What is existentialism?

It is a philosophy that concerns finding self and finding meaning through free will, choice, and personal responsibility. It is the search and journey for true self and true personal meaning in life. It is a philosophy that holds many ideologies and does not have a universal agreement on one set of ideal and beliefs but they all seek the most individual freedom for everyone.

Soren Kierkegaard-

- Sparked and inspired the idea of existentialism in the 19th century
- “...the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die” - August 1, 1835
- Felt that life and existence, in all its aspects, is subjective and ambiguous.
- Asked questions about how life can be lived the best
- “Father of Existentialism
- Either/Or was an influential book that was foundational to later existentialism and was also Kierkegaard’s first major work. The first part goes through Kierkegaard’s ideas on the aesthetic stage of existence and living a life full of pleasures and personal enjoyment. The second part goes through his thoughts on the ethical stage of existence and a society with rules and order for the greater good.

Jean-Paul Sartre-

- Believed that man’s life is not established before his existence. Once he terrible freedom is acknowledged, man must make this meaning himself. Existence precedes essence (it is only up to the man to define himself in the world. We cannot say what the man is before he dies or what mankind is before it disappears)
- Based his existentialism on human free will. Emphasized human freedom, choice, and responsibility which sparked a lot of interest in people around the world. He brought the most international attention to existentialism in the 20th century.
- “Beingand Nothingness” is a famous essay published by Sartre in 1943 on phenomenological consciousness and includes complex thoughts and inventive ideas.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky-

- A Russian author whose works focused on human psychology and existentialism though he himself was not completely an existentialist. He was dedicated to religious mysticism.
- Notes from Underground is a novel written by Fyodor. It encompasses the life of a man who struggles to find meaning and to define himself as well as the world around him. It shows the true nature of existentialism.
Martin Heidegger-

- His philosophy concerns the search for authenticity and personal integrity and begins with the analysis of “Dasein” (being there)
- Suggested that moods are the starting point for understanding the nature of the self and who we are instead of knowledge. Much of Heidegger’s Dasein analysis is in terms of moods. Some examples include angst or boredom
- Investigated meaning of authentic existence and our place in the world and among others as an individual. Questioned how to live and how to live authentically in a technological and political world

Simone de Beauvoir-

- In 1945, she and Sartre founded and began editing “Les Temps Modernes” which was a monthly journal review
- Beauvoir’s novels expound the major existential themes, demonstrating her conception of the writer’s commitment to the times
- Beauvoir’s life supported her thesis: “The basic options of an individual must be made on the premises of an equal vocation for man and woman, founded on a common structure of their being, independent of their sexuality
- A member of the intellectual fellowship of philosophers- writers who have given a literary transcription to the themes of existentialism