

A Short His. of Existentialism, by Jean Wahl 1949, Phil. II, 5  
Actually 1945 lectures & translation

Phil. of existence, 1st used by Kierkegaard. Heidegger opposed world  
existentialism, & Jaspers claimed it to be the death of phil. of existence  
yet all are existentialists, the only Sartre, Beauvoir & Merleau-Ponty  
accept terms. p. 2, "From Plato phil. was the search for Essence,  
those who wished to rise above realm of Becoming yet the most univer-  
sal ph. Hegel insisted on importance of Becoming, thus diverging  
from tradition of Plato, Descartes, Spinoza.

Subj-ivity & His. "the intensity of the subj. feeling being paradoxically  
founded upon an obj. his. fact. Phil. of existence could be traced  
back to Schelling. To Hegelianism Schelling opposed what he called  
his "positive phil." or his "affirmation of incomprehensible  
contingency." We could even trace phil. of existence back to Kant  
who demonstrated that we ca not conclude existence from essence  
thus opposed the ontological proof, but only with Kierkegaard  
II, p. 9. phil. of existence stage begins with Jaspers & Heidegger.  
Communication is core of Jaspers' system. Communication is one of  
major problems in the philosophies of existence. Heidegger claims  
is not philosopher of existence but of Being & that his eventual  
aim is ontological (p. 17) "In summary transcendence toward the world  
" other  
" future  
" Being

transcendence, out of Nothingness  
are the 5 uses of transcendence to be found in Heidegger."  
III, p. 27 or 3rd stage of his--Influence of Heidegger & Sartre (Gabriel  
Marcel) felt BEFORE the war. Sartre linked in part to Heidegger  
& in part to Husserl. In common with Heidegger Sartre  
has the 'ontological concern', the need to study the idea of Being  
& also an emphasis on the idea of Nothingness... Sartre characterizes  
Being as having 2 forms "in-itself" (l'en soi) which is always identical  
with itself, and "for-itself" (le pour-soi) which corresponds to  
Thought construed in Hegelian fashion as a constant movement.  
If ontology is the science of a unique being, can there be any ontol-  
ogy in this ontological theory?.. On this point the Hegelian theory  
in which the Absolute is the dev. of the implicit "for-itself"  
towards the explicit "for-itself" seems far more satisfactory. No  
doubt, Sartre's affirmation of the "in-itself" responds to an  
epistemological concern on his part, & answered the need to affirm  
a reality independent of thought. " Sartre's definition of knowledge  
as a "not-being"... His phil. is one of the incarnations of problemat-  
ism & of the ambiguity of contemporary thought... "There may yet be a  
Sartre who will go beyond ambiguity." (NO.-ff)

Want destroy ideas of Essence and Substance & have phil. become one of  
existence.. Reality cannot be reduced to scientific formulation.

DISCUSSION. Nicolas Berdiaeff:..p. "Ontology is impossible from the  
existential point of view.. Yet Heidegger & Sartre want to create a  
rational ontology, Sartre even more than Heidegger.

"Moreover, I am not at all sure  
that the idea of Nothingness in Hegel approximates the idea of  
Nothingness in Sartre. FOR HEGEL, NOTHINGNESS HAS POSITIVE RESULTS,  
BECAUSE THE FUTURE COMES FROM & EXISTS ONLY BY VIRTUE OF, THIS  
NOTHINGNESS. I do not see this in Sartre. Rather, I have the  
impression that according to Sartre being begins to decompose or  
rot internally under the influence of Nothingness. Nothingness is  
putrefaction of being. This is NOT AT ALL IN HEGEL'S NOTION the  
would never have said such a thing;

"Why is ontology impossible? Because it is  
always a knowledge objectifying existence... So that in ontology--in  
every ontology--existence vanishes... It is only in subjectivity

that one may know existence, not in objectivity. In my opinion, the central idea has vanished in the ontology of Heidegger, Sartre,

Georges Gurvitch: "The term 'existence' introduced by Kierkegaard and Heidegger, the phil. of existence of which he was the promoter, had a definite historical significance as WEAPONS AGAINST THE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALECTIC & PAN\*LOGISM OF HEGEL. Moreover, there is no doubt about the fact that 'existence' for Kierkegaard was primarily that of Christ--transcendence incarnated in immanence, Jesus initiating a lineage of 'existents' who teach by the very fact of existing. Like most doctrines, the phil. of existence is right in what it denies & wrong in what it affirms.

"In Heidegger--who is not an honest philosopher...it has become a mere means dexterously used to pass from the scholastic phil. in which he began to the Nazi phil. Sartre's 'L'Être et le Néant' provides a possible liaison bet. the logomachy of Hegel & the phil. of 'existence'. To become 'existentialism', existence let pass through the logonomical purgatory of 'in-itself' & 'for-itself' to reemerge itself--impoverished to the limit....

"...one must note that in no phil. is existence found to be more impoverished or diluted than precisely in 'existentialism'. In Sartre it becomes a psychological isolation which nullifies itself & only tangentially does he arrive at 'the other'. One affirms existence after one has carefully emptied it of all its richness, all its contradictions, all its collective & historical aspects. The call to existence becomes an appeal for a replacement of constructed existence for lived existence.

"His repeats itself. As the traditional empiricism amt'd. to a total destruction or transformation of experience into a chaos of sensation, so existentialism applies itself to the task of reducing existence to zero. This is the nausea of impotence."

Emmanuel Levinas: "...you were able to find existentialists everywhere ...and nowhere.. This is what Husserl called the 2nd stage in the spread of a new doctrine. During the 1st stage, one cries: it's absurd! During the 2nd stage, one says indignantly: but everybody knows that! There is a 3rd stage in which the doctrine is reinstated in its true originality. ...the verb to be as transitive....

Discussion in  
Excerpts from/A Short His. of Existentialism by Jean Wahl.

N. Berdayeff: "For Hegel, Nothingness has positive results, because the future comes from, exists only by virtue of, this Nothingness. I do not see this in Sartre. Rather, I have the impression that according to Sartre being begins to decompose or rot internally under the influence of Nothing. Nothingness is putrefaction of being. This is not at all Hegel's notion, & he would never have said such a thing."

Georges Gurvitch: "The term of 'existence' introduced by Kierkegaard & the phil. of existence of which he was the promoter, had a definite (his) significance as weapons AGAINST the constructive dialectic & pan-logism of Hegel. Moreover, there is no doubt about the fact that 'existence' for K was primarily that of Christ--transcendence incarnated in immanence, Jesus--initiating a lineage of 'existents' who teach by the very fact of existing...."

"In Heidegger--who is not an honest thinker, but an able constructor & calculator bereft of ethics & intellectual scruples--the phil. of existence has lost its negative sincerity: it has become a mere means--dexterously used to pass from the scholastic philosophy in which he began to the Nazi phil."

"SARTRE'S (B&N) proclaims a possible liaison bet. the logomachy of Hegel & the phil. of existence. To become 'existentialism,' existence 1st passes through the logonomical purgatory of 'in-itself' & 'for-itself' to rediscover itself--IMPOVERISHED TO THE LIMIT.... bereft, as is existentialism, OF CONSEQUENCES & A SENSE OF HLF...."

"In no phil. is existence found to be more impoverished or diluted than precisely in: 'existentialism.' In K it had already been

artificially reduced to the Religious & the Individual. IN SARTRE IT BECOMES A PSYCHOLOGICAL ISOLATION WHICH NULLIFIES ITSELF, & ONLY tangentially does he arrive at 'the other.' One affirms existence after one has carefully emptied it of all its richness, all its contradictions, all its collective & his aspects! The call to existence becomes an evasion, a replacement of constructed existence for lived existence.

"His repeats itself. As the traditional empiricism amounted to a total destruction or transformation of experience into a chaos of sensation, so existentialism applies itself to the task of reducing existence to zero. This is the nausea of impotence."

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Emmanuel Levinas, in objecting to extension of existentialism backward & forward from Heidegger, says: "This is what Husserl called the 2nd stage in the spread of a new doctrine. During the 1st stage one cries: it's absurd! During the 2nd stage, one says indignantly: but everybody knows that! There is a 3rd stage, in which the doctrine is reinstated in its originality." Only Heidegger is that person: "Existentialism is to experience & think existence--the verb 'to be'--as event."