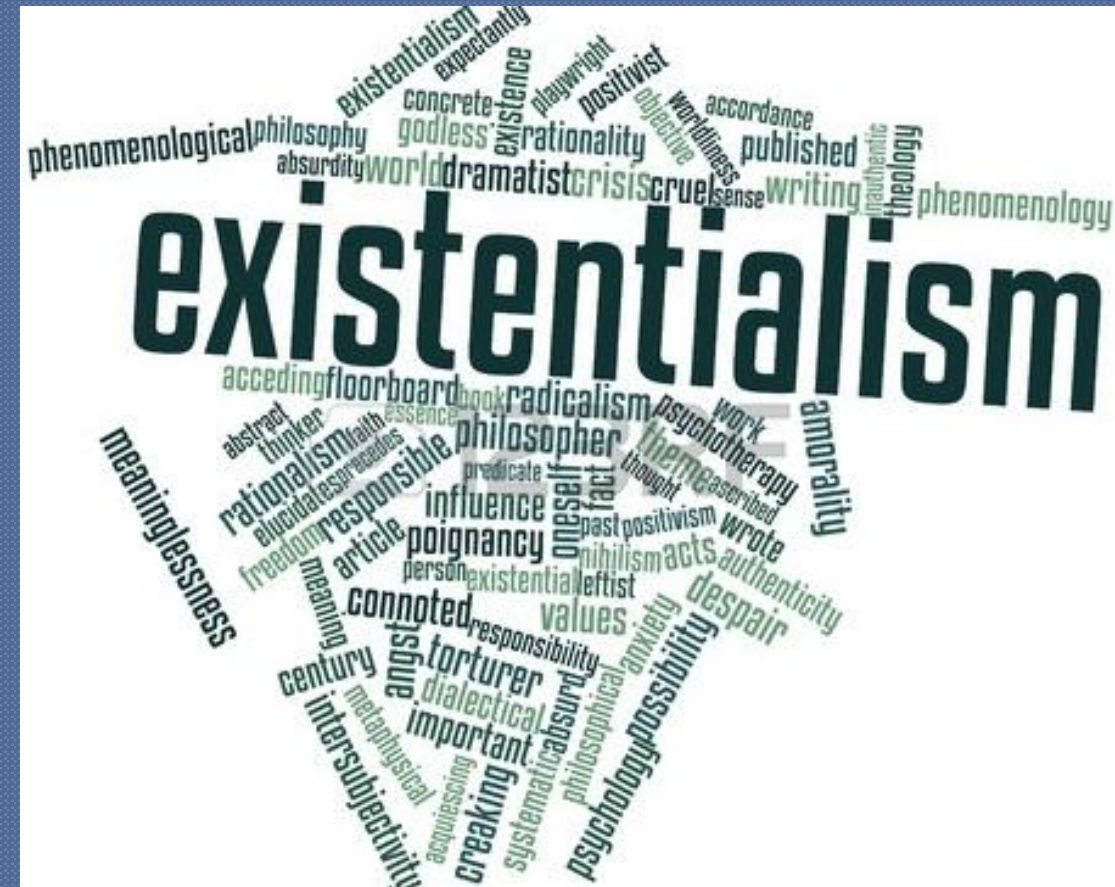


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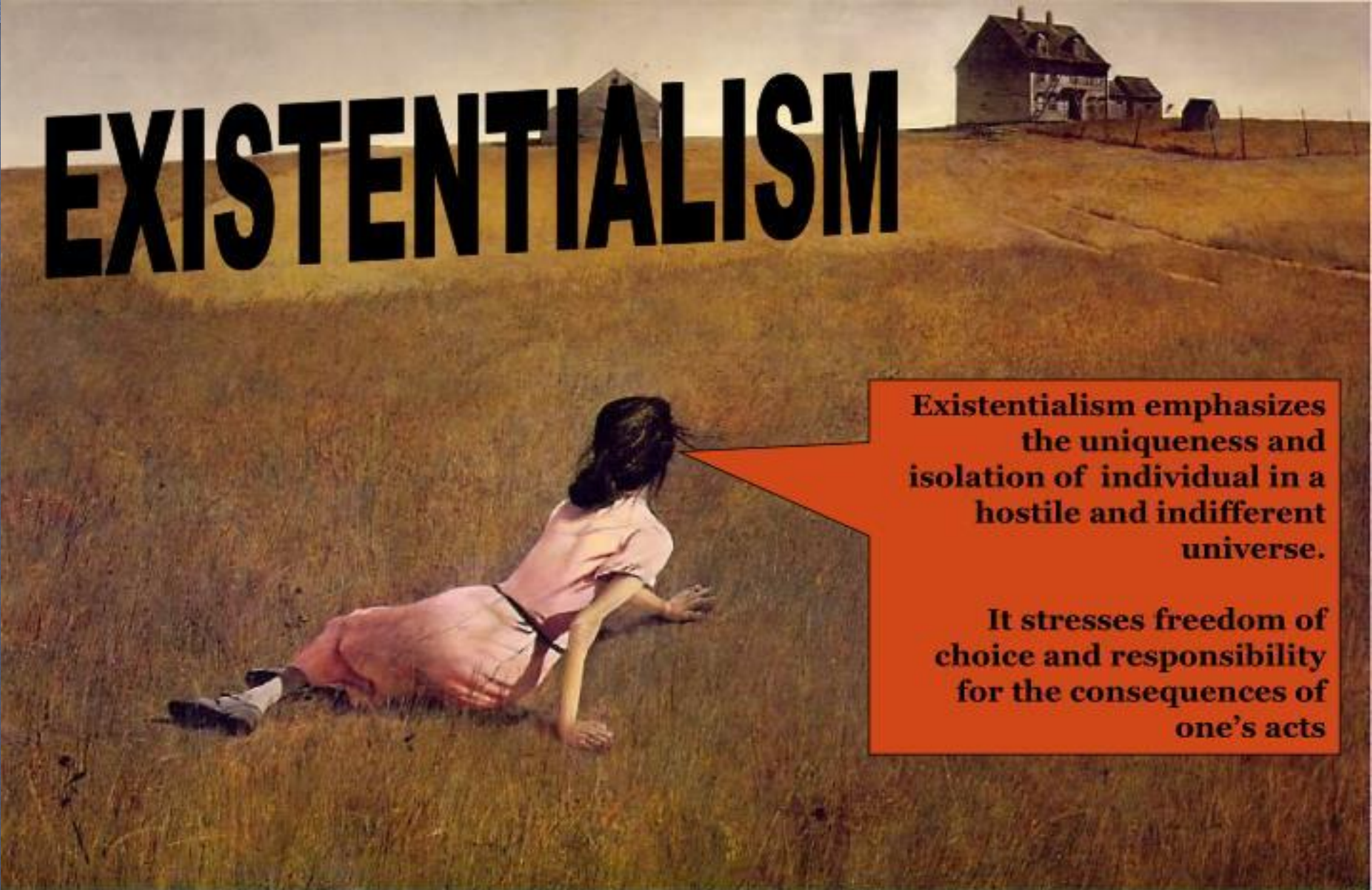
Aims

- ◉ Introduce the concept of existentialism
- ◉ Introduce the key figures of existentialism

What is existentialism?

A philosophical view that emphasizes the importance of existence, including one's responsibility for one's own psychological existence.

EXISTENTIALISM

The background image is a painting depicting a woman in a pink dress crawling on her hands and knees through a vast, dry, yellow field. She is looking away from the viewer towards a small, isolated house in the distance. The sky is overcast and grey, and the overall mood is one of isolation and despair.

Existentialism emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of individual in a hostile and indifferent universe.

It stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts

Existentialism

- ◉ Concerned with the *existential* (living, concrete)
- ◉ *Who am I?*
- ◉ *What does my life mean?*
- ◉ *Why do I feel guilty?*
- ◉ *Why am I afraid?*
- ◉ *What am I to do?*

- ◉ These are all fundamental questions – or life's big questions.
- ◉ How you answer these questions determines how you see the world.

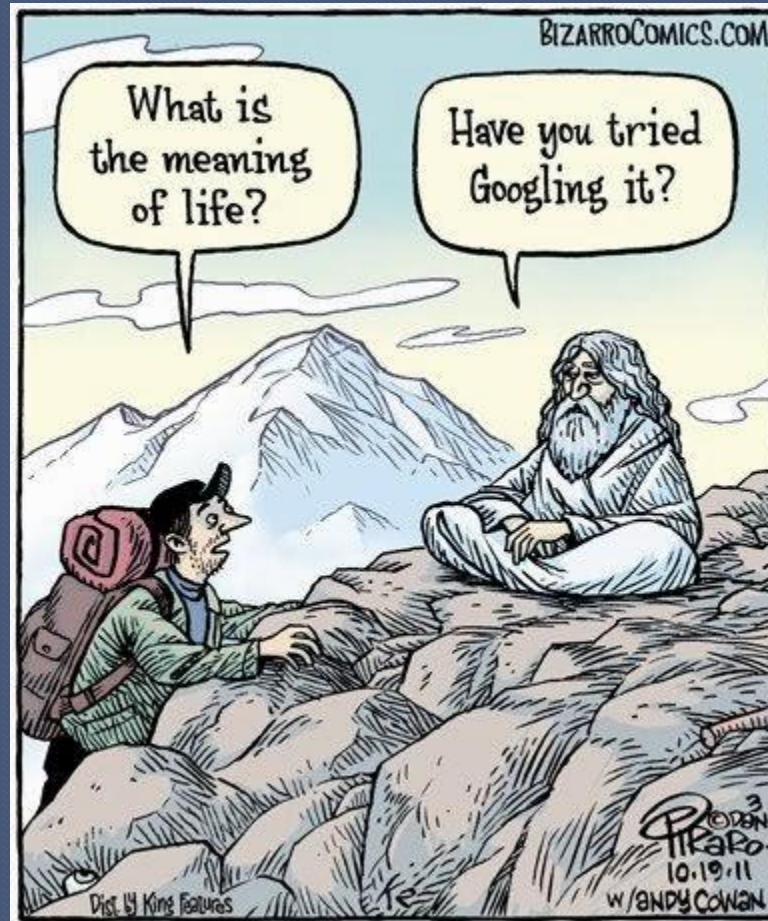
Existentialism

- It concerns:
 - The meaning of the individual
 - Freedom
 - Living an authentic life
 - Alienation
 - Mortality



-
- ◉ Is it inevitable in the modern age?
 - ◉ Within our post-industrial, technological “sophisticated” society...
 - ◉ Do we now feel that we have a loss of individuality?
 - ◉ Is there pressure to conform?
 - ◉ Is there threat to human freedom?

Where does the idea of Existentialism stem from?



- ◉ It was particularly during World War II, when Europe found itself faced in a crisis, faced with death and destruction, that the existentialist movement began to flourish.
- ◉ It was popularized in France in the 1940s



Existentialism

- ◉ Throughout the 1960s Humanism and Existentialism began to merge
- ◉ Humanism was a decidedly American concept
- ◉ Advocated that: **Humans have unique inherent capabilities**
- ◉ Supported and realised and permitted to reveal true emotions

Existential worldview

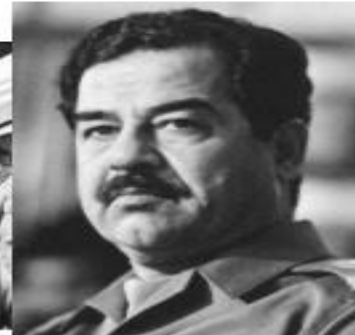
- ◉ People can choose what they become
- ◉ Responsible for choices made and the direction they choose
- ◉ Experiences and understanding are important
- ◉ Advocates that “existence precedes essence”

Existential Worldview

Existence Precedes Essence

THIS MEANS THAT MAN IS

1. IDENTIFIED BY HIS ACTIONS
2. THAT HE IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS ACTIONS



Existential Worldview

- ◉ An individual's essence is defined by that individual
- ◉ The way the individual creates identity is through the way they create or live their life.
- ◉ “Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards” – *Jean-Paul Sartre*

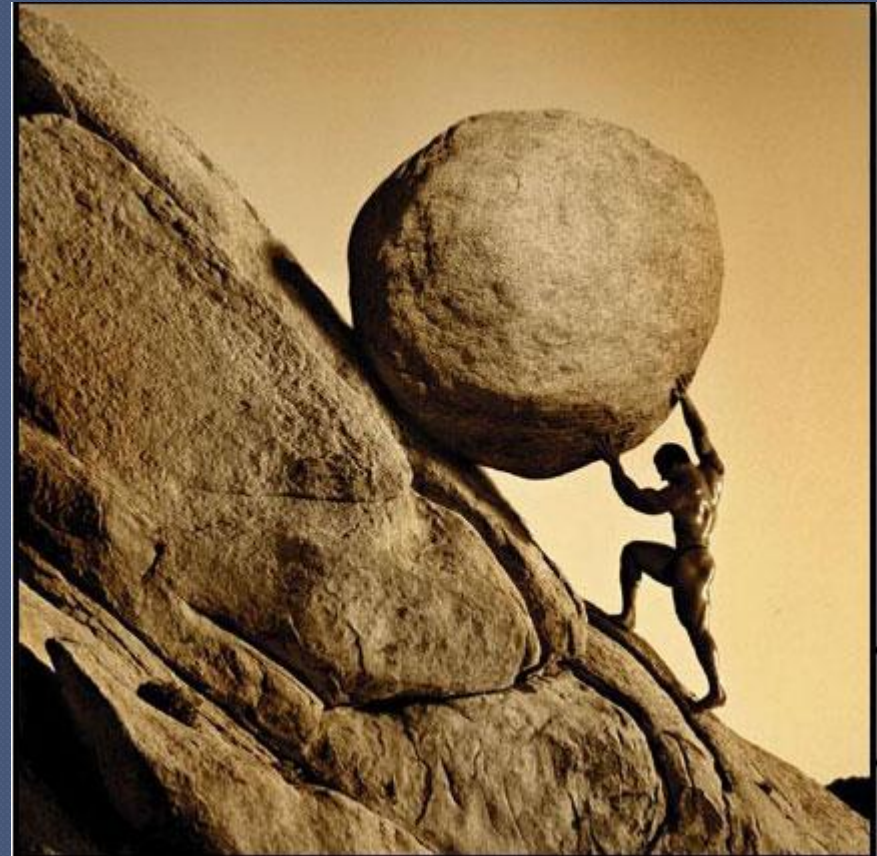
Existential Worldview

- Existentialists insist that personal experience and acting on one's own is essential in arriving at the truth
- Thus, an individual's understanding of a situation that a person is involved in is superior (and more truthful) to the understanding of a detached, objective observer



Existential Worldview

- ◉ Instead the existentialist says that life is ABSURD
- ◉ Nothing can explain or rationalise human existence
- ◉ The efforts of man to find meaning in his life will fail, because, life has no meaningful purpose
- ◉ Humans exist in a possibly meaningless, irrational universe and any search for order will bring them into direct conflict with the universe



Existentialism:



Existentialism: What's the point?

- ◉ The “point” is that something (an object or simply living one's life) must have a higher purpose to justify it
- ◉ However, for that higher purpose to have a point, then it too, must have an even higher purpose
- ◉ So you can see, that every purpose, must have a higher purpose, must have a higher purpose, ad nauseum

(Latin

To a disgusting or ridiculous degree; to the point of nausea

Existentialism: What's the Point?

- ⦿ These chains of justification never come to an end, so nothing can be considered the ultimate or transcendent purpose
- ⦿ And even if something did come to an end, it will not satisfy us
- ⦿ Rather than not caring, the true existentialist cares deeply. Why? Because everything is for a higher purpose

Existentialism: Choice and Commitment?

- ◉ Humans have freedom to choose
- ◉ Each individual makes choices that create his or her own nature
- ◉ Because we choose, we must accept risk and responsibility for wherever our commitments take us

Existentialism: Choice and Commitment

- ◉ How it works...
- ◉ So, if I cross the road and get hit by a bus, that's my fault?
- ◉ I did not make the bus hit me
- ◉ I did not make a choice to be flattened!

Existentialism: Choice and Commitment

- ◉ I did make the choice to get up that morning, take a walk, step into that road, put one foot in front of the other and place myself dead on in front of that enormous, moving vehicle
- ◉ You made the choice to be in that place and that time
- ◉ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=siR5HeDdWHc>
- ◉ *“A human being is absolutely free and absolutely responsible. Anguish is the result.” Jean-Paul Sartre*

Existentialism: Dread and Anxiety

- ◉ Dread is a feeling of general apprehension. Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher interpreted it as God's way of calling each individual to make a commitment to a personally valid way of life
- ◉ Anxiety stems from our understanding and recognition of the total freedom of choice that confronts us every moment, and the individual's confrontation with nothingness



Existentialism: Alienation and Estrangement

- ◉ Feeling of being a stranger in the world
- ◉ Creator of our own reality
- ◉ No one can help you make sense of our existence
- ◉ We only exist right now, right here.



Core Theorists of 19th and 20th Centuries

- Soren Kierkegaard
- Friedrich Nietzsche
- Jean-Paul Sartre

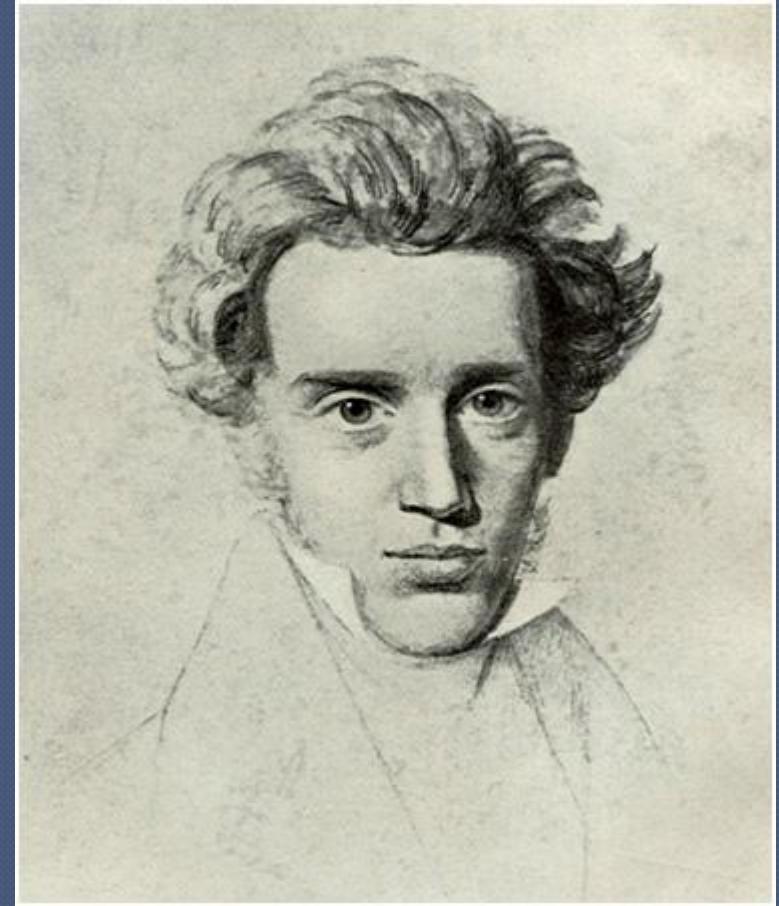


Theorists:

- ◉ An existentialist could either be a religious moralist, agnostic relativist, or an amoral atheist.
- ◉ Kierkegaard, a religious philosopher,
- ◉ Nietzsche, an anti-Christian,
- ◉ Sartre, an atheist, credited for his work and writings about existentialism.
- ◉ Sartre is noted for bringing the most international attention to existentialism in the 20th century.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)

- ◉ Born in Copenhagen, Denmark.
- ◉ Generally thought to be founder of existentialism.
- ◉ Kierkegaard thought that the individual, the personal, the subjective aspects of human life are the most important.



Kierkegaard cont..

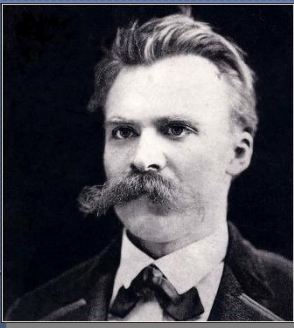
- ◉ Most important human activity is decision-making: through our choices, we create our lives and become ourselves.
- ◉ Scientific objectivity is dangerous: reveals facts and truths but not the truth. Felt people were too dependent on experts to point out way to salvation or personal growth.

-
- ⦿ Authenticity results when an individual lives honestly and courageously in the moment without refuge in excuses, and without reliance on groups or institutions for meaning or purpose.
 - ⦿ In-authenticity results when the nature and needs of the individual are ignored, denied or made less important than institutions, abstractions, or groups.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)



- “God is dead.”
- Believed life is meaningless, full of suffering and striving; the universe is indifferent to human suffering; still, he believed life is all there is and that we should live life to the fullest and get all we can out of it.
- Question for Nietzsche: How do we live a full life in a godless, meaningless world?
- Because there is no God, the morals and values that we attribute to God are instead human creations; therefore, we are free to choose whatever values it is in our interests to have.



Nietzsche (cont.):

- For Nietzsche what we should value is the “will to power” or the drive to reach our full potential. The human being who reaches his full potential is a super-human-being or “superman.”
- Accepting this value will lead to great human achievement and allow the gifted self-fulfillment and personal happiness. Although it may lead to conflicts, these should be welcomed as should the destruction of the weak.

Existentialism

What meaning can you find in the following quote?

“We are
condemned to be
free.”

~Sartre.

Sartre cont...

- ◉ According to Sartre, man is free to make his own choices, but is "condemned" to be free.
- ◉ We did not create ourselves. Even though people are put on Earth without their consent, we must choose and act freely from every situation we are in.
- ◉ Everything we do is a result of being free because we have choice.

Sartre cont...

- ◉ The only choice we do not have is that of having choices.
- ◉ Not only are we condemned to be free because we did not choose to exist, but we are also condemned to be free because we are the only thing that exists that has to be responsible for all of our actions.

Existentialism

- ◉ However, how do we know that God doesn't have everything determined for us and just leads us to believe that we are free?
- ◉ The truth is that we don't know, and won't until we leave this earth. It is now up to us to decide if our freedom is to be valued, and to choose the way we want to use our freedom.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980):



- Born in Paris; internationally known philosopher, novelist, playwright. Awarded Nobel Prize in literature in 1964; turned it down.
- Existence precedes essence: We have no “given nature;” we become who we are through freedom of choice and moral responsibility.

-
- We are born into existence that has no divine purpose; life is often absurd or horrible and the only true values are the ones we create for ourselves.
 - “Bad faith”: when people are too terrified to face the freedom and responsibility of choice and revert to old existing norms and rules (religious).
 - “Commitment”: Choosing and living in accord with the choice.



Jean-Paul Sartre (cont.):

- WWII: Joined the French army in 1939. Captured and imprisoned by Germans for nine months. Released for poor health; contributed to Sartre's belief that evil is not an abstraction; it is real and concrete.
- Any attempt to rationalise or deny evil fails: an ordered universe governed by a loving, powerful God is not possible; the universe is indifferent to us. Science is not a certainty given that concentration camps were both "scientific" and "rationally ordered." Even the order of Nature is a delusion; nature does not care about us.
- Belief in these ideas are attempts to evade the awesomeness of choice.

Summary

- All existentialists are concerned with the study of being
- An existentialist believes that a person's life is nothing but the sum of the life he has shaped for himself

Summary

- ◉ At every moment it is always his own free will choosing how to act
- ◉ He is responsible for his actions, which limit future action
- ◉ Even if God does exist, He does not reveal to men the meaning of their lives

Summary

- ◉ Honesty with oneself is the most important value
- ◉ Every decision must be weighed in light of all the consequences of that action...

Readings

- Yalom, I. D. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Cooper, M. 2003. *Existential Therapies*. London: Sage e-book Chapter 1 & 2
- Clifton Fadiman, ed., *Living Philosophies: The Reflections of Some Eminent Men and Women of Our Time*, New York: Simon Schuster, 1931.