

On Existentialism

Introduction:

The term Existentialism is coined by the Danish theologian and philosopher Soren Kierkegaard. According to Soren Existentialism “is a rejection of all purely abstract thinking, of a purely logical or scientific philosophy; in short, a rejection of the absoluteness of reason” (Roubiczek, 10). Existentialism, in fact, begins as A voice raised in protest against the absurdity of Pure Thought, a logic which is not the logic of thinking but the immanent movement of Being. It recalls the spectator of all time and of all existence from the speculations of Pure Thought to the problems and the possibilities of his own conditioned thinking as an existing individual seeking to know how to live and to live the life he Knows.

Meaning of the word *Existence*:

The word *Existence* is the key concept in Existentialism. It is used in this philosophy in a very special sense. The existentialist uses *existence* to refer specifically to human existence. There is a common belief that only a concrete thing can exist. Existentialists also support this view and describe man as a concrete individual capable of being an existent. The Existentialist considers that to be an existent one has to be capable of being conscious that one exists. In this sense man alone can exist. Kierkegaard was the first person who used the word *existence* in a religious sense. His main interest was the possibility of man’s self realization. According to him, to what extent can Man realizes himself by withdrawing from the irresponsibility, superficiality, and forgetfulness of everyday life? So, for Kierkegaard existence is the attainment of self possession in the spirituality directed and determined life of the individual.

Existentialism is a ‘philosophy of existence’:

According to a widely accepted definition, ‘Existentialism’ may be defined as a philosophic stand point which gives priority to existence over essence. From the dictionary meaning, existentialism may be defined as a ‘philosophy of existence’. It is “---an irrational trend in bourgeois philosophy which appeared in the 20th century in an attempt to create a new world outlook corresponding to the frame of mind of bourgeois intellectuals”.

Stand point of Existentialism:

Existentialism as laid down in the Encyclopedia Britannica emphasizes that

- (i) existence is always particular and individual,
- (ii) existence is primarily the problem of existence; it is therefore, also the investigation of the meaning of Being,

(iii) this investigation is continually faced with diverse possibilities from which man must make a selection to which he must then commit himself,

(iv) existence is always a being-in-the –world, so to say, in a concrete and historically determinate situation that limits or conditions choice.

Central focus on individual's inner awakening:

Existentialism insists that philosophy should be connected with the individual's own life and experience. It should be a philosophy worth living. All this is blended in the word existence. The existentialist philosophers concentrate mainly on inner experience of the individual. So for an individual the personal is the real. Philosophy therefore should start from one's inner knowledge, one's own experience, which must be considered as evidence.

Existence comes before essence:

Existentialism believes in Individual's personal experience. Thus it is considered as a philosophy of Being, a philosophy of attestation and acceptance, and a refusal of the attempt to rationalize and to think Being. But the question arises that does man's existence have an essence. In this regard existentialism is most commonly acknowledged with the modern French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre's famous dictum "existence comes before essence", which implies that there is no pre-defined essence to humanity except that which it makes for itself. Sartre further adds, "Man first is – only afterwards is he this or that. Man must create for himself his own essence"(Roubiczek, 121). This lends some authority to German existentialist Martin Heidegger's statement of man being thrown into existence, which existentialists consider as prior to any other thoughts or ideas that human's have or definitions of themselves that they create. Again as Sartre puts it, "... man first of all exists, encounters himself and surges up in the world- and defines himself afterwards." So human being has no essence that comes before his existence.