

Evaluation of existentialism theories



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Existentialism is a division of philosophy focused on the explanation of life and how we, as people, live in the world. Throughout an individual's life, they make decisions that affect their overall existence. Existentialists are firm in their belief that these individuals must make life choices that break the “chains” that society's rules place on them. This branch of philosophy gives careful thought to a person's independence, choices that they make having pressure and ramifications, self-control and competency being vital to their lives, society being artificial and its' rules being random, and worldly desire being vain. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “The term was explicitly adopted as a self-description by Jean-Paul Sartre, and through the wide dissemination of the postwar literary and philosophical output of Sartre and his associates—notably Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Albert Camus—existentialism became identified with a cultural movement that flourished in Europe in the 1940s and 1950s.”. Therefore, existentialism was an idea that came to be through the influence of numerous existentialists that believed there was more to a human being than what physical sciences like psychology can teach us about them. The concepts of “mind” and “body” cannot be explained by the physical sciences which provide information about the mechanics of the human body and its' behavior. These concepts are theoretical and solely based on ideas and perception of human life.

Friedrich Nietzsche was a German philosopher and an extremely influential existentialist, also known as the “Father of Nihilism”. He was born October 15, 1844 in Röcken, Saxony, Prussia (now Germany) and lead a life bursting with education and brilliance. Nietzsche believed that God was dead;

therefore, life was futile. Along with this, he did not believe in truth or merit and excelled in distinguishing truth from opinion. Nietzsche thought that *gut* (“good”), *schlecht* (“bad”), and *böse* (“evil”), kept the world in timeless existence and that individuals only lived once. This implying that they should live their short lives to their fullest potential while loving and embracing self and life. He impacted the lives of many other philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and novelists with his works such as: Thus spoke Zarathustra, The Gay Science, The Birth of Tragedy, Beyond Good and Evil, On the Genealogy of Morals, Twilight of the Idols, The Case of Wagner, The Antichrist, The Will to Power, Ecce Homo, and countless others.

Soren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher, theologian, and cultural critic known as the “Father of Existentialism”. Kierkegaard was born May 5, 1813 in Copenhagen, Denmark and wrote numerous intellectual works including: Fear and Trembling, Either Or, The Sickness Unto Death, Philosophical Fragments, The Concept of Anxiety, Prefaces, and Repetition. Although Soren did not make appearances in church, he believed that a person’s relationship with God should be independent and not hidden by the involvement of the church. Later in life, he insisted that the church was corrupt by nonreligious/governmental parties despite the clergy’s reluctance. Kierkegaard said, “The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.” to show the intimacy of ones relationship with their God and how prayer plays a major role in the individual’s faith. He suggested that there were three stages of life, one of them being “the religious” and the other two, the aesthetic and the ethical.

Jean-Paul Sartre was a French philosopher, novelist, and playwright awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature to which he declined. He was born June 21, 1905 in Paris, France, where he later became involved in political activities. Sartre wrote: *Nausea*, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, *Being and Nothingness*, *The Words*, *The Wall*, *The Problem of Method*, and many other influential works. The reason he declined the Nobel Prize was his view that a writer should “ refuse to let himself be transformed into an institution.” according to Britannica. Jean-Paul once said “ We are our choices.” which represents his belief of freedom and the ability to say “ yes” or “ no” which is the chance given to all individuals that are “ free”. He thinks that it’s up to a person to exercise their freedom without overlooking their existence as a fact.

Simone de Beauvoir was not only a French philosopher and feminist, but Jean-Paul Sartre’s “ lover”. She was born January 9, 1908 in Paris, France. She’s the writer of: *The Second Sex*, *The Woman Destroyed*, *The Mandarins*, *La Vieillesse*, *She Came to Stay*, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, *All Men are Mortal*, and other books. Her relationship with Sartre was a romantic one, but they were both able to see other people and never lives together. De Beauvoir dedicated her time to writing about aging and dying, influenced by the treatment of elderly in society and her mother’s death. Around the end of her career, she wrote: *A Very Easy Death*, *Old Age*, and *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*. Simone became known during her era as an extremely prominent feminist icon famously claiming, “ One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”.

Albert Camus was famous for being a French-Algerian philosopher, author and journalist. He was born November 7, 1913 in Mondavi, French Algeria
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where he studied philosophy and began his political involvement. As a critic of communist theory, Jean-Paul Sartre and him had a disagreement after publishing political commentary about World War II. He wrote: *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Fall*, *The Rebel*, *The Guest*, and other literary pieces. Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. He believed human life is meaningless and strongly rejected religion as a whole. Albert never referred to himself as an existentialist, rather an absurdist, but he is considered an existentialist due to the perspective he takes within his works.

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