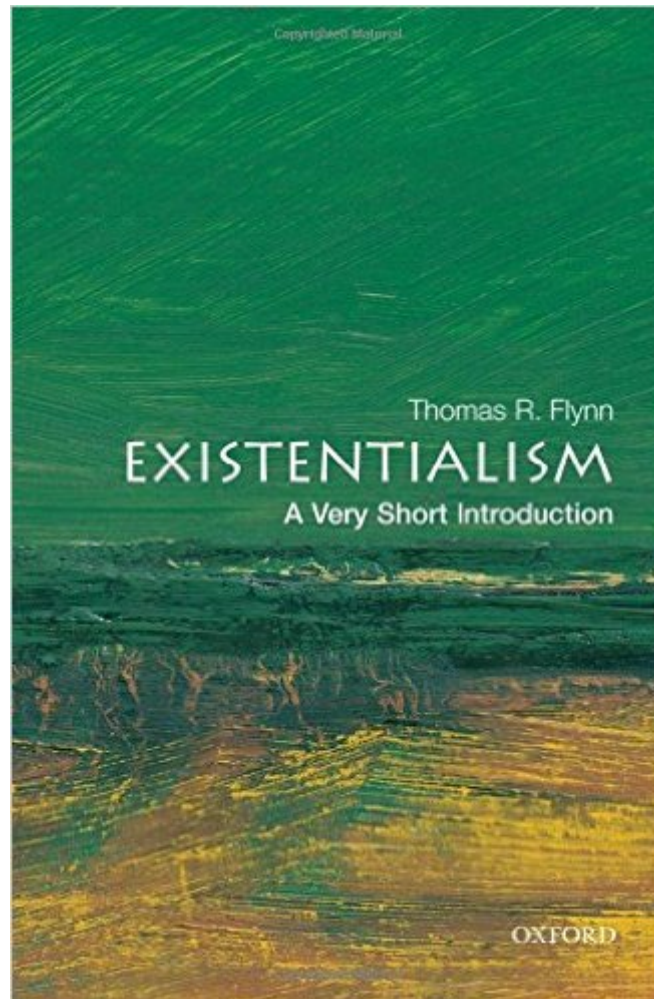


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Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction



Synopsis

One of the leading philosophical movements of the twentieth century, existentialism has had more impact on literature and the arts than any other school of thought. Focusing on the leading figures of existentialism, including Sartre, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty, and Camus, Thomas Flynn offers a concise account of existentialism, explaining the key themes of individuality, free will, and personal responsibility, which marked the movement as a way of life, not just a way of thinking. Flynn sets the philosophy of existentialism in context, from the early phenomenologists, to its rise in the 40's and 50's, and the connections with National Socialism, Communism, and Feminism. He identifies the original definition of "existentialism," which tends to be obscured by misappropriation, and highlights how the philosophy is still relevant in our world today.

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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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