



The Philosophy Café

What kind of existentialist are you?

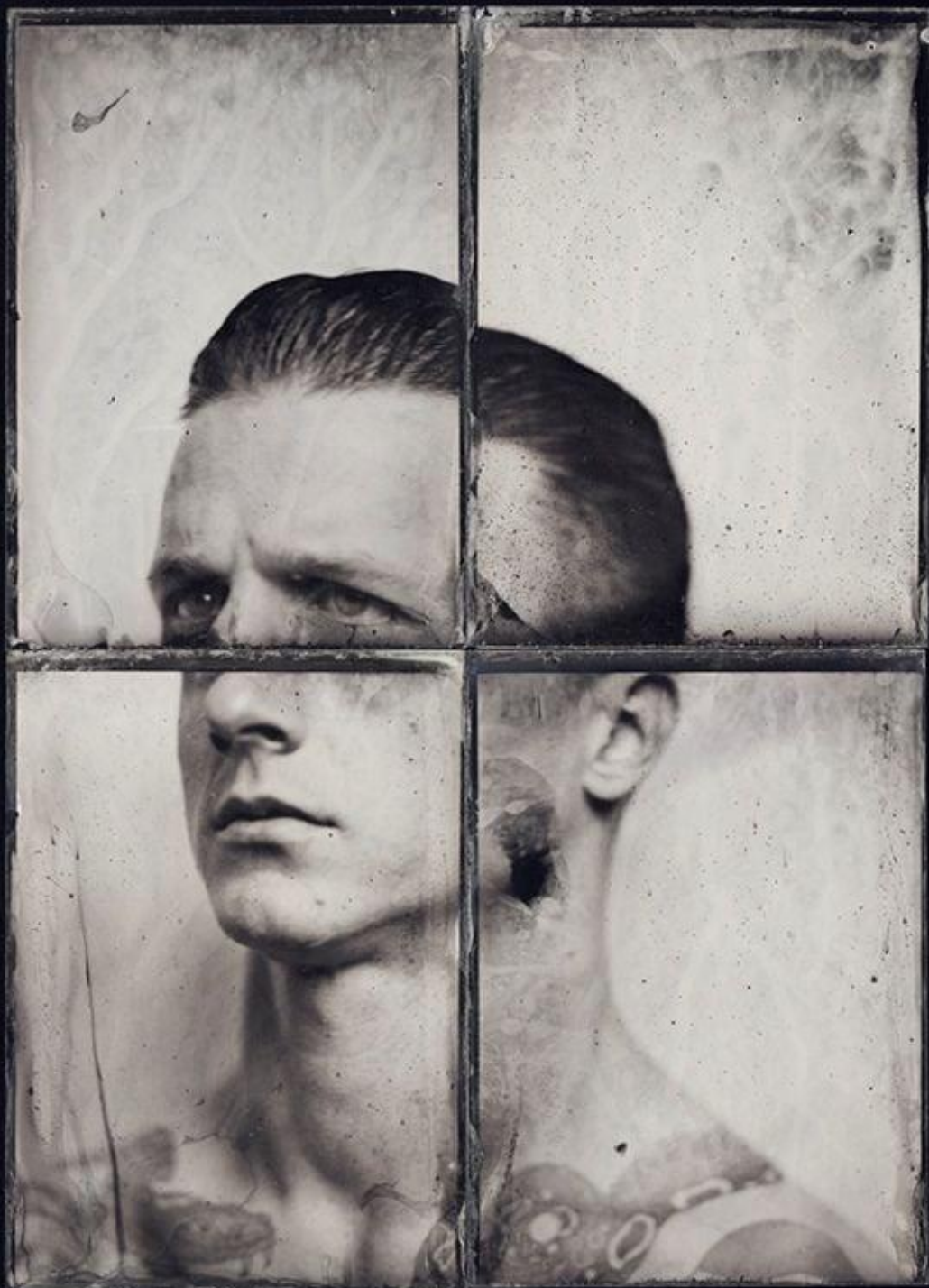


Existentialism



The manifestation of nothingness is closely associated with the contemplation of emptiness, and with human attempts to identify and personify it.

As such, the concept of the Void, and ideas similar to it, have a significant and historically evolving presence in artistic and creative expression, as well as in academic, scientific and philosophical debate surrounding the nature of the human condition.



The Human Condition

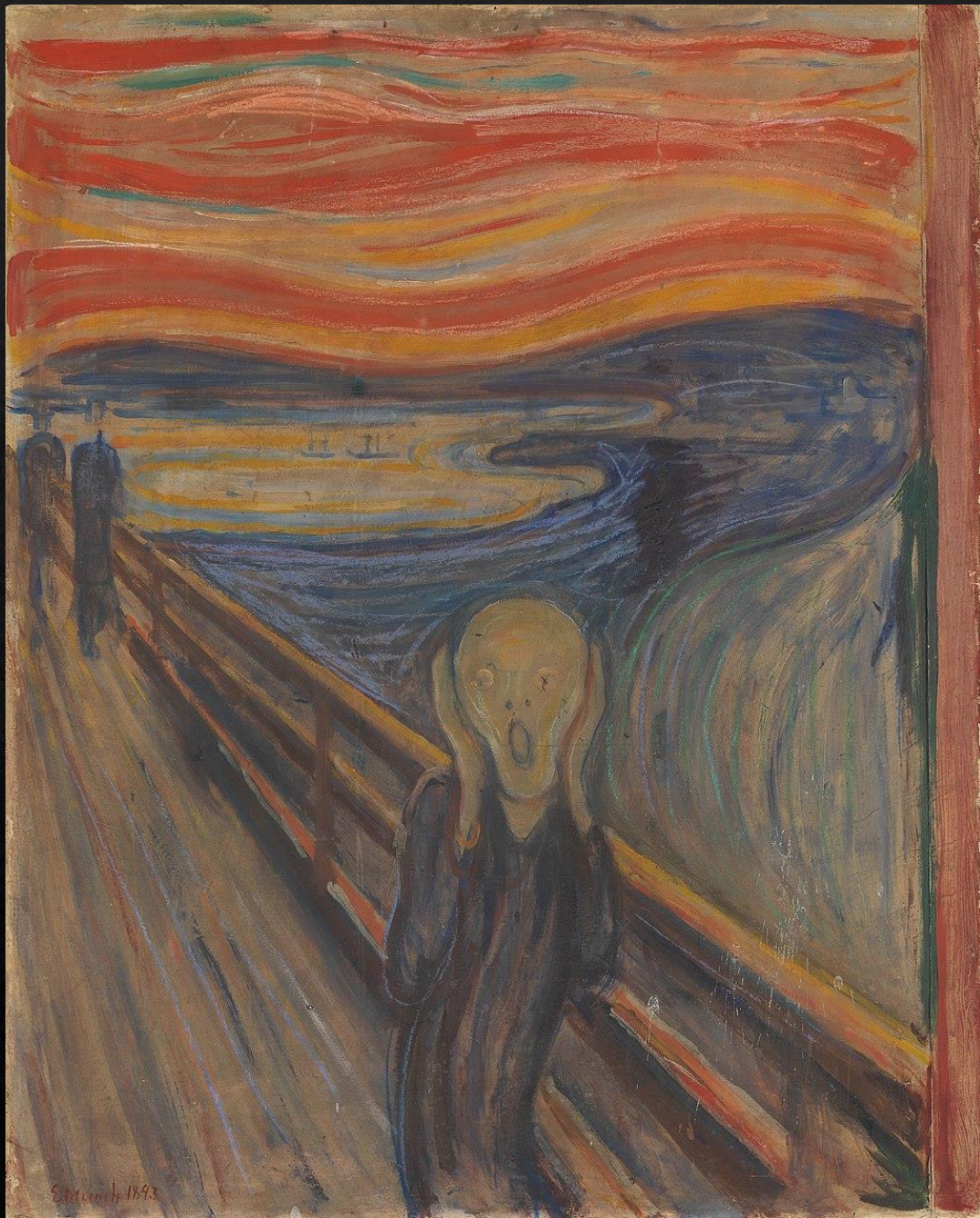
Mortality

Love and Relationships

Conflict and Struggle

Search for Meaning

Freedom and Responsibility



Existential Angst

Intense questioning or anxiety about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life, often triggered by the realization that life may lack inherent meaning or that one's values, beliefs, or choices are uncertain.

Image: The Scream – Edvard Munch

Answer these questions

01

THERE IS SUCH A
THING AS
MEANING AND
VALUE

02

THERE IS
INHERENT
MEANING IN THE
UNIVERSE

03

THE PURSUIT OF
MEANING MAY
HAVE MEANING
IN ITSELF

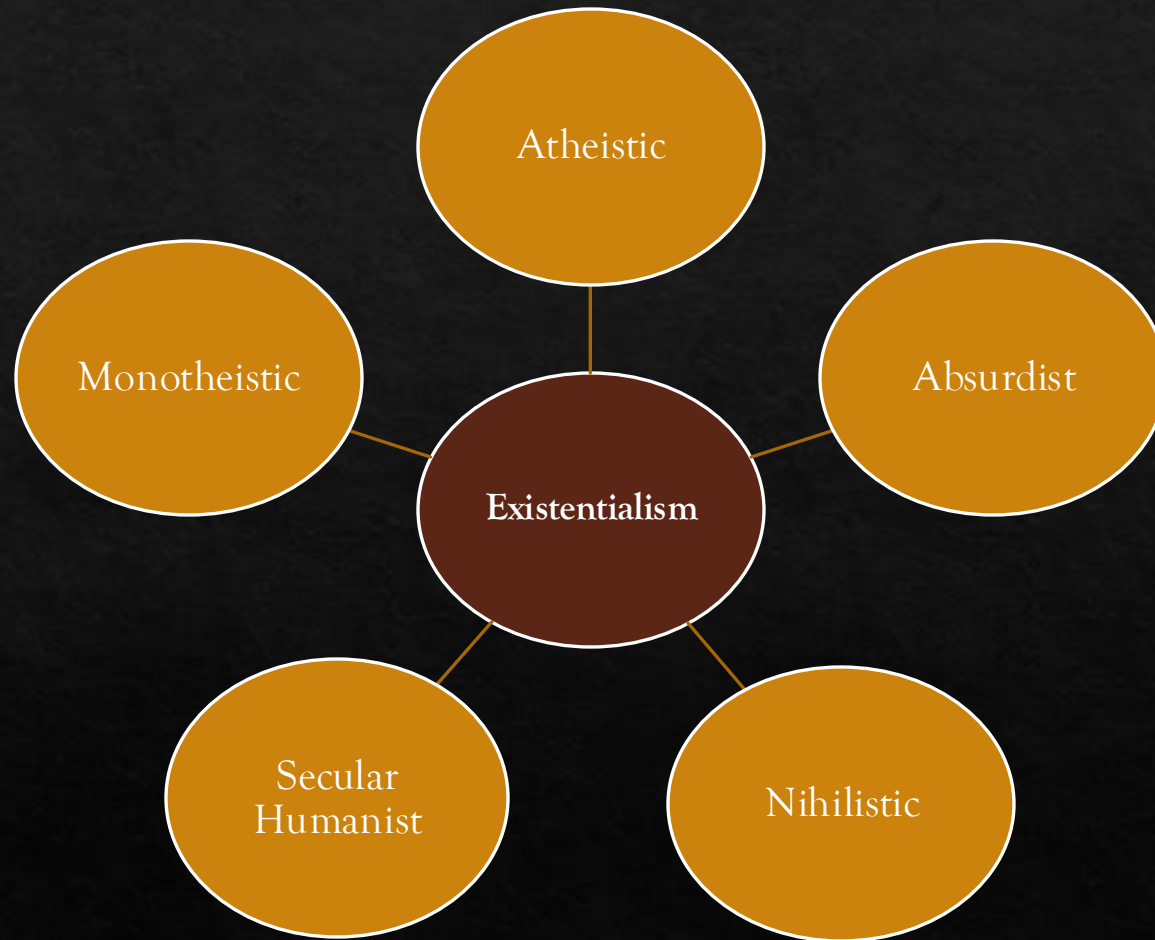
04

THE INDIVIDUAL'S
CONSTRUCTION
OF ANY TYPE OF
MEANING IS
POSSIBLE

05

THERE IS
RESOLUTION TO
THE INDIVIDUALS
DESIRE TO SEEK
MEANING

Major brands of Existentialism



Monotheistic

There is such a thing as Meaning and value:

Yes. The universe has a defined purpose because it was created by a divine being

There is inherent meaning in the universe:

Yes, but the individual must have come to the knowledge of God

The pursuit of meaning may have meaning in itself:

Yes. Searching for meaning is part of the human condition and, in a monotheistic view, a pathway toward God.

The individual's construction of any type of meaning is possible:

Yes, though this meaning would incorporate God, being the creator of the universe and meaning itself

There is resolution to the individuals desire to seek meaning:

Yes, God provides answers to the human longing for meaning, even if not fully comprehensible in this life

Monotheistic Existentialism

1. Literature Example:

Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* explores themes of faith and doubt. Alyosha, a devout character, believes in God and finds meaning through love, humility, and service to others, contrasting with his brother Ivan's existential struggle with atheism.

2. Real-Life Example:

A person going through hardship may find solace and meaning by praying, engaging in acts of charity, or reflecting on divine teachings. They interpret their suffering as part of a larger divine plan, even if it's not fully understood.

3. Philosophical Example:

Kierkegaard's concept of the "three stages of life" (aesthetic, ethical, and religious) describes the journey toward ultimate meaning. The highest stage, the religious, involves committing fully to God, despite the paradoxes of faith.

Atheistic



There is such a thing as Meaning and value:
Yes, but only in the sense that humans create them

There is inherent meaning in the universe:
No. The universe is indifferent and devoid of inherent purpose

The pursuit of meaning may have meaning in itself:
Yes, this is a defining characteristic of human existence

The individual's construction of any type of meaning is possible:
Yes, meaning making in a world without inherent meaning is the goal of existentialism

There is resolution to the individuals desire to seek meaning:
Yes, the creation of one's own meaning

Atheistic Existentialism

1. Literature Example:

Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* emphasizes that meaning and purpose come from human creativity and understanding, not divine authority. He encourages finding wonder and meaning in science and nature.

2. Art Example:

Carl Sagan's *Pale Blue Dot* (both the book and the image) reflects the idea that Earth is a tiny, insignificant speck in the vastness of the universe, yet it is our home and holds all the meaning we create.

3. Real-Life Example:

Humanists like Bertrand Russell or modern thinkers like Sam Harris advocate for creating meaning through human connection, ethics, and the pursuit of knowledge without the need for religious or supernatural frameworks.

Absurdist

There is such a thing as Meaning and value:
Yes. It is a logical possibility

There is inherent meaning in the universe:
No. The universe is indifferent and silent

The pursuit of meaning may have meaning in itself:
Yes. Such a pursuit can and should generate meaning for an individual, but death still renders the activity as ultimately meaningless

The individual's construction of any type of meaning is possible:
Yes, though it must face up to the absurd and embrace the transient, personal nature of our meaning making projects and the way they are nullified by death

There is resolution to the individuals desire to seek meaning:
Yes. Embracing the absurd can allow one to find joy and meaning in one's own life, but the only "resolution" is in eventual annihilation by death

Absurdist Existentialism

1. Literature Example:

The Stranger by Albert Camus: The protagonist, Meursault, lives without concern for meaning or morality. He does not mourn his mother's death, does not pretend to love his girlfriend, and accepts his death sentence with peace—because he has embraced the Absurd.

2. Art Example:

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett: Two characters wait endlessly for "Godot," who never arrives. The play reflects the absurdist view that life is full of pointless waiting and expectations, yet we continue anyway.

3. Real-Life Example:

Many comedians (e.g., George Carlin, Bill Hicks, Bo Burnham) use dark humor to highlight life's absurdity, showing how we take meaningless things (social norms, politics, fame) too seriously. They acknowledge the Absurd but laugh at it instead of despairing.

Nihilistic

There is such a thing as Meaning and value:
No. There is no objective meaning or value in life

There is inherent meaning in the universe:
No. The universe is indifferent, chaotic, and without inherent meaning

The pursuit of meaning may have meaning in itself:
No. The pursuit of meaning is ultimately futile because there is no meaning to be found

The individual's construction of any type of meaning is possible:
Yes, but it's entirely subjective and ultimately arbitrary, self-made and without universal significance

There is resolution to the individuals desire to seek meaning:
No. the only "resolution" is to accept the absence of meaning and make peace with it — or not

Nihilistic Existentialism

1. Literature Example:

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Demons* depicts characters grappling with nihilism, often leading to destructive behaviors as they reject morality and purpose.

In *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, Meursault embodies a nihilistic attitude, detached from societal norms and unconcerned with the deeper "meaning" of life or death.

2. Art Example:

Postmodernist works, like Andy Warhol's art, often reflect nihilistic themes by challenging traditional notions of value, originality, and meaning.

3. Real-Life Example:

A nihilist might approach life with stoic detachment, choosing to live in the moment without concern for legacy, morality, or ultimate purpose. They might embrace hedonism, apathy, or simply focus on what feels personally satisfying, knowing it holds no deeper meaning.

Secular Humanist

There is such a thing as Meaning and value:

Yes. Through helping others, advancing knowledge, and improving the world

There is inherent meaning in the universe:

No. But humans can create meaning through reason, ethics, and shared values.

The pursuit of meaning may have meaning in itself:

Yes. Seeking knowledge, truth, and connection makes life worth living.

The individual's construction of any type of meaning is possible:

Yes. It is necessary and the meaning we create should benefit both ourselves and others.

There is resolution to the individuals desire to seek meaning:

Yes. By accepting our role in creating a better world.

Secular Humanist Existentialism

1. Literature Example:

- Carl Sagan's Cosmos – Finds meaning in human curiosity, science, and our shared responsibility to improve life.

2. Art Example:

- The Humanist Renaissance – Humanistic ideals reflecting human dignity and reason influenced artistic and literary styles, leading to more realistic portrayals of humans (e.g., Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man), and the development of new literary forms.

3. Real-Life Example:

- Bertrand Russell – Advocated for reason, compassion, and ethical living without reliance on supernatural beliefs.

Our existentialist hero? A secular humanist finds meaning in knowledge, ethical action, and human connection. Instead of despairing at life's lack of inherent meaning, they focus on making life better for themselves and others.