

EXISTENTIALISM QUOTES

"Has a nation ever changed its gods?
(Yet they are not gods at all.)
But my people have exchanged their Glory
for worthless idols.
Be appalled at this, O heavens,
and shudder with great horror,'
declares the LORD.
'My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.'"
Jeremiah 2:11-13

"Existentialism is a doctrine that renders human life possible."
Jean Paul Sartre: **Existentialism is a Humanism**

"Existentialism is nothing else but an attempt to draw the full conclusions from a consistently atheistic position." Sartre

"Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, 'I seek God! I seek God!' As many of those who do not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. 'Why, did he get lost?' said one. 'Did he lose his way like a child?' said another. 'Or is he hiding?' 'Is he afraid of us?' 'Has he gone on a voyage, or emigrated?' Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his glances.

'Whither is God?' he cried. 'I will tell you. We have killed him - you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how have we done this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What did we do when we unchained the earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving now? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night and more night coming on all the time? Must not lanterns be lit in the morning? Do we not feel anything yet of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was holiest and most powerful of all the world yet owned has bled to death under our

knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to cleanse ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we not ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever will be born after us - for the sake of this deed he will be a part of a higher history than all history hitherto.'

'I come too early.' he said then; 'my time has not yet come.'"

Frederick Nietzsche: Thus Spake Zarathustra

"When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgment, I have less confidence in my opinions than when I only consider the objects concerning which I reason, and when I proceed still further to turn the scrutiny against every excessive estimation I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual diminution and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence.

Thus the skeptic still continues to reason and believe even though he asserts that he cannot defend his reason by reason.

I cannot possibly by any argument pretend to maintain its truth."

David Hume - Treatise Of Human Nature

"Among great philosophers Hume, who hung his nose as far as any over the nihilistic abyss, withdrew it sharply when he saw the psychological risks involved and he advised dilution of metaphysics by playing backgammon and making merry with his friends. The conclusion of Hume's philosophizing was indeed a radical skepticism which left no convincing logical grounds for believing anything natural was there at all and he saved his reason by refusing to take the implications of his philosophy to heart."

Kathleen Knott - Objections To Humanism

"Should it be asked me whether I sincerely assent to this argument which I have been to such pains to inculcate, whether I be really one of those skeptics who hold that everything is uncertain, I should reply that neither I nor any other person was every sincerely and constantly of that opinion. I dine, I play backgammon, I converse and am merry with my friends and when after three or four hours of amusement I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold and strange and ridiculous that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further. Thus the skeptic still continues to reason and believe though he asserts he cannot defend his reason by reason." Hume

DOVER BEACH

The sea is calm tonight.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; - on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægæan, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Matthew Arnold

"Heidegger has experienced the death of God and this death casts a shadow over all his writings." William Barrett: Irrational Man

"Heidegger's philosophy is neither atheism nor theism, but a description of the world from which God is absent." Barrett

"It is now the night of the world. The god has withdrawn himself, as the sun sets below the horizon." Karl Jaspers

"When we speak of 'abandonment' — we only mean to say that God does not exist, and that it is necessary to draw the consequences of his absence right to the end. The existentialist is strongly opposed to a certain type of secular moralism which seeks to suppress God at the least possible expense." Sartre

"They said something like this: God is a useless and costly hypothesis, so we will do without it. However, if we are to have morality, a society and a law abiding-world, it is essential that certain values should be taken seriously..." Sartre

"It must be considered obligatory (by such a person)...to be honest, not to lie, not to beat one's wife, to bring up children and so forth: so we are going to do a little work on this subject which will enable us to show that these values exist all the same, inscribed in an intelligible heaven although, of course, there is no God." Sartre

"Nothing will be changed if God does not exist; we shall re-discover the same norms of honesty, progress and humanity, and we shall have disposed of God as an out-of-date hypothesis which will die away quietly of itself." Sartre

"The existentialist, on the contrary, finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There can no longer be any good, a priori, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it. It is nowhere written that 'the good' exists, that one must be honest or must not lie, since we are now up on the plain where there are only men." Sartre

"Experiencing the death of God to its depths." Nietzsche

"The working out of man's homelessness on the earth now religion is dead." Nietzsche

"The central fact of modern history in the West...is unquestionably the decline of religion." Barrett

"The deepest significance of this change does not even appear principally at the purely intellectual level, in loss of belief, though this loss...has been a major

historical cause of the decline. The waning of religion is a much more concrete and complex fact than a mere change in conscious outlook, it penetrates the deepest strata of man's total...life.....It was not so much a theological system as a solid psychological matrix surrounding the individual's life from birth to death, sanctifying and enclosing all its ordinary and extraordinary occasions." Barrett

"I care for a philosopher only to the extent that he is able to be an example...Kant clung to the university, subjected himself to governments, remained within the appearance of religious faith, and endured colleagues and students: it is small wonder that his example produced in the main university professors and professors' philosophy." Nietzsche: writing of Kant

"Not long ago I became acquainted with Kant's philosophy; and now I must tell you of a thought in it, inasmuch as I cannot fear that it will upset you as profoundly and painfully as me. We cannot decide whether that which we call truth is really truth or whether it merely appears that way to us." Nietzsche: quoting a philosopher von Kliest

"If the latter is right, then the truth we gather here comes to nothing after our death; and every aspiration to acquire a possession which will follow us even into the grave is futile. If the point of this idea does not penetrate your heart, do not smile at another human being who feels wounded by it in his holiest depths. My only, my highest aim has sunk, and I have none left." Nietzsche

"'The critique of abstractions.' The endless effort to drag the balloon of the mind back to the earth of actual experience.....The primacy of personal experience over abstraction."

William Barrett: referring to Alfred North Whitehead's definition of true philosophy.

"Existentialism is a philosophy that has unbearably heightened human tensions: it did not create these tensions which were already at work in the soul of modern man, but simply sought to give them philosophic expression, rather than evading them by pretending they were not there." Barrett

"The inner depth of the human psyche cannot be measured by the quantitative methods of the physical sciences." Barrett

"If people condemn our works of fiction, in which we describe characters that are base, weak, cowardly and sometimes even frankly evil, it is not only because those characters are base, weak cowardly or evil. For suppose that, like Zola, we showed that the behaviour of these characters was caused by their heredity, or by the action of their environment upon them, or by determining factors, psychic or organic. People would be reassured, they would say, 'You see, that is what we are like, no one can do anything about it.' But the existentialist, when he

portrays a coward, shows him as responsible for his cowardice. He is not like that on account of a cowardly heart or lungs or cerebrum, he has not become like that through his physiological organism; he is like that because he has made himself into a coward by his actions." Sartre

"We do not believe in progress, progress implies amelioration, but man is always the same facing a situation which is always changing." Sartre

"Existentialist philosophy is a product of a bourgeois society in a state of dissolution." Barrett

"Before that there was an epoch of vast material progress and political stability. August 1914 shattered the foundations of that human world, it revealed that the apparent stability, security and material progress of society had rested like everything human upon the void."

Barrett: writing about the First World War

"It is neither our fault nor our merit if we lived in a time when torture was a daily fact. We have been taught to take Evil seriously. Chateaubriand, Oradour, the rue des Saussails, Dachau, and Auschwitz have all demonstrated to us that Evil is not an appearance, that knowing its cause does not dispel it, that it is not the effect of passions which might be cured, of a fear which might be overcome, of a passing aberration which might be excused, of an ignorance which might be enlightened, that it can in no way be diverted, brought back, reduced, and incorporated into idealistic humanism, like that shade of which Leibnitz has written that it is necessary for the glare of daylight." Sartre: writing about the Second World War

"We were, as I have said, situated in such a way that every lived minute seemed to us like something irreducible. Therefore, in spite of ourselves, we came to this conclusion, which will seem shocking to lofty souls: Evil cannot be redeemed." Sartre

"European man came face to face with himself as with a stranger."

Barrett: writing of the way optimism about human nature was undermined by the two world wars

"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" Romans 2: 1-4

"Alienation and estrangement; a sense of the basic fragility and contingency of human life; the impotence of reason confronted with the depth of existence; the threat of Nothingness, and the solitary and unsheltered condition of the individual before this threat." **Barrett**

"In the state I was in, if someone had come and told me I could go home quietly, that they would leave me my life whole it would have left me cold. Several hours, or several years of waiting is all the same when you have lost the illusion of being eternal." **Sartre: The Wall**

"I clung to nothing." **Sartre**

"Nothing is more real than nothing." **Becket**

"Turning off the electric light he continued the conversation with himself...what did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too: It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanliness and order. Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y pues nada. Our nada (nothing), who are in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada." **Ernest Hemmingway: A Clean, Well-Lighted Place**

"Hail nothing, full of nothing, nothing is with thee." **Hemmingway**

"'It was not fear or dread,' he tells us. 'It was a nothing that he knew too well.' Fear and dread are moods; but what is in question for the character in the story is not a mood, but a presence that he knows and knows all too well. So far as the mood of Hemmingway's story is concerned, it is in no way frantic, despairing, or 'nihilistic.' Rather, its tone is one of somber and clear courage." **Barrett: responding to the objection that this sickening litany is 'a mere mood'**

"His passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing. This is the price which must be paid for the passion of this earth." **Camus: The Myth of Sisyphus**

"The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd." **Camus**

'Wings'

The skull-splitting polyp of his brain, on its tiny root,
Lolls out over him ironically:
Angels, it whispers, are metaphors, in man's image,

For the amoebas exhilaration."
(Sartre)

And he is an owl
He is an owl, 'Man' tattooed in his armpit
Under the broken wing...
He is a man in hopeless feathers
(Kafka)

Star peering at star through the walls
Of a cage full of nothing
And no quails tumbling
From the cloud, And no manna
For angels.
(Einstein)
Ted Hughes

'Pibroch'

Minute after minute, eon after eon,
Nothing lets up or develops
And this is neither a bad variant nor a tryout
This is where the staring angels go through
This is where all the stars bow down."
Ted Hughes

"Who is this that darkens my counsel
with words without knowledge?
Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?
Tell me, if you understand.
Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!
Who stretched a measuring line across it?
On what were its footings set,
or who laid its cornerstone -
while the morning stars sang together
and all the angels shouted for joy?
Job 38:2-7

"Heisenberg's Principle of Indeterminacy shows that there are essential limits to our ability to know and predict physical states of affairs, and opens up to us a glimpse of a nature that may at bottom be irrational and chaotic—at any rate, our knowledge of it is limited so that we cannot know this not to be the case.

The situation in physics is made more paradoxical by Bohr's Principle of Complementarity, according to which the electron must be regarded both as a

wave and as a particle, according to its context. The application of these contradictory designations would have seemed thoroughly illogical to a nineteenth century physicist...What is remarkable is that here, at the very farthest reaches of precise experimentation, in the most rigorous of the natural sciences, the ordinary and banal fact of our human limitation emerges.

Godel's findings seem to have even more far-reaching consequences, when one considers that in the Western tradition, from the Pythagoreans and Plato onward, mathematics as the very model of intelligibility has been the central citadel of rationalism. Now it turns out that even in his most precise science—in the province where his reason seemed omnipotent—man cannot escape his essential finitude: every system of mathematics that he constructs is doomed to incompleteness. Godel has shown that mathematics contains insoluble problems, and hence can never be formalized in any complete system."
Barrett: responding to the rationalists claim that reality is 'predictable through and through'

"When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of space of which I am ignorant, and which knows me not, I am frightened, and am astonished being here rather than there, why now rather than then." Pascal

"No final resolution for the tensions of the human soul...to try to illumine human existence,...this illumination is a tiny and flickering light as against the encompassing darkness of the forces of night." Karl Jaspers

"A sense of weakness and dereliction before the whirlwind that man is able to unleash but not to control." Barrett

"Not only a dispossessed but a fragmentary being." Barrett

"Faith in science, or reason, or duty, or homo faber, or Christ, if it stands between the individual and his total responsibility hides him from himself."
Sartre

"The destiny of man is placed within himself...And at the point of departure there cannot be any other truth than this, I think, therefore I am, which is the absolute truth of consciousness as it attains to itself." Sartre

"Before there can be any truth whatever, then, there must be an absolute truth, and there is such a truth which is simple, easily attained and within the reach of everybody: it consists of one's immediate sense of one's self." Sartre

"Atheistic existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency, that if God does not exist there is at least one being whose existence comes before its essence, a being which exists before it can be defined by any conception of it. That being is man...Man first of all, exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards." Sartre

"There is no human nature because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is." Sartre

"Dostoyevsky once wrote, 'If God did not exist, everything would be permitted.'" Sartre

"That, for existentialism, is the starting point. Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon, either within or outside himself." Sartre

"One will never be able to explain one's action by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words there is no determinism—man is free, man is freedom. Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behaviour. Thus we have neither behind us nor before us in a luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free." Sartre

"Every man, without any support or help whatever, is condemned at every instant to invent man." Sartre

"Man is the future of man." Sartre: quoting Ponge

"The first effect of existentialism then is that it puts every man in possession of himself as he is and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely on his own shoulders." Sartre

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of god he created him;
male and female he created them.

Genesis 1:27

He is the image of the invisible God.

Colossians 1:15

The Son is the radiance of God's glory
and the exact representation of his being.
Hebrews 1:3

No man has ever seen God,
but God the only Son,
who is at the Father's side,
he has made him known.
John 1:18

Now the Lord is the Spirit,
and where the Spirit of the Lord is,
there is freedom. And we, who
with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory,
are being transformed into his likeness
with ever increasing glory.
2 Corinthians 3:17-18

But the man who looks intently
into the perfect law that gives freedom,
and continues to do this,
not forgetting what he has heard,
but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does.
James 1:25

"If, to take a more personal case, I decide to marry and to have children, even though this decision proceeds simply from my situation, from my passion or my desire, I am therefore committing not only myself, but humanity as a whole to the practice of monogamy. I am thus responsible for myself and for all men, and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself, I fashion man." Sartre

"Anguish, abandonment and despair." Sartre

"Man is condemned at every instant to invent man." Sartre

"We should act without hope." Sartre

"Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions." Sartre

"Man makes himself: he is not found ready made: he makes himself by the choice of his morality, and he cannot but choose a morality, such is the pressure of circumstances upon him." Sartre

"The struggle itself toward the height is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy." Camus

"Sisyphus, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: It is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate which cannot be surmounted by scorn." Camus

"Such, in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which science presents for our belief. Amid such a world, if anywhere, our ideals henceforward must find a home. That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins - all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built. Bertrand Russell

Black Rook In Rainy Weather

On the stiff twig up there
Hunches a wet black rook
Arranging and rearranging its feathers in the rain.
I do not expect a miracle
Or an accident

To set the sight on fire
In my eye, nor seek
Any more in the desultory weather some design,
But let spotted leaves fall as they fall,
Without ceremony, or portent.

Although, I admit, I desire,
Occasionally, some backtalk
From the mute sky, I can't honestly complain:

A certain minor light may still
Leap incandescent

Out of kitchen table or chair
As if a celestial burning took
Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then-
Thus hallowing an interval
Otherwise inconsequent

By bestowing largesse, honor,
One might say love. At any rate, I now walk
Wary (for it could happen
Even in this dull, ruinous landscape); sceptical,
Yet politic; ignorant

Of whatever angel may choose to flare
Suddenly at my elbow. I only know that a rook
Ordering its black feathers can so shine
As to seize my senses, haul
My eyelids up, and grant

A brief respite from fear
Of total neutrality. With luck,
Trekking stubborn through this season
Of fatigue, I shall
Patch together a content

Of sorts. Miracles occur,
If you care to call those spasmodic
Tricks of radiance miracles. The wait's begun again,
The long wait for the angel
For that rare, random descent.
Sylvia Plath

(As soon as these ideas about the death of God begin) "to assert a popular influence, we should find it reflected in the form of a gnawing and crumbling scepticism and relativism." Nietzsche: prophesying about the future of our culture

"Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature the things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." Romans 2:14-15

"If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains." John 9:41