disquieting philosophical odyssey, dares to voyage into the marrow of human existence and essence, laying bare the trembling realities of life—freedom, alienation, despair, absurdity, and authenticity—while boldly dismantling the age-old conviction that "essence precedes existence" (Sartre 22). Its soul endeavors, posing timeless, aching questions: Who is one? What does it mean for one to exist? Is life imbued with intrinsic meaning, or is one the creator of one's significance? Rooted in the audacious declaration that "existence precedes essence" (*Existentialism Is a Humanism* 22), it illuminates the solitary figure of the individual, flung into an indifferent world, tasked with the agonizing liberty to sculpt themselves anew. Guided by the incandescent thought of Søren Kierkegaard, the defiant proclamations of Friedrich Nietzsche, the fierce clarity of Jean-Paul Sartre, the impassioned insights of Simone de Beauvoir, and the haunting meditations of Albert Camus, this philosophy vestiges its evolution from its sacred origins to its starkly secular and absurdist manifestations. The musings of the great minds reveal that as a philosophy, it turns from the mechanistic and the predetermined toward the trembling heartbeat of choice—where each decision echoes individual's responsibility, and every

moment is heavy with the weight of becoming. However, this is no mere philosophical exercise—a quiet revolution of the spirit that does not soothe but unsettles; that does not provide answers but demands presence. To walk this path is to peer into the void and, rather than retreat, whisper that I am absolute.

Historical Background

Existentialism did not emerge in a vacuum. Though it gained high currency in the middle of the 20th century, just after World II, its philosophical lineage can be taken back to the earlier thinkers like Socrates, St. Augustine, Michel de Montaigne, and Blaise Pascal in Western philosophy and to the sacred scriptures of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism in Eastern philosophy. For this reason, Dr. Radhakrishnan remarks, "Existentialism is a new name for an ancient method" (*History of Philosophy: Eastern and Western*, 443). However, Søren Kierkegaard is often regarded as the father of Existentialism. His critique of the Hegelian abstraction and his advocacy for the importance of individual faith and subjectivity is regarded as a harbinger of a new light in the history of Existentialism. Following Nietzsche, it paved the way for a radical rethinking of values and challenged the foundations of morality and meaning with his proclamation, "God is dead" (*The Gay Science*, 181). Later on, in this train of philosophical thoughts, comes a vital figure, Simone de Beauvoir, who, with her final blow on patriarchy, said, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (*The Second Sex* 283). This thought, though a key concept of feminism, referring to sex—biological characteristics—and gender—roles, behaviours, and identities, signifies that the identity of the half-population, i.e., the fair sex, is not predetermined by biology but by social and cultural factors that manipulatively assign one a secondary place in society. Whatever it is, no one can forget the role that Camus and Kafka play in the blooming of Existentialism worldwide. The former's focus on the absurdity of the human condition and his rebellion against it, and the latter's focus on the alienation and dehumanization of individuals within bureaucratic systems, as presented in their literature, familiarize the literary world with the thoughts of this philosophy. However, the devastation of World War II, which caused existential crises, played a crucial role in the rise and dissemination of existentialist ideas. Humanity's existential crisis—characterized by loss, absurdity, and alienation—demanded a new philosophical terminology that emphasized personal meaning over universal order.

Core Concepts of Existentialism

Philosophy does not deal in answers—it kindles the flame of thought. Its concepts are not tools but echo, rising from the depths of wonder. And existentialism, being a philosophy is never aloof from it. It does not stand apart but walks within this long tradition, asking what it means to be free, to choose, to carry the weight of meaning in a world that offers nothing. Along this winding path, specific ideas take shape—not as doctrines but as companions in thought. These are:

- **Existence Precedes Essence**

Arguably, Sartre's proposition "existence precedes essence" (*Existentialism Is a Humanism* 22) is Existentialism's first and foremost fundamental tenet. As a purple patch of this philosophy, it signifies that man is not born with a predefined purpose or essence. Instead, he comes into existence first, and later on, through living—through his choices, actions, and responsibilities—defines who he is. However, opposing the classical view (especially theological) that human beings are created with an inherent purpose, it projects the notion as Sartre says:

What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world– and defines himself afterwards […] He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man, simply is. […] Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of Existentialism (*Existentialism is a Humanism* 28).

- **Decision Decides Destiny**

Whenever one explores the essence of Existentialism, one comes across Sartre's striking impression—"Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (*Existentialism Is a Humanism* 22)—that capturing a central theme of the existentialist belief suggests that one's essence is not given to one in advance but is shaped by one's choices in the furnace of freedom and responsibility. From this perspective, one's path is not predetermined by fate or divine will; it unfolds through individual decisions and personal responsibility. It is to say that, unlike traditional philosophies that search for fixed truths or rely on a higher power to define meaning, Existentialism turns inward, focusing on the raw, often uneasy experience of being human—on the weight of freedom, the struggle with doubt, and the need to create meaning in a world that offers nothing by default.

- **Freedom and Responsibility**

According to the existentialists, freedom is innate to every individual at birth; it shapes one's path and is inseparable from existence itself. For them, one is radically free to choose one's path. One's freedom is coupled with an equally radical responsibility. One is responsible for one's picks and moves, together with the meaning and consequences of one's life. There is no external force like God, nature, or society that remits one of one's choices. Thinking this, Sartre says: "*Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does*" (*Being and Nothingness* 553). This condemnation arises because, paradoxically, refusing to choose is still a choice.

- **Angst and Anxiety**

Angst and anxiety are at the core of existentialist conception. They reflect the human confrontation with freedom, choice, and the absence of inherent meaning. Søren Kierkegaard distinguishes anxiety from fear, noting that while fear has a specific object, anxiety is more abstract, arising from the awareness of boundless possibilities—what he calls "the dizziness of freedom" (*The Concept of Anxiety* 61). This awareness, though liberating, also induces despair due to the burden of responsibility. Martin Heidegger deepens this view in *Being and Time*, describing anxiety (Angst) as a mood that reveals the nothingness underlying everyday life. In such moments, the familiar recedes, exposing the individual to the raw fact of existence and mortality. However, this confrontation enables authenticity by demanding personal decisions beyond societal distractions. Sartre asserts that humans are "condemned to be free" (*Being and Nothingness* 553), forced to define themselves through choices in a world lacking predefined essence. This radical freedom evokes anxiety but also the potential for self-creation. Thus, existential anxiety is not pathological but a vital awakening to human freedom, demanding responsibility and authentic living.

- **Absurdity**

The great minds of Existentialism often depict human life as absurd. They do not portray it in the sense of being ridiculous but in the sense of being devoid of inherent meaning. Camus and Kafka, the icons of the absurd, wonderfully

illustrate it in their works. Whether it is the former's *The Myth of Sisyphus* that portrays human existence as a ceaseless and meaningless struggle yet advocates for a defiant embrace of the absurd, calling it "revolt" to assert one's freedom or it is the latter's *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial* that widely explore the inherent meaninglessness of existence and the human struggle against incomprehensible forces. Their deeds are identical. They fetch this philosophy to literature. Its best illustration can be perceived in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* where the former advocates for everyone to embrace absurdity in the concluding paragraph. The paragraph says—

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He, too, concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy (Camus 123).

Minute mensuration in this concluding paragraph of the essay reveals that absurdity lies in embracing a meaningless, repetitive punishment as fulfilling. Camus convinces that Sisyphus's eternal futile labour is joyful. Though contradicting logic, he attains happiness from struggle without purpose. Though ironical, he finds meaning in absurdity, thereby negating the very premise of a meaningless, indifferent universe.

- **Authenticity**

Authenticity, for existentialists, means embracing one's freedom and responsibility to create meaning rather than hiding behind social roles or "the they" (*Heidegger* 345). In this context, Sartre insists, one is “condemned to be free" (*Being and Nothingness* 553)—one cannot escape choosing one’s path and must own its consequences. Heidegger deepens this: authenticity arises when one faces one's "own most potentiality-for-Being" (*Being and Time* 294), boldly confronting mortality instead of drifting into "everydayness" (*Being and Time* 41/49). Kierkegaard adds that the authentic self is "the relation that relates itself to itself" (*The Sickness unto Death* 13), a dynamic struggle between passion and rationality. In living authentically, one rejects external definitions—Beauvoir calls this the refusal "to be a thing among things" (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 80)—and, instead, enacts and projects oneself aligned with one’s deepest convictions. Eventually, authenticity is not a static state but an ongoing effort: one continually chooses and reaffirms who one is, crafting one’s essence through acts of self-aware freedom.

- **Facticity**

In realm of Existentialism, facticity refers to the concrete realities into which an individual is "thrown"—the conditions that one does not choose but must confront. Jean-Paul Sartre defines it as "all the concrete details against the background of which human freedom exists and is limited" (*Being and Nothingness* 555). For Sartre, it includes birthplace, body, language, past actions, and mortality. However, existentialists assert that it does not imprison us; instead, it merely sets the stage for freedom. Sartre emphasizes this idea by stating, "What is important is not what is made of man, but what he makes of what is made of him" (*Saint Genet* 297). While one cannot deny one’s circumstances, one is never defined by them—the Other and the Look. In this context, De Beauvoir writes, "To will oneself free is also to will others free" (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 72).

This highlights one's shared responsibility to transform facticity into meaning. Finally, facticity is not a chain; it is the rough terrain from which choice, responsibility, and authentic existence must emerge.

- **The Other and the Look**

"The Other and the Look" is one of the core concepts of Existentialism. It plays a vital role in edging one's self-perception and comprehending one's existence. As a term, it emerges in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness, suggesting* that one's self-identity is formed under the gaze of others, revealing consciousness, objectification, and interpersonal tension central to the existential human experience. According to Sartre, "Hell is other people" (*No Exit and Three Other Plays* 45), not because others are inherently evil but because their gaze objectifies one, *transforming* one from subject into object. Such a "Look" (*le regard*) from the *Other* disrupts one's internal freedom by fixing one's identity from an external perspective. It causes a rupture in self-consciousness, compelling one to see oneself as caught. In his (Sartre's) view, "existence precedes essence" (p. 22); thus, identity is not pre-given but forged through freedom and action. However, the presence of the Other introduces a conflict: while one strives to assert one's subjectivity, one is simultaneously being seen and judged. Simone de Beauvoir expands this idea, noting, "The category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself" (*The Second Sex* 25). The gaze thus becomes a mirror and a prison—an existential tension between freedom and alienation. Essentially, the Look signifies a confrontation with the Other that defines, confines, and yet, paradoxically, affirms one's existence in a shared, if fractured, reality.

- **Suicide and Death**

In the philosophical dominion of Existentialism, suicide and death are not merely endpoints but crucial thresholds through which the meaning—or absurdity—of life is questioned. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus starkly declares: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide" (p. 03). For Camus, the decision to continue living or to end one's life confronts the absurd: the tension between one's yearning for clarity and the silent, indifferent universe. Suicide, then, is not an escape but a philosophical revolt—a refusal to succumb to meaninglessness without first confronting it. Kierkegaard views death through the lens of despair, describing it as a sickness of the soul. He writes, "The most painful state of being is remembering the future, particularly the one you'll never have" (*Either/Or* 225/226). For him, the idea of death becomes not a physical cessation but an inward spiritual decay when one fails to live authentically. Similarly, Jean-Paul Sartre does not romanticize death but sees it as the final absurdity—outside one's subjectivity, beyond one's freedom: "Death is my possibility of no longer realizing possibilities" (*Being and Time* 294). Existentialists do not glorify death or suicide. Instead, they urge individuals to confront it, to stand at its edge and ask: What shall they do with this life? Living is responsible for creating meaning, even when no is given. Thus, in facing death, Existentialism demands that one lives—not in fear but in fierce, defiant affirmation of our freedom.

Persons and Impersonations

Existentialism is not a rigid school of philosophy because it prioritizes personal experience, freedom, and authenticity over universal truths, allowing diverse and even conflicting perspectives to coexist. It is a train of philosophers from distant times and countries pursuing the precise destination of human life

with common, identical goals. Rather than a unified, systematic doctrine, it functions more as a movement or orientation of thought. Thus, thinkers whose work deeply engages with core existential themes—such as freedom, authenticity, alienation, absurdity, subjectivity, and the search for meaning—are generally regarded as part of the existentialist tradition.

Sacred Scriptures

Most religions of the world have made significant contributions to the growth and development of existential thought. None can ignore the contribution of Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, which, despite their firm faith in God, gave way to the rise of Existentialism in the hour of need. Abraham's story in the Bible and Krishna-Arjuna's dialogue in the Gita are inimitable illustrations of explorations, as they reveal their thoughts on human existence, free will, responsibility, and the nature of reality.

Proto-Existentialists

The thinkers who lived before the term "existentialism" gained high currency fall in this group. It is another thing that they were unaware of it as a school of thought, yet their notions, which possess existential thoughts, influenced the world in their ways. The name that comes first in this queue is Socrates, who emphasized the importance of self-knowledge and inner moral responsibility. Next to him comes Augustine of Hippo, who explored introspection, inner conflict, and faith in his preaching. Just after Hippo comes the name of Blaise Pascal, who, with his philosophical argument of "wager" and the "angst of the human condition," paved the way for this *ism*. Finally comes the name of Michel de Montaigne, who, with his thoughts on subjectivity and skepticism in his essays, gave an orientation to this thought.

Foundational Existentialists

The Philosophers who shaped Existentialism into a recognizable movement are Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche**.** The former, the father of Existentialism, writing in mid-19th-century Denmark, was deeply concerned with the Christian faith and individual choice. In his works such as *Fear and Trembling* and *The Sickness Unto Death*, he explored the 'leap of faith' necessary to overcome existential despair. For Kierkegaard, subjectivity is truth. It is not objective but subjective; it is a matter of inward passion and personal commitment. Moreover, he is known for his paradoxical line: "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards" (*Papers and Journals: A Selection 161*). Whereas the latter, a German philosopher, is called the challenger of truth. His existentialism is grounded in the rejection of traditional morality and metaphysics. He is best known for his concept of "God is dead" (p. 181) and the *Übermensch* (Overman), a figure who creates his values in the absence of divine order. His notion of "will to power" and "the eternal Recurrence" also play a vital role in the philosophy of existence and essence. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, he challenges the herd mentality of society and calls for a reevaluation of all values, proclaiming: "He who has a way to live can bear almost any how" (*Twilight of the Idols* 33).

20th-Century Continental Existentialists

This group includes Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers, Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Paul Tillich. In which Heidegger, the philosopher of being, marked a momentous philosophical achievement with his book *Being and Time* (1927). His concept of *Sein-zum-Tode* (being-towards-death), a literal approach to death to understand existence and *Dasein* (being-there)

to describe the human mode of existence made him immortal in the history of Existentialism. The fame that he achieved with the concepts of *"Geworfenheit"* (Throwness) and "*Eigentlichkeit vs. Uneigentlichkeit*" (Authenticity vs. Inauthenticity) is beyond human computation. His move away from humanism and instead investigating the question of being itself brought him to the forefront of existentialist philosophy. His analysis of death, time, and anxiety informs much of later existentialist thought. Moreover, his contour: "Only a being that can understand its own Being can ask the question of Being" (*Being and Time* 32), has become one of the chanting hymns of the philosophy of existence and essence, i.e., Existentialism.

Next to Heidegger comes Sartre, the philosopher of freedom, who systematized Existentialist thought in his treatise *"Being and Nothingness*" (1943). His concepts of "existence precedes essence" (p. 22), *"Mauvaise Foi"* (Bad Faith), "Radical Freedom", and "Authenticity" made him the prime star of the philosophical exploration of existence. He is one of those existentialists who brought Existentialism to literature, elaborating on human freedom, bad faith, and the nothingness at the core of being. His plays *No Exit*, and the novel *Nausea* bring existential themes into literary form. He also engaged politically, advocating for Marxism while preserving existentialist individualism.

De Beauvoir, the supreme authority of feminist Existentialism in this philosophy, extended existentialist principles more deeply than Sartre to questions of the body, gender, and ethics in her seminal work, *The Second Sex*. She addressed the lived experience, highlighting how existential freedom is often constrained by social structures, especially for women. The concepts— "Freedom and Ambiguity", "Authenticity and Oppression", "Embodiment and Lived Experience", and "Other"—that she coined to express her lived experience as a woman is down-to-earth. It is the stark reality that a woman, like her, daily senses, comes to realize and practically bears in her mundane life. None can ever forget her proclamation that scanning society reveals—

One is not born, but instead becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic destiny defines the figure that human female acquires in society; it is civilization as a whole that develops this product, intermediate between female and eunuch, which one calls feminine (*The Second Sex* 283).

This proclamation by Beauvoir unswervingly challenges the notion of gender essentialism, emphasizing the role of social construction and individual agency. Her analysis of oppression, freedom, and identity remains influential in feminist Existentialism, proclaiming: "To will oneself free is also to will Others free" (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 73).

Camus, the philosopher of the Absurd, though often associated with Existentialism, preferred to call himself an absurdist. In *The Stranger, The Plague, The Rebel, The Fall* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he explored the indifference of the universe and the human quest for meaning. His insistence on "Revolt" against "The Absurd" plays a significant role in Existentialism. To him, an individual can attain meaning and purpose in life only by rebelling against the indifferences of the universe that are totally absurd. However, sadly, the inability of the human mind to grasp the world and the world's irrationality in providing humans with meaning and purpose in life does all. It becomes the root cause of absurdity with which man can do nothing but live. This thought of living with the absurd and without recourse to illusions or resignation gives Existentialism a tragic dignity,

making him utter: "I rebel, therefore we exist" (*The Rebel* 22).

Literary Existentialists

Fyodor Dostoevsky, with his profundity and spiritual enquiry, emerges as a pioneering voice in literary Existentialism, delving into the complexities of freedom, guilt, and moral ambiguity. Nearby stands Franz Kafka, whose unsettling visions of faceless authority and inescapable systems capture the quiet terror that underpins modern existence. Moreover, Miguel de Unamuno, the Spanish essayist and novelist, is also a noteworthy figure in this milieu. His works, with glimpses of life, internal conflicts, and the pursuit of faith, make a noteworthy contribution to the field. Similarly, Rainer Maria Rilke, the Austrian poet, further develops this philosophical lineage through his poetic reflections on solitude, death, and the ongoing process of becoming. Nor can one overlook Ralph Ellison, an American poet and critic, whose powerful examinations of identity and invisibility in the American experience confront the existential crises shaped by race and history. Likewise, Jean Genet, a French playwright whose works delve into outsider hood, freedom, and the poetics of marginality, stands as an essential voice in this existential chorus. British literature is not aloof from it. Shakespeare, Pinter, Becket, and Osborne's plays, Eliot, Auden, Larkin, and the Angry Young Men's poetry, and Lawrence, Hardy, Conrad, and Fowles' fictions have lots to do with it. Together, these authors form a profoundly interconnected tradition, each offering a distinct yet resonant inquiry into the human condition.

Existential Thinkers Beyond Europe

Beyond Europe, Keiji Nishitani—Kyoto School; synthesis of Zen and Existentialism—, Frantz Fanon—identity, decolonization, and existential violence—, Clarice Lispector—Brazilian writer exploring metaphysical freedom—, Octavio Paz —Mexican poet-philosopher on solitude and being—, Amal Dunqul—Arab existentialist poet dealing with resistance and identity—, and Ashis Nandy—an Indian philosopher exploring existential psychology and politics are the icons who contributed lots in this field.

Modern/Post-Existential Thinkers

This group comprises thinkers who, under the influence of Existentialism, extend its principles into new fields. Michel Foucault—subjectivity, power, and freedom—Jacques Derrida—deconstruction and metaphysics of presence—Cornel West—combines Existentialism with race and social justice—and Slavoj Žižek—Psychoanalysis, ideology, and existential tensions.

Themes in Existentialism

Existentialism unravels the fragile thread between freedom and despair, between being and nothingness. Its core themes—absurdity, freedom, alienation, authenticity, and the anxiety of choice—echo across the works of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Kafka, Sartre, Camus, and Beckett. Literature becomes a mirror where man confronts his radical freedom in a godless world, burdened by the responsibility to create meaning in the void. The existential hero is often alone—Meursault, Gregor Samsa, Roquentin—caught in a world that neither consoles nor condemns. Life is no longer a divine blueprint but a canvas of dread and defiance. From Heidegger's *Dasein* to Simone de Beauvoir's gendered freedom, Existentialism compels the individual to confront the question: *What does it mean to exist?* In a world stripped of illusions, it does not offer answers—it demands courage. Existentialism is not merely a philosophy; it is a haunting fire that demands one to live deliberately—or not at all.

Existentialism and Religion

Existentialism presents a paradoxical relationship with religion. While thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard are deeply Christian, others, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, are staunchly atheistic. Theistic Existentialism accepts the absurdity of existence but finds resolution in faith. Atheistic Existentialism, on the other hand, accepts the absurd as final and seeks meaning within human subjectivity. Both paths, though divergent in outlook, converge on a vital point: the weight of personal choice and responsibility. Whether one turns toward faith or yields to nihilism, the existential demand does not waver—it calls upon the individual to face the void and determine a way to exist within it.

Existentialism in Art and Literature

Existentialist themes have left a profound impression on the worlds of literature, theatre, and film, resonating with something restless in the human condition. In Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis*, readers encounter characters caught in cold, bewildering realities—lost in systems they cannot understand, alien even to those closest to them. Their solitude is not loud; it seeps in quietly as they wrestle with a world that offers no answers, only silence and confusion. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* gives voice to the quiet despair of waiting for meaning that never arrives, revealing the stillness and uncertainty at the heart of life. Dostoevsky, in *Notes from Underground* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, turns inward, probing the soul's darker corners—where guilt festers, faith trembles and the search for truth becomes a deeply personal battle. In film, directors such as Ingmar Bergman (*The Seventh Seal*) and Michelangelo Antonioni capture existential loneliness. Even popular culture—films like *Fight Club*, *The Matrix*, and *Her*—reflect existential anxieties about identity, freedom, and authenticity.

Criticisms and Challenges

Existentialism is not without its critics. Some accuse it of being overly pessimistic, focusing too much on alienation, despair, and death, and others argue that it is too individualistic, neglecting the social and historical dimensions of existence. Marxist critics, such as Georg Lukács, dismissed Existentialism as bourgeois navel-gazing, incapable of systemic critique. However, Existentialism emphasizes subjectivity and freedom; yet, this perspective can seem overly simplistic when confronted with structural oppression. How free are we, really, in a world shaped by economic inequality, racism, and cultural dominance? In this context, Simone de Beauvoir's work is significant, as it strives to reconcile the idea of existential freedom with the complexities of social issues.

Existentialism Today: Why It Still Matters

In a world torn between hyper-connectivity and deep fragmentation, Existentialism emerges as a pressing retort to algorithmic determinism, consumer culture, and ecological crisis—urging a return to personal freedom, responsibility, and authenticity. The post-pandemic world has compelled many to confront the realities of isolation, mortality, and the fragility of life's meaning. Existentialism offers no easy answers—but perhaps that is its strength. It stirs one to question, to contemplate, and eventually to determine all the concerned in the face of uncertainty and absurdity. Inspired by the existentialist philosophy, Existential therapy helps individuals navigate issues of meaning, anxiety, and free will. Moreover, Existentialist thought fosters critical inquiry and personal growth in both education and the arts, encouraging individuals to seek meaning and authenticity in learning and creative expression.

Conclusion: Existentialism—A Way of Life

Existentialism is not merely a school of thought—it is a challenge, a confrontation with the human condition. It refuses to comfort individuals with illusions or absolutes. Instead, it demands them to take themselves seriously as agents of meaning. In a world often devoid of lucidity, it offers them the possibility of creating their purpose—not as a retreat from reality but as an engagement with its most difficult truths. To live existentially is to accept the weight of freedom and the inevitability of death but also to affirm the possibility of living authentically, passionately, and deliberately. The basics of Existentialism are not confined to the classroom or the philosopher's study—they are lived every day, in every choice, in every act of courage against despair.

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