sound and echo, and the things which are much valued in life are empty and rotten and trifling, and [like] little dogs biting one another, and little children quarrelling, laughing, and then straightway weeping. But fidelity and modesty and justice and truth are fled

Up to Olympus from the wide-spread earth.
Hesiod, Works, etc., v. 197.

What then is there which still detains thee here? if the objects of sense are easily changed and never stand still, and the organs of perception are dull and easily receive false impressions; and the poor soul itself is an exhalation from blood. But to have good repute amid such a world as this is an empty thing. Why then dost thou not wait in tranquility for thy end, whether it is extinction or removal to another state? And until that time comes, what is sufficient? Why, what else than to venerate the gods and bless them, and to do good to men, and to practise tolerance and self-restraint; but as to everything which is beyond the limits of the poor flesh and breath, to remember that this is neither thine nor in thy power.

34. Thou canst pass thy life in an equable flow of happiness, if thou canst go by the right way, and think and act in the right way. These two things are common both to the soul of God and to the soul of man, and to the soul of every rational being, not to be hindered by another; and to hold good to consist in the disposition to justice and the practice of it, and in this to let thy desire find its termination.

35. If this is neither my own badness, nor an effect of my own badness, and the common weal is not injured, why am I troubled about it? and what is the harm to the common weal?

36. Do not be carried along inconsiderately by the appearance of things, but give help [to all] according to thy ability and their fitness; and if they should have sustained loss in matters which are indifferent, do not imagine this to be a damage. For it is a bad habit. But as the old man, when he went away, asked back his foster-child's top, remembering that it was a top, so do thou in this case also.

When thou art calling out on the Rostra, hast thou forgotten, man, what these things are? Yes; but they are objects of great concern to these people—wilt thou too then be made a fool for these things? I was once a fortunate man, but I lost it, I know not how. But fortunate means that a man has assigned to himself a good fortune; and a good fortune is good disposition of the soul, good emotions, good actions.

NOTES

1. This sentence is imperfect or corrupt, or both.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CRITIQUE AND ANALYSIS

1. What lifestyle does Marcus Aurelius recommend to us? Is it the one we ought to prefer? Why or why not?
2. Marcus Aurelius says that, "Things themselves touch not the soul, not in the least degree." What does this mean exactly? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
3. What are some contemporary obstacles to stoic serenity? How best should we deal with these obstacles?

EXISTENTIALISM: BORN FREE, LET ME BE ME

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that some prefer to see as an attitude or outlook rather than as a formal philosophy. We regard it as a philosophy of life for our purposes here. Existentialism is difficult to define precisely because there doesn't exist any common body of doctrine to which all existentialists would subscribe. For example, within the existential movement, you find **atheists** and **theists** (primarily Christian and Jewish), as well as **political conservatives, Marxists, humanitarians,** at least one **fascist,** and those who are

"Whatever its ultimate meaning, the universe into which we have been thrown cannot satisfy our reason—let us have the courage to admit it once and for all."

GABRIEL MARCEL

anti-political. Some are optimistic, while others tend toward pessimism. Certain existentialists have emphasized issues of **freedom** in their writing, whereas others have focused on **absurdity** or on the world of the **interpersonal.** To complicate things even further, some philosophers associated with existentialism predate the use of the term itself, and others simply refuse to be called existentialists at all. To belong to a "school of thought" and be labeled as a member, or to subordinate one's individuality and adhere to some shared philosophical doctrine, would not be very "existential." You'll understand why shortly.

Methods

Existentialism adopts some **unorthodox methods** of investigation for probing the human condition; consequently, some don't see existentialism as a legitimate philosophy. Existential insights are often best communicated in

PHILOSOPHICAL PROFILE

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE AND SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

Existentialists

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Jean-Paul Sartre was a famous novelist, playwright, and major philosopher of the twentieth century. He virtually held court over French intellectual life for a couple of decades. After completing a high school diploma, he began six years of study at the Sorbonne in Paris for his "agregation," the exam that would launch his academic career as a philosophy teacher. In 1928, Sartre failed the agregation, coming last in his class. This setback resulted, fortunately, in his meeting Simone de Beauvoir. Sartre and de Beauvoir were to develop a loving friendship that would last until his death. Sartre's major philosophical opus is *Being and Nothingness;* his literary works include *Nausea, No Exit,* and *Saint Genet.*

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR

Simone de Beauvoir was born in 1908. She was educated at the Sorbonne, where she studied philosophy. De Beauvoir enjoyed a productive and prosperous career as a philosophy professor and novelist, perhaps the foremost in her time. Until 1949, de Beauvoir was primarily recognized as a talented writer and close companion to Jean-Paul Sartre. She read and critiqued most of Sartre's works. In that same year, the release of *The Second Sex* made her arguably one of the most important and controversial theorists of the twentieth century. De Beauvoir provided us with a conception of existential ethics, something Sartre never did. Though she did greatly emphasize freedom, like Sartre she paired it with morality, making her own original and important contribution to philosophical research. See her *Ethics of Ambiguity.* Other works by de Beauvoir include *The Coming of Age, A Very Easy Death, The Blood of Others, America Day by Day,* and *Marquis de Sade.* De Beauvoir passed away in 1986.

aphorisms, dialogues, parables, and other **literary forms** such as novels and plays. Poignant existential statements are often found in poetic verse and in visual art, and not necessarily in the context of systematic rational argument and debate. Also, given that prominent existentialists like **Jean-Paul Sartre** practiced his philosophy in Parisian cafés, far removed from the hallowed halls of academe and the lecture podium of the university professor, many initially regarded existentialism as little more than a passing fad. The unorthodox existential approach to philosophical inquiry is certainly different from traditional philosophy and often the source of much confusion and bewilderment. Nonetheless, existentialism remains a useful umbrella term under which it is possible to gather together a number of **recurrent themes** and philosophical preoccupations.

It is undeniable that the existential movement has had its effects on contemporary society, and that its profound insights can have personal relevance. Some basic existential questions pertaining to you include the following: *"What am I to do?" "To what can I commit my life?" "What does my life mean?"* To determine if, or to what extent, you possibly suffer from a sense of meaninglessness in your life and are unable to answer the last question, complete the *Know Thyself* self-diagnostic entitled "The Purpose in Life Test–Abbreviated Version" developed by James C. Crumbaugh and Leonard Maholick (1969).

KNOW THYSELF

The Purpose in Life Test (Abbreviated Version)

BACKGROUND AND AIMS

"The Purpose in Life Test" is an attitude scale based on the insights of the psychiatrist Viktor Frankl and his system of existential counseling known as "Logotherapy." *Logos* is a Greek term denoting the idea of meaning, so his work is a kind of meaning therapy, helping people to escape the "existential vacuum"—a sense of futility and emptiness that pervades the lives of so many individuals today. According to Frankl, the primary motive in people is the "will-to-meaning," in contrast to Sigmund Freud's "will to pleasure" and Alfred Adler and Friedrich Nietzsche's "will-to-power" (see Chapter 5). Frankl believes that human beings possess within themselves the urge to find meaning and purpose in life. Failure to do so results in a form of existential frustration, or even more seriously, in "noögenic neurosis"—a breakdown created by a compounding of neurotic symptoms with an inability to find meaning in human existence. It should be noted that the existential vacuum is not a neurosis or abnormality as such, but rather a pervasive human condition resulting from modern society's tendency toward dehumanization. Only in neurotically predisposed people does the more serious noögenic neurosis develop. "The Purpose in Life Test" helps to detect the presence of an existential vacuum. Other clinical tests and procedures are required to identify the more serious presence of noögenic neurosis.

Purpose of Life Test (PIL)

JAMES C. CRUMBAUGH, PH.D, AND LEONARD T. MAHOLICK, M.D.

PART A

For each of the following statements, circle the number that would be most nearly true for you. Note that the numbers always extend from one extreme feeling to its opposite kind of feeling. "Neutral" implies no judgment either way; try to use this rating as little as possible.

1. I am usually:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
completely bored			(neutral)			exuberant, enthusiastic

2. Life to me seems:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
always exciting			(neutral)			completely routine

3. In life I have:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
no goals or aims at all			(neutral)			very clear goals and aims

4. My personal existence is:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
utterly meaningless, without purpose			(neutral)			very purposeful and meaningful

5. Every day is:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
constantly new			(neutral)			exactly the same

6. If I could choose, I would:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
prefer never to have been born			(neutral)			like nine more lives just like this one

7. After retiring, I would:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
do some of the exciting things I have always wanted to			(neutral)			loaf completely the rest of my life

8. In achieving life goals I have:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
made no progress whatsoever			(neutral)			progressed to complete fulfillment

9. My life is:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
empty, filled only with despair			(neutral)			running over with exciting good things

10. If I should die today, I would feel that my life has been:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
very worthwhile exciting			(neutral)			completely worthless

11. In thinking of my life, I:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
often wonder why I exist			(neutral)			always see a reason for my being here

12. As I view the world in relation to my life, the world:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
completely confuses me			(neutral)			fits meaningfully with my life

13. I am a:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
very irresponsible person			(neutral)			very responsible person

14. Concerning people's freedom to make their own choices, I believe people are:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
absolutely free to make all life choices			(neutral)			completely bound by limitations of heredity and environment

15. With regard to death, I am:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
prepared and unafraid			(neutral)			unprepared and frightened

16. With regard to suicide, I have:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
thought of it seriously as a way out			(neutral)			never given it a second thought

17. I regard my ability to find a meaning, purpose, or mission in life as:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
very great			(neutral)			practically none

18. My life is:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
in my hands and I am in control of it			(neutral)			out of my hands and controlled by external factors

19. Facing my daily task is:

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
a source of pleasure and satisfaction			(neutral)			a painful and boring experience

20. I have discovered:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
no mission or purpose in life			(neutral)			clear-cut goals and a satisfying life purpose

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INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The Purpose in Life Test has established norms for scoring which, unfortunately, cannot be included here. These norms help you to determine more precisely if you are indecisive, if you clearly lack meaning, or if there is a definite presence of meaning in your life at this time. Generally speaking, the higher your score, the greater the meaning in your life. As you can see from the test itself, the highest possible score is 140. Add the numerical values for all 20 questions and compare your score. Remember, your raw scores should really be compared with established norms to accurately assess the presence of meaning. Your raw scores are for preliminary consideration only. (To obtain the full test with its norms for scoring, contact Psychometric Affiliates, Box 807, Murfreesboro, TN., 37133-0807)

Philosophers Associated with Existentialism

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) is generally regarded as the father of existentialism, though elements of existential thinking can be found in the works of earlier writers such as **Michel de Montaigne** (1533–1592) and **Blaise Pascal** (1623–1662). When discussing existentialism, other notable names certainly come to mind: **Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844–1900), **Karl Jaspers** (1883–1969), **Gabriel Marcel** (1889–1973), and of course, **Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905–1980), who coined the term in 1946 in his famous essay (variously translated from the French as) *The Humanism of Existentialism.* **Simone de Beauvoir,** lover and colleague of Sartre, was certainly a significant existentialist too. She critically read and approved many of Sartre's works and became a celebrated writer herself. A noted feminist, she authored *The Second Sex* and *The Ethics of Ambiguity.* **Martin Heidegger's** (1899–1976) works are often discussed under existentialism, given that he exerted such an important influence on it. Nevertheless, he expressly indicated that he wished to be disassociated

from Sartre.[9] **Albert Camus,** winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957, is usually tagged with the existentialist label as well, though he always refused it.[10] A good example of existential fiction is his *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger* or *The Outsider*). Also see **Fyodor Dostoyevsky's** *Notes from Underground* (1864) and **Franz Kafka's** *The Trial* (1925) for further examples of existential literary works. The more usual philosophical methods of logic and rational analysis are covered in the next chapter.

Existentialism as a Revolt

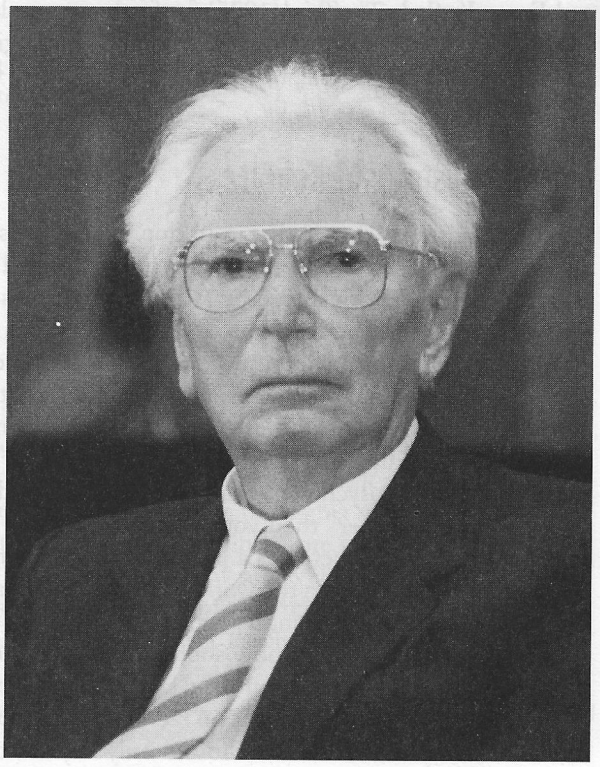
If existentialism is unorthodox in its approach, this is largely because it represents a revolt against **rationality** and **philosophical system-building.** Perhaps one commonality shared by all existentialists is the belief that human existence cannot be dissected into discrete categories and neatly packaged as an interlocking system. Certainly, existentialists appreciate the fact that reason and rational inquiry are appropriate to mathematics and the natural sciences, but that such approaches are able to produce only disappointing vague generalities regarding real live persons. If you've ever read about a personality theory in your psychology class, for example, and then asked, "But how does this apply to me?" then you've experienced the existential disappointment I'm referring to here. As a protest against rationalism and the kinds of elaborate systems found in the works of thinkers such as **Plato** and **Hegel,** existentialists argue that the individual self is lost in **abstract universals.** As far back as Plato, many rational philosophers have held the view that everyday experience cannot provide a secure and sound foundation for knowledge. Plato argued that the material world is, in fact, a shadow world of illusion, and that ultimate reality or truth can be found only beyond the experienced spatio-temporal plane in the **realm of forms** (see the section on Plato in Chapter 4, dealing with metaphysics and epistemology). From the perspective of Platonic rationality, the body is to be held in contempt, since it houses the corrupting emotions and disquieting passions. **Perception** is regarded as untrustworthy, while reason and deductive thinking are elevated to the throne. Since, for Plato, truth must be universal, immutable, and eternal, and because sense perception is notoriously inaccurate and frequently deceptive, no certainty can be found in the world of everyday experience. It should be viewed with suspicion.

From an existential perspective, unquestioned adherence to reason and rational inquiry does violence to humanity by obliterating the **uniqueness of individuals** and their **subjective experience.** If you've ever been offended because someone drew conclusions about you based on some kind of broad sociological generalization, then you've experienced first-hand existential violence committed against your uniqueness and individuality. Your being upset at being "typed" or "classed" or "scientifically figured-out" manifests the same spirit of protest that the existentialists display toward dogmatic faith in science and rationality as methods for understanding human existence.

> ***"Probably a crab would be filled with a sense of personal outrage if it could hear us class it without apology as a crustacean, and thus dispose of it. "I am no such thing," it would say, "I am myself, myself alone."***
>
> WILLIAM JAMES

VIKTOR FRANKL'S LOGOTHERAPY AND THE WILL-TO-MEANING

The late Viktor Frankl, a noted psychiatrist, adopted a number of existential insights and incorporated them into a form of psychological counseling called *logotherapy.* Like the stoics, he was able to see the overlap between psychological health and personal philosophy. During his lifetime of work, Frankl was able to identify a kind of spiritual malaise prevalent in contemporary society. He called it the *existential vacuum.* According to Frankl, we are all born with a fundamental need to make sense of the world, and we manifest this need in a will-to-meaning. Unfortunately, this basic need is often frustrated or left unsatisfied, with the result that we begin to suffer from a type of existential frustration. If this existential frustration is constant and excessive, then what results is a new type of psychological disturbance labeled noögenic neurosis (noögenic derives from the Greek, *noetic,* meaning perceptible to the mind; thinkable, as opposed to visible).



Viktor E. Frankl, M.D., Ph.D., 1905–1997, neurologist and psychiatrist; founder of Logotherapy and Existential Analysis

Frankl believed that meaninglessness comes essentially from a couple of sources. To begin with, unlike other animals, we are not governed by drives and instincts. Evolutionary biology has seen to it that we can, as autonomous beings, override biological urges. Therefore, biology no longer tells us what we must do. Secondly, in contrast to earlier times, traditions and traditional values relating to authority and the nuclear family are on the wane. What was once unquestionably valued is now oftentimes viewed with doubt and skepticism. Moral guidelines and acceptable practices are no longer clear. Therefore, we no longer know for sure what we should do. Not knowing what we must do (by force of instinct), nor knowing what we should do (according to traditional values and norms), we no longer know what we wish to do or what is truly rewarding and meaningful for us in life. The result is that we fall prey to the existential vacuum, feeling a sense of emptiness and futility.

To remedy the existential vacuum, Frankl recommends that we get beyond ourselves through a process of *self-transcendence.* He suggests we look for meaning outside of our petty egoistic preoccupations. For him, meaning is found in love, work, and potentially, though not necessarily, through suffering. It is when we invest ourselves in something other than ourselves that we find meaning. We all need a mission in life. By serving a cause greater than ourselves or by loving another, we can live a fulfilling life. Also, by overcoming misfortune or illness in our own unique style, we can lend dignity to life and transform any tragedy into a personal triumph. As Frankl points out, no animal besides man can do this. Rather than live as if we were personally entitled to happiness, Frankl says, ". . . *man should not ask what he may expect from life, but rather understand that life expects something from him.*"

Essence versus Existence

In the context of existentialism, much is made of the distinction between **essence** and **existence** and which comes first. Religious existentialists like Kierkegaard believe in God and so grant creative authority to this grand architect of the universe. If there is a God, then he (or she, if you prefer) envisioned the world and made human beings by design. To put it another way, the idea of humankind preceded the actual existence of any single human being. God knew, as it were, what human nature or the essence of humanity would be like before any real live existing beings were created. Thus, in a godly universe, essence precedes existence. A divine plan proceeded the project of producing reality. Humans were created in God's image.

In contrast to religious existentialists, atheistic ones like Jean-Paul Sartre adopt the opposite position, namely that existence precedes essence. This means that there is no all-powerful and all-knowing God that has made us who we are. All other-worldly essences are rejected. We were not born perfect, but neither were we born imperfect, stained with original sin. We are not good, nor are we evil by nature. Whatever we are, we are that by choice. To paraphrase Sartre, we are nothing else but what we make of ourselves.

The atheistic existential universe is very different from the stoic universe we learned about earlier. In the cosmology of the stoic, we found a reality that is ordered, fated, and purposeful. We are taught by the stoics to quiet the disturbing passions and to control the emotions in order to live a tranquil life in accordance with nature. Peace of mind is found not by choosing one's role (that is the task of God or the divine Logos), but by playing it well without complaint. A certain serenity can be found in the belief that the universe unfolds itself by design, and that whatever happens does so for a reason.

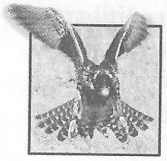
In the atheistic existential universe no such stoic comfort is to be found. Suffering serves as the origin of human consciousness and becomes the starting point for existential philosophy. Existentialists deny the thesis of *causal determinism* or fate, most clearly where psychological matters are concerned. For instance, traumatic events in your past don't necessarily "make" you behave in this way or that. What someone said cannot "force" you to become mad, glad, or sad. The values you live by are not written in the sky or somehow indelibly ingrained on your mind. How you respond to what others have said or done is a choice. Whatever has value has it only because you bestow personal worth upon it. In existential reality, nothing is good or bad in itself. Who would make it so? In a godless universe, everything is permissible, and it is you who are personally responsible for everything you think, say, feel, or do. Since existence precedes essence and there is no creator God to preside over the universe, life is therefore meaningless in itself. Rather than display rational order, life is absurd and chaotic, without purpose or design. Simply put, the universe doesn't make sense. Everything that happens is contingent and unpredictable. Thus, when a particular misfortune befalls you, it's silly to ask "why" it happened or what "meaning" is contained in the event. Being in the wrong place at the wrong time just happens—period. If there's any meaning, it is invented by you, not imposed from above. There are no hidden messages in life that some kind of divine presence transmits to you in times of struggle

and adversity. Human beings themselves are the creators of meaning. The lessons of life are self-taught.

In view of the preceding discussion, it should be clear that atheistic existentialists reject other-worldly religious realms or anything resembling Plato's picture of ultimate reality as perfect, unchanging, and comprising pure essences or forms. Existence is not somehow less real than essence for, in fact, essences don't exist—either within or separate from human reality. The psychological point is that if existence precedes essence, then we as individuals carry the burden of making meaning in life. In itself, human existence is contingent and insecure. There is no "answer" or ultimate meaning to be discovered "out there" somewhere.

Individuality and Subjective Experience

The belief that systems, universals, and general categories cannot explain the nature of human existence leads existentialists to emphasize the **uniqueness** of individuals. Though we are human, no two of us are exactly the same. Even identical twins are distinguishable by virtue of their behavioral patterns, differing beliefs, and so on. For existentialists, the fundamental drive within us is the urge to exist and to be recognized as individuals. By creating a sense of individuality, we find meaning and significance in life. To reduce human beings to the **cogito** (or thinking thing) of René Descartes is limiting and unperceptive. (For a discussion of Descartes's *Cogito,* see Chapter 4.) Human beings are not pure thinkers but existing individuals with passions, commitments, fears, hopes, and dreams. Human existence is full, vital, rich, self-conscious, and something for which we, as individuals, are personally responsible. As part of its protest against traditional rational philosophy, existentialism glorifies the individual and subjective experience. It encourages us to go our own ways and to become truly unique individuals. It also cautions us against the dehumanizing influences of modern society. In an age of mass production, mass markets, impersonal bureaucracies, personal subjugation in service to science and technology, and the pressure to follow fads and conform to others' standards and expectations, the **individual** continues to be under attack as much today as he or she was in the time of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. The fight to be yourself and express yourself in the world has never been more difficult. Existentialists would encourage you to resist being swallowed up by the crowd. They advocate that you



PHILOSOPHERS IN ACTION

Is the existentialist's preoccupation with individual uniqueness legitimate or merely reflective of some neurotic desire to be considered "special." Explain why. If the existentialist is correct that no objective reality exists and that no general statements can be made about human beings, then what are the consequences for morality? Discuss.

do not follow the herd or mindlessly go along with the masses. To do so is to rob yourself of your special uniqueness as an individual—a fatal mistake for living an authentic and genuine lifestyle, the kind in which you express yourself in a personally responsible way. In this regard, e.e. cummings writes: "*To be nobody but yourself—in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight, and never stop fighting.*"

Freedom of Choice

Another major theme of great importance to the existentialists is **freedom of choice.** For existentialists, to be conscious is to be free. The only thing we're not free about is the choice to be unfree. Even if we wish to follow the totalitarian leader or conform to the crowd, we have still "chosen" to give up our individuality and personal freedom. Some people would argue that coercive circumstances can seriously limit freedom, but for the existentialist, you can still exercise a fair degree of it, even under duress. Let's suppose, for instance, that you are held up at gunpoint by a would-be thief demanding that you surrender your wallet. Whatever you do, the consequences are precariously uncertain. Nonetheless, you still have a choice. You could give over your wallet or refuse. In a very real example much like this one, a potential victim was actually confronted in the night by a robber but refused to give up his billfold. Fortunately for him, the robber was a coward and ran away at the refusal. Of course, the innocent man could just as easily have been killed. The point is that he was ultimately free to choose. He chose to take a risk and won. (Such risks are generally not recommended!) We must therefore be careful to distinguish between having difficult choices and having no choices at all. Making a free choice at gunpoint is difficult, though not impossible.

Fortunately for most of us, the choices we have to make on a daily basis are not so dangerous. In fact, life becomes so routine sometimes, we're not even aware that we're making choices at all. When the phone rings, we automatically pick it up, or when the light turns red, we stop. Yet in both cases, it's important to note that we do have choices to make. Just because you reflexively and unthinkingly pick up the phone when it rings doesn't mean you have to do so; if you would rather be left alone, you could let it ring forever. If you are in an emergency and rushing to the hospital, you could also choose to run a red light. If securing the health and safety of someone is more important to you than concern about violating a traffic regulation, then you will choose to break the law to get to your destination quicker. Of course, if a police officer lacking compassion catches you, you may also be ticketed. Again, the point is that environmental stimuli like red lights and telephone rings don't cause your behavior or determine you in any way. You are free. Indeed, Sartre suggests that "you are condemned to be free." There is no way out of personal responsibility for your actions. The "blame-game" is therefore not something you can honestly play. You are personally accountable for everything you do.

In the existentialist's universe of **possibility** and **contingency,** human freedom is guaranteed. It is the central fact of human existence. The only authentic and genuine way of life becomes, therefore, the one chosen by the individual. Responses,

attitudes, purposes, values, feelings, beliefs, and thoughts are consciously or unthinkingly chosen by persons themselves. Saying "I did X because that's the way I was raised," or "You made me mad; that's why I'm screaming," are instances of attempted escapes from personal responsibility and hence, from freedom. If you chose not to value what someone said or did, then they couldn't "make" you mad. If you chose to reject what you were taught when growing up, then you wouldn't behave as conditioned. Even emotion is not outside the control of our wills. We are responsible for how we feel and respond to the world. When we are able to make our individual choices with full awareness that nothing else determines them for us, we are then in a position to live with **authenticity.**

One last point to be made about existential freedom involves its relationship to the concept of **negation.** Don't assume this term to imply anything evaluative or pejorative. Rather, put it into the context of existence—what is and what is not. An essential component of existential freedom is the ability to conceive of what is *not* the case, what does not yet exist. Social fairness and equality, for example, may not now exist between the genders or among the various ethnic and racial groups living in a particular society, but we can imagine what life would be like if such things did obtain. If fact, by imagining to ourselves what is not now the case, we could commit our lives to working toward making it the case. Unlike purely instinctive organisms that only react to stimuli, we can act freely, consciously, and intentionally to realize our visions, hopes, and aspirations. Consciously being able to make the possible a reality is a distinctively human characteristic. It is what makes us human. Thus, while having no escape from freedom in an absurd and contingent world may instill dread in the hearts of some, for others, this same freedom may serve as the impetus for taking personal action and living responsibly. How freedom is viewed is a choice—your choice!

Let us now consolidate our learning about the foundations of atheistic existentialism by turning to an excerpt from Sartre's *The Humanism of Existentialism.* You can also refer to a discussion of existentialist ethics in Chapter 5, where Friedrich Nietzsche's work is presented.

ORIGINAL SOURCEWORK

The Humanism of Existentialism

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

PART I

What is meant by the term *existentialism?*

Most people who use the word would be rather embarrassed if they had to explain it, since, now that the word is all the rage, even the work of a musician or painter is being called existentialist. A gossip columnist in *Clarlés* signs himself *The Existentialist,* so that by this time the word has been so stretched and has taken on so broad a meaning, that it no longer means anything at all. It seems that for want of an advanced-guard doctrine analogous to surrealism, the kind of people who

Source: Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Humanism of Existentialism.* New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1947.