Existentialism Here and Now
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THERE IS NO AGREEING on what existentialism is, or was, or means. For some, it is a set of intellectual property, a label that can be attached to any concept or movement to confer a special meaning or significance. For others, it is a philosophical framework that provides a lens through which to view and understand the world. Still others see it as a way of life, a set of values or principles that guide and inform their actions.

One thing most agree on is that existentialism is not about finding answers to the big questions of life, but rather about posing them. It is about recognizing the contingency and finitude of human existence, and the consequent need for personal responsibility and authenticity. It is about acknowledging the meaninglessness of the world and the need for individuals to create meaning for themselves.

Existentialism is not easy to define precisely because it is not a single, unified theory but rather a loose collection of ideas and perspectives that have evolved over time. It draws on a variety of sources, including Western philosophy, religion, literature, and psychology.

The core principles of existentialism are often summarized in terms of freedom, choice, responsibility, and authenticity. Existentialists believe that human beings are free to choose their own paths in life, but that these choices come with a corresponding responsibility to take action and make the best of them.

Authenticity is another key concept in existentialism. It refers to the idea that each individual has a unique potential for growth and fulfillment, and that it is our responsibility to discover and realize this potential.

Existentialism has been influential in a variety of fields, including literature, psychology, and social philosophy. It has been used to analyze and understand a wide range of issues, from the nature of human suffering and the meaning of life, to the problems of contemporary society and the challenges of personal development.

However, existentialism is not without its critics. Some argue that it is too focused on the negative aspects of human existence and ignores the possibilities for joy and fulfillment. Others charge that it is too individualistic and fails to take into account the social and cultural contexts in which we live.

Despite these criticisms, existentialism remains a rich and important area of study. It continues to inspire and challenge us to think more deeply about the nature of human existence and the possibilities for growth and fulfillment.


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1. For example, Derrida, "Writing and Difference," The University of Chicago Press, 1978.