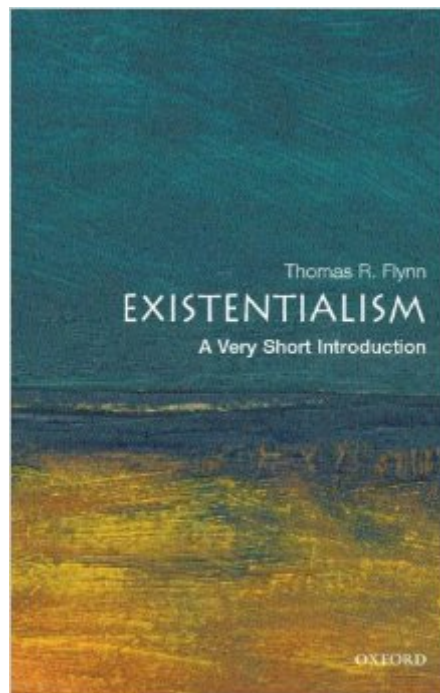


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Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



Synopsis

Existentialism was one of the leading philosophical movements of the twentieth century. Focusing on its seven leading figures, Sartre, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty and Camus, this Very Short Introduction provides a clear account of the key themes of the movement which emphasized individuality, free will, and personal responsibility in the modern world. Drawing in the movement's varied relationships with the arts, humanism, and politics, this book clarifies the philosophy and original meaning of 'existentialism' - which has tended to be obscured by misappropriation. Placing it in its historical context, Thomas Flynn also highlights how existentialism is still relevant to us today. ABOUT THE SERIES: The Very Short Introductions series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

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Customer Reviews

Most introductions to Existentialism make either of a couple of mistakes: they either focus on the style rather than the substance of the thinkers subsumed under the label or they focus on the mood evoked. Anyone who has read much about the philosophy knows that it is all too easy to degenerate into a meditation on the angst of human existence. By centering their discussions on moods and attitudes rather than concrete philosophical positions, Existentialism as it emerges from far too many introductions become anything and everything, yet nothing at all. Not so with Flynn. The book is broken into six (necessarily) short chapters. The first five justify the cost of the book. The last one, on "Existentialism in the 21st Century," is an unhappy addendum. It seeks to hint at ways that Existential thought can engage some of the ongoing philosophical debates that continue into the 21st century. But the various ideas are simply dealt with too briefly and the possibilities of engagement are more gestured at than explained. The intentions were good, but there simply wasn't enough room to produce more than an outline of a chapter. But the first five chapters are all lucid and sharply focused. The first chapter deals with the central tenet of all thinkers who can be considered Existentialists (it is important to remember that most "Existentialists" did not so consider themselves), that philosophy is a practical discipline, dealing with actual lived life, not an inhuman scientificity far removed from concrete human concerns. The second deals with what it means to become an individual and how that is achieved.

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