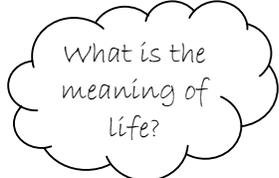


# THEORY OF EXISTENTIALISM

Theory on the meaning of life



Plato said that the whole of philosophy could be summed up in one Question: "How should we live?"

Socrates felt the "unexamined life" is not worth living.

Western societies have tended to ignore existentialism, believing that technological progress could satisfy all human needs. A heavy price of social breakdown, violence, alienation and cynicism is being paid.

### Main Objective / Aim / Importance of

- Seeks an understanding of our existential purpose
- Questions the role of social institutions
- Opposed to "nihilism" which negates everything

### Key Concepts

- Self-examination
- Self-discovery
- Decision-making
- Choice-making
- The meaning of life*

### Main Proponents

- Jean-Paul Sartre
- Franz Fanon
- Jean Baudrillard
- Jacques Derrida
- Frederick Nietzsche
- WEB du Bois

### Other Proponents

- Kgalushi Koka
- Michael Foucault
- Lucy Irigaray
- Simone de Beauvoir



Foucault

**Nihilism:**

Opposite of Existentialism.

- ✓ No such thing as a soul
- ✓ Motto is "So What?!"
- ✓ Can lead to violence & chaos
- ✓ Can free people (esp if from very repressive religious background / upbringing / environment)

Can help us to...	Failings are...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Question other peoples ideas &amp; values</li> <li>✓ Be more open about ourselves</li> <li>✓ Trust our instincts</li> <li>✓ Spot fakes</li> <li>✓ Enjoy life more</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ It may make us too trusting</li> <li>✓ It can be confusing</li> <li>✓ It may lead to despair</li> <li>✓ It may leave us feeling helpless &amp; angry</li> <li>✓ It may be seriously disrupting</li> </ul>

**Existentialists** believe that people should not be told what their lives mean – everyone should discover their own meaning and this meaning will be subject to their culture. Existentialists believe we should repeatedly ask ourselves, "Is this how I want to spend my life?"

**Black Existentialism** contemplates the situation of black people in the world generally. – Scholar: Lewis R Gordon's book *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*.

**Michael Foucault** extremely concerned with the *influence of modern institutions* have on human existence. Foucault believed they distorted life & destroyed the innocence of the human soul. Foucault said human beings are essential free & unformed – institutions force people to conform to sets of rules.