EXISTENTIALISM

EXISTENTIALISM - METAPHYSICS

The ultimate and final reality resides within the self of the individual human person.

Morris, V. C. & Pai, Y. Philosophy & the American School, p. 70

EXISTENTIALISM - METAPHYSICS

• Our existence is given; we wake up to it.
• Our essence is what is in question; it becomes our project.

Morris & Pai, p. 71

EXISTENTIALISM

• Christianity says, “Look to God, who watches over and takes charge of all.”
• Plato & Aristotle say, “Look to a rational system of logical necessity.”
• Naturalism says “Follow nature; let nature be responsible.”
• The Experimentalists say “Look to the scientific method; look to the community.”

Morris & Pai, p. 70

• No greater tyranny than the tyranny of the majority

EXISTENTIALISM - METAPHYSICS

In every instance, people have been separated from their basic humanity, i.e., their circumstance of ultimate choice.

Morris & Pai, p. 70

EXISTENTIALISM - EPISTEMOLOGY

• Making a choice is not confined to deciding to do something. It also includes deciding to believe something, to accept something as true.

Morris & Pai, p. 154

• Each person is his or her own supreme court of epistemological judgment and is, therefore, in an ultimate sense, absolutely on his or her own when it comes to deciding between candidates for truth.

Morris & Pai, p. 154

• In matters religious Protestantism placed all the weight of its emphasis upon the irrational datum of faith, as against the imposing rational structures of medieval theology and there is Luther’s famous curse upon “the whore, Reason.”

Irrational man, p. 27
Kierkegaard: On Subjective & Objective Truth

If I know that twice two is four, this knowledge is in the highest degree impersonal. Once I know it, I know it, and I need not struggle continuously to make it my own. But the truth of religion is not at all like that: it is a truth that must penetrate my own personal existence or it is nothing; and I must struggle to renew it in my life every day. A learned theologian may be in possession of all the so-called truths of rational theology, able to prove & disprove propositions and generally hold his own dialectically with the best; And yet in his heart God may have died or never lived. On the other hand, an illiterate peasant who knows nothing of formal theology, who may not even be able to state accurately the tenets of his creed . . . Nevertheless may succeed in being religious. He is in the truth, as we say, and people who know him can recognize this fact from his presence, his bearing, his way of life.

Irrational Man, p. 171

Albert Camus
Atheist Existentialist
1913-1960

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. . . . All the rest - comes afterward. Whether the earth or the sun revolves around the other is a matter of profound indifference. To tell the truth, it is a futile question. On the other hand, I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living . . . What is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying.

The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 3

EXISTENTIALISM - EDUCATION

Existentialism . . . has not yet taken up . . . the mundane, non-metaphysical problems of organized social life - politics, social organization, institutional education.

Morris & Pai, pp. 92-93

But individual Existentialists have made suggestions. Here are some thoughts of Maxine Greene:

Art and imagination: Reclaiming the sense of possibility
The existential contexts of education . . . have to do with the human condition in these often desolate days, and . . . they make the notions of world-class achievement, benchmarks, & the rest seem superficial & limited, if not absurd. Like their elders, children & young persons inhabit a world of fearful moral uncertainty - a world in which it appears that almost nothing can be done to reduce suffering, contain massacres, & protect human rights.

Maxine Greene, PDK 76(5) p. 378
The bombardment of images identified with “Technological Communication” frequently has the effect of freezing imaginative thinking. Instead of freeing audiences to look at things as if they could be otherwise, present day media impose predigested frameworks on their audiences.

Hannah Arendt’s definition of “thoughtlessness”

The heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of ‘truths’ which have become trivial and empty.

Classroom encounters with the arts can move the young to imagine, to extend, and to renew. And surely nothing can be more important than finding the source of learning not in extrinsic demands, but in human freedom.