



Existentialism For Dummies

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Have you ever wondered what the phrase “God is dead” means? You’ll find out in *Existentialism For Dummies*, a handy guide to Nietzsche, Sartre, and Kierkegaard’s favorite philosophy. See how existentialist ideas have influenced everything from film and literature to world events and discover whether or not existentialism is still relevant today.

You’ll find an introduction to existentialism and understand how it fits into the history of philosophy. This insightful guide will expose you to existentialism’s ideas about the absurdity of life and the ways that existentialism guides politics, solidarity, and respect for others. There’s even a section on religious existentialism. You’ll be able to review key existential themes and writings. Find out how to:

- * Trace the influence of existentialism
- * Distinguish each philosopher’s specific ideas
- * Explain what it means to say that “God is dead”
- * See culture through an existentialist lens
- * Understand the existentialist notion of time, finitude, and death
- * Navigate the absurdity of life
- * Master the art of individuality

Complete with lists of the ten greatest existential films, ten great existential aphorisms, and ten common misconceptions about existentialism, *Existentialism For Dummies* is your one-stop guide to a very influential school of thought.

Existentialism For Dummies Details

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From Reader Review Existentialism For Dummies for online ebook

Shaimaa Suleiman says

I like to think of this book as an appetizer; it makes you yearn for more. I have not read it thoroughly, though. It sort of became a bit repetitive and I thought I'd had enough!

Praxedes says

A friend and colleague of mine, Jonathan Vick, recommended I peruse these pages. Like Jonathan, I consider myself an existentialist. I don't always agree with the tenets (i.e. I choose not to dwell on anxiety) but overall this school of thought impels me to become a better human being.

Although this book was well-written, carefully researched, and easy to understand, it left out the beautiful rapturous side of being an existentialist. Living in existentialism is inspiring, lyrical, filled with grandeur and purpose. Very little of that is reflected in this book.

Imagine an essay about Disney World which described the physical and logistical aspects of it but only lightly touched on how children react to it. It may be only one component of the Disney experience, but it is a crucial one.

Crystal Scurr says

About calibre of other "Dummy" books I've read. A good refresher for the points I remembered but "lost" over the years. Feel more comfortable talking about existentialism again. That isn't a bad thing!

Navy says

Very accessible introduction and explanation of the concepts of existentialism, by far the easiest to navigate as well. Highly recommended for those getting into existentialism as this book does very good job as being an "appetizer".

Mere Fantasy says

Good review

J. Allen says

Eminently readable, light-hearted, while still being informative. By design, information is repeated, which can get a bit tedious. I suppose it helps ram home the content, however. If you can't spare the time and effort to decipher Camus, Sartre, and Heidegger (and who can?) it's well worth picking this up.

Joe says

I liked this at first, and then I didn't. It meanders on and, I felt, could have benefitted from a different structure. They spend a huge portion of the book (perhaps the largest chapter) talking about the importance of mood in existentialist philosophy. While important, I feel it's certainly not deserving of the attention they give it. Something, something...beating a dead horse. The whole second half of the book falls into that trap, which is a shame, because the first half is pretty on-point as a general overview if you're looking for background information as you dive into the actual writings of Sartre, de Beauvoir, Camus, and others. Oh well.

Nativeabuse says

Read this awhile back, can't remember when, I was really young though, and the idea of meaningless blew my mind and made me depressed for years. After reading this book, was when it first clicked with me.

I don't think I even finished it, I had it in Ebook form. Probably really mediocre as an introduction to existentialism unless you are a complete idiot like I was Sophomore year of high school.

Jennifer says

good - very readable -- got the overview plus some details I was hoping for -- have the basis for following up with specific authors/thinkers

Kesha says

Good read made reevaluate a lot of my perceptions.

Michael says

This book was the equivalent of taking the blue pill from Morpheus in the movie The Matrix. Not pleasant, but very necessary if I'm going to be the author of my own life.

"Live dangerously." --Fredrick Nietzsche

Scott says

I had no idea existentialism was so complex. I'm glad I started with a "for dummies" book. The authors introduce the concepts through the perspective and writings of the major existentialist authors: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Camus. Some of the content was very thought-inspiring. I found the following quote to be quite profound and I pondered it for days:

" Kierkegaard, in his Concept of Anxiety, talked about his understanding of the story of the fall from grace, or the story of how Adam and Eve lost their place in the Garden of Eden. The story tells us that God commanded Adam not to eat the apples from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, saying that if he did, he would surely die. Of course, Adam ate the apple. Typically, people explain this story by suggesting that Adam intentionally chose what was evil, so they understand the temptation that drove Adam to be the apple itself and the knowledge that it contained.

Kierkegaard disagreed. As far as he saw it, Adam didn't know what good and evil were yet; he'd have to eat from the tree to find that out. So it's odd to say that he was tempted by evil if he couldn't have any knowledge of it until he ate the apple. Instead, Kierkegaard wanted to understand Adam's transgression in a different way. As he saw it, the prohibition from God (which Adam also didn't totally understand, because he didn't know what death was either!) awakened anxiety in Adam. The anxiety was unsettling for Adam because in it, he was awakened out of his innocence (his immediacy, or his robotic routine) and into an insight of his own possibilities as a free being. Specifically, God's prohibition allowed Adam to become conscious of the fact that he could become the kind of person who doesn't do what God tells him to do. He didn't understand what being that kind of person would mean; he'd never done it before, and it was never really even possible. The prohibition made it possible. With it came the mystery of possibility, the fact that some form of existence was waiting for him to fulfill it if he wanted to, which was extremely attractive - and repulsive - to him.

Essentially, Adam sensed the possibility of being something other than what he presently was. Thus, for Kierkegaard, anxiety in the face of his own possibility is what made his own transgression possible. In eating from the tree, Adam didn't choose what was evil; instead, he made the choice, or rather a leap, to exist in a new way that he didn't understand. In fact, in some Jewish interpretations of the story, this very possibility - this creation of an Adam who can visualize himself as someone who can follow (through faith) or reject (through sin) God -- was God's intention in the first place when he gave the prohibition to Adam!"

Existentialists try to find the self by tearing down artificial constructs that, though they may be comforting, cause us to be inauthentic. Finding the self is not the path of least resistance and requires that you remove yourself from the flock. Consider this excerpt titled "Socrates the crowd-hater"

"If you want to live in the crowd, you need a few skills. You need to be good at appeasing those around you. You have to make them feel good about themselves. You need to be a good social chameleon, to be sure your way of acting assures others that you're one of them. If that means moving from one belief or behavior to another in different situations, do it. You need to become what the ancient Greeks called a sophist. Sophists were notoriously uninterested in truth and cared more about persuasion and rhetoric. Socrates lived as an antisophist, and he paid the ultimate price for doing it. Socrates avoided crowds and preferred to speak only to individuals. He felt, as Kierkegaard did, that truth wasn't in the domain of the crowd but belonged only to individuals. In fact, Socrates felt that individuals needed to free themselves from the crowd's alleged wisdom and learn to approach existence truthfully. In spurning the crowd in this way, he made lots of enemies, some of whom put him to death on false charges. In fact, in his defense trial (described in Plato's Apology), Socrates told the Athenian assembly - the crowd that would judge him - that he would not treat them in the ways crowds like to be treated. He told them that he would not flatter them and play to their cowardice."

Kierkegaard's Fire Chief speaks to the message of crowd cowardice:

"When a fire happens, he says, it's serious business. The Fire Chief knows that when he arrives at the scene, the surrounding crowd will be brandishing useless pitchforks and buckets. They're not serious about the fire, but they want to play at being serious because that's what crowds do. At best, they're a nuisance to the firefighters, but at worst, they're dangerous and get in the way. As a result, the Fire Chief rightly uses the police to disperse the crowd.

In developing this analogy, Kierkegaard is asking a simple question: Are you willing to take your own existence seriously, as the Fire Chief treats the business of putting out fires? If so, you'll have to make passionate commitments about how to live. Of course, when the crowd hears that you're addressing how to live your life, it will immediately show up to prove that it takes the issues under consideration very seriously, and it'll demand that you pay attention to it as proof of your own seriousness. However, just as in the scene of the fire, the crowd is merely waving figurative pitchforks; it's dangerous to you in your quest because it wants you to live in untruth.

What will you say as the Fire Chief in charge of your own life? You can't call the police (unless the crowd is waving real pitchforks). You have to send them away on your own if you plan on living in a meaningful way. Will you? Do you have the courage?"

Some people like to choose friends who are pretty much exactly like them. They look for clones. Nietzsche says these people look to surround themselves with neighbors. Nietzsche despises neighbor-seeking because it means looking to be surrounded by people who don't challenge you. Nobles don't do that, because they always seek to live their identities by exposing them to conflict and challenge. A big part of existentialism is becoming noble by finding your own way.

I think I'd like to read "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" to learn more about existentialism.

C says

"Bukowski arranged for his tombstone to read simply, "Don't try." Acceptance or surrender? Maybe a bit of both."

Eva M. says

Loved it. Definitely worth reading, this book will make you question a lot of things and also will leave you anxious thinking. Enjoy!

Farah says

"A Reference for the Rest of Us!"

Having been curious about the philosophical movement and only knowing about it vaguely as it incorporates itself into our lives through film and literature and abstractly as I find myself asking the questions that existentialism takes upon its hands to answer. I decided it was time for another "For Dummies" book that I figured would be the go-to-book where everything I needed to know about existentialism and nothing less

would be. But I soon found out that it would not suffice and my curiosity would suffer (and probably even my need for answers - according to what I now know of the movement)- and so I cannot stop here. The book felt like a class - and now I feel more comfortable on tackling the original texts of literature by the giants of Existentialism and thus I feel much obliged to the parts of ten that sealed the book with a list of good books to get you started.
