

Existentialism: Core Concepts

Existentialism · Answer Key · 12 Questions

1. Which existentialist philosopher famously stated, 'Existence precedes essence'?

- A) Friedrich Nietzsche
- B) Albert Camus
- C) Jean-Paul Sartre**
- D) Søren Kierkegaard

2. In existentialist thought, what term describes the dread or anxiety that arises from the awareness of one's freedom and the lack of predetermined meaning?

- A) Alienation
- B) Nihilism
- C) Angst**
- D) Bad Faith

3. Albert Camus, a philosopher often associated with existentialism, introduced the concept of 'the absurd'. What does this concept primarily refer to?

- A) The inherent meaninglessness of the universe and humanity's persistent search for meaning.**
- B) The irrationality of human emotions in the face of logic.
- C) The conflict between individual desires and societal norms.
- D) The inevitability of death and its impact on life's value.

4. What did Jean-Paul Sartre mean by 'bad faith' (mauvaise foi)?

- A) Acting against one's own moral principles.
- B) Denying one's freedom and responsibility by pretending to be determined by external forces or roles.**
- C) Intentionally deceiving others for personal gain.
- D) Giving in to despair and abandoning all hope.

5. Søren Kierkegaard, often considered the father of existentialism, emphasized the importance of subjective truth. What did he believe was the highest form of truth?

- A) Objective, verifiable scientific facts.
- B) Logical deductions from universally accepted premises.
- C) Personal, passionate commitment and experience.**
- D) The collective wisdom of society.

6. Simone de Beauvoir, a prominent existentialist feminist, argued in 'The Second Sex' that 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.' What does this statement imply about gender in existentialist terms?

- A) Biological sex dictates a woman's inherent nature and destiny.
- B) Gender is a social construct and a role that is learned and performed, not a fixed essence.**
- C) Women are naturally more emotional than men, influencing their roles.
- D) Societal expectations for women are immutable and biologically determined.

7. For existentialists, the concept of 'authenticity' refers to:

- A) Conforming to societal expectations and norms.
- B) Living in accordance with one's own freely chosen values and commitments, embracing one's freedom and responsibility.**
- C) Achieving external success and recognition.
- D) Adopting a persona that is widely admired.

8. What is the existentialist perspective on 'human nature'?

- A) Humans are born with a fixed set of instincts and predetermined behaviors.
- B) Human nature is an abstract concept; individuals create their own essence through their choices and actions.**
- C) Human nature is primarily driven by biological and genetic factors.
- D) Human nature is defined by the collective consciousness of society.

9. Friedrich Nietzsche, though not strictly an existentialist, significantly influenced the movement. His concept of the 'Übermensch' (Overman) suggests:

- A) A person who conforms to societal moral codes.
- B) An individual who overcomes nihilism and creates their own values, transcending conventional morality.**
- C) A leader who imposes their will on others.
- D) A being solely defined by divine will.

10. The existentialist idea of 'the Other' (l'Autre) primarily refers to:

- A) One's own subconscious self.
- B) The external world and its objective realities.
- C) The consciousness of other individuals, which can influence self-perception and create objectification.**
- D) A hypothetical ideal of perfect personhood.

11. What is the existentialist view on the purpose of life?

- A) The purpose is divinely ordained and unchanging.
- B) The purpose is to achieve worldly success and happiness.
- C) There is no inherent, preordained purpose; individuals must create their own meaning through their choices and actions.**
- D) The purpose is to serve the collective good of society above all else.

12. Martin Heidegger, a key figure in phenomenology and existentialism, introduced the concept of 'Dasein'. What does this term roughly translate to and signify in his philosophy?

- A) 'Objectivity', referring to the external world.
- B) 'Being-in-the-world', signifying human existence as fundamentally embedded and engaged with its environment.**
- C) 'Essence', referring to an immutable core nature.
- D) 'Absurdity', describing the meaninglessness of existence.