CHAPTER III

THE INDIVIDUAL, IN EXISTENTIALISM

In this chapter, I will study the concept of the individual in existentialist philosophy, as an immediate background for my study of Kierkegaard's concept of the individual. Apparently, there are two factors, closely related to each other, that have influenced the emergence of existentialism. The one is the political, the other, the philosophical influence. The two factors represent the practical and theoretical backdrop to the emergence of existentialism as a specific movement.

A. Background of Existentialism

(i) Political Background

If we reflect on the European history of ideas and ideologies, we come face to face in the early nineteenth century with a political crisis that paved the way for the birth of existentialism. The atrocities committed during the world wars left man with no option but to focus his interests on matters, which would rectify the ills around him. This search for normalcy and sanity against the horrors of wars finally found a haven in man’s own actions. It was the most practical, and possibly man’s only, choice in his quest for a better life. Existentialism rose against the much acclaimed political ideologies of the times, often buttressed by the favoured philosophical doctrines of essentialism. Both were responsible for the devastation of mankind, in a way Existentialism evolved as a protest movement against them, on the one hand, with Sartre, Heidegger, Camus, Kafka and Nietzsche, advocating an atheistic existential philosophy, while, on the other, we find Kierkegaard, Marcel and Jaspers, advocating a theistic view. However, all existential
philosophers share a common concern with the primacy of the human existence, his individuality and, above all, freedom. Man is to be understood as a free agent, who, performing free action, and exercising his freedom, continually makes himself. His existence is a continuous becoming, a project.

Ideas or thoughts are mental products of the forces that serve as catalysts for socio-political actions in society. These ideas serve as a major factor in shaping the history of the world we live in. Ideas and events of history are closely related to one another. Ideas are instrumental in bringing about events in history, and the events, in their turn, help to generate new ideas in men. Ideas constantly change, they are never static, thus playing a dynamic and major role in the evolution of the socio-political and cultural institutions of mankind. Every development in the economy, polity, society, -- in short, in all cultural arenas, both material and ideal, -- is the continuation of, or reaction to, the ideas prevalent in the society. But the interaction here is mutual. Ideas form the specific institutions of the society, even as the institutions give rise to new ideas.

As stated in the previous chapter, the concept of the individual has engaged the attention of the philosophers from Aristotle to contemporary thinkers like P.F. Strawson. The works of great many scholars throw light on how the physical quality accounts for the concept of the individual. With the advent of existentialism, the concept of the individual takes a positive turn. Existentialism showed to the world how man is best understood as a being-in-a-situation. It made clear how the physical aspect plays a major role in determining and moulding man’s individuality and personality. It is because man finds himself in a certain situation that he is motivated to act in a certain way, he responds to his surroundings in specific ways. The physical aspect affects the individual in such a way that he is constituted largely by his environment as an individual. Existential understanding of man will not be clear to us, if we do not take into account the situation in which man is located. This brings us first of all to the political ideologies in vogue immediately prior to the rise of existentialism.
During the later part of the nineteenth century and the earlier part of the twentieth century, nationalism in Europe came to be increasingly asserted, often strongly buttressed by political ideologies. The philosopher of the age, giving articulation, philosophically but unwittingly, to the nationalistic aspirations, may be said to be Hegel, who professed to offer an enlarged conception of reason now famously known as “the dialectic”. It was his belief that politically man goes through certain phases progressively, in which the final stage represents the unity of freedom with authority. The unity represents the “synthesis”, which is resultant upon the two prior stages of the dialectic, viz. “thesis” and “anti-thesis”. Freedom cannot be conceived without authority, because man is free to do only that which is authorized by the state. Hegel is of the view that a state is weak, if it fails to command the respect of its citizens. The subjugation by the state and the willing obedience of the citizen can, and must, coalesce, if there should be an evolved state. Citizens form the parts of a state, and so they must be subordinated to the whole, which is the state. The citizen cannot have an identity of his own apart from the state, even as the parts by themselves cannot be the whole. Man should do everything in his power for the cause of his nation-state. Man’s obligation towards his nation thus becomes his freedom, thus rationalizing his every act. Metaphysically, however, Hegel is the logical absolutist who advocates the evolutionary march of “Reason” through dialectics. Hence, to him, everything that exists in the human world, including the state, is the outcome of reason. The state is the embodiment of reason, and it reflects the general will. The true freedom of the individual therefore lies in obeying the laws of the state. The individual has no freedom except through, and under, the direction of the state. It is Hegel’s belief that a citizen, being a part, should co-exist harmoniously with other parts. Coherence is the hallmark of not only epistemology but also social and political systems. Man is fulfilled only through his living in communion with other human beings. Man attains an identity in a group; therefore, identity is not possible outside the community he is in; speaking politically, he has no identity, unless he entertains a sense of patriotism. The nation determines his identity, and, so, man must do everything the authorities require of him, if he wishes to maintain a group identity. Because man’s identity is that of the community, therefore, of the nation, finally, his individual conscious purposes really
count for very little, or have no significance in the total outcome. Man may be said to represent the category of “means” to an end, and the end is the state. The desires and gratifications of man are rightly sacrificed for the achievements and purposes of the nation. The universal will precedes over the personal individual will. The universal (state) is exalted at the expense of the particular (man).

Ideologies attain their power, when politics harnesses them to its political agenda. Such political ideologies led to the rise of absolutistic political movements in the form of Fascism and Nazism. Both Fascism and Nazism were not fundamentally economic movements, but rather the manifestation of aggressive nationalism. Fascism and Nazism sought to re-establish their respective countries to the status of super-powers. They believed that man cannot realize his full potentiality alone, but that the state holds the key to the realization of nationalistic goals. Only through the state is man able to truly develop, and the level of development is exhibited in the degree of power the state is able to exhibit and execute. Only in the state can man find his true identity. The state is everything, and it may unquestioningly demand self-sacrifice, discipline, obedience and total loyalty of the individual. Nothing exists outside the state, and the individual exists for the state. Individuals have to realize their freedom, whatever it be, in the freedom of the state. The state engulfs the individual, the individual is always at the disposal of the state. Individual freedom therefore is subordinated to the interests of the state. Since force is an integral part of the coercive state, it is a key factor through which the state seeks to establish its national goals and, through them, the social virtues for the people. But, because every nation thinks in this way, conflicts are inevitable. Conflicts, in course of time, grow into conflagrations and wars.

(ii) Philosophical Background

In the field of philosophy, Hegel built his absolutistic and idealistic system in consonance with the above political ideologies. In Hegel’s philosophy we find that thought, or reason, takes a prominent place, which finally results in defining man as
rational being, in a sense that goes far beyond its Aristotelian version, where a delicate balance between rationality and animality was however maintained. But, fed on the enlightenment agenda for over two centuries, this fine balance was thrown overboard. Man was seen to have come of age. He is identified as a rational being. For Hegel, man progressively develops as he goes through the process of thesis, anti-thesis and finally establishes himself in the synthesis, whereby he is now in the realm of the universal, or the race. The goal of man is to march past his individuality to become the universal man. Man cannot go beyond the universal, because he has no identity apart from the race. The individual man is abrogated (aufheben), so that the universal man is born anew. The individual was not given any due significance. The true man is considered as a rational being, capable of reasoning, to the extent he attributes to himself the characterization of belonging to the rational race. Individual man now is a mere being who belongs to the essence of being rational. Everything ultimately is thus resolved to the supposition that man is a rational being. Hegel, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, builds up an impressive idealistic system of purely logical ideas, that is unfortunately and completely severed from the everyday situation, in which man otherwise finds himself. His philosophy is best understood as a philosophy of identity between existence and rational knowledge. The fundamental axiom of this impressive idealistic philosophy is: Reality is rational. Hegel gave a far better expression to the inchoate thoughts of German idealists like Fichte, Schelling and Lessing. To Hegel, that which thinks alone exists, indeed, “to exist is to think”. Hegel propounds that it is only by logical thought that we can know reality, or truth. Accordingly man becomes a mere medium for the manifestation of reason, and has no independent reality otherwise. Man is to be overcome, if the “superman” is to be born. He becomes a mere tool with no real freedom. His so-called freedom consists in the acceptance of the necessity of the birth of the ideal man, who is rational.

It is clear from the above that the Aristotelian rational man is ripped off his freedom, which profoundly is to affect man in his ethical and religious pursuits. It is the highest price man can ever pay, though what he receives, in return, is his own downfall.
What the Hegelian reason failed to see was that man has, besides rationality, feelings, needs, desires, inclinations, will etc, which contribute in no mean way to gratifying and shaping his personality. The rationalist viewed man only from a single perspective, while, in truth, he should have given man the credit of a larger perspective that would at once do justice to his cognitive, affective and conative life.

Let us try to understand the kind of situation man had to face during the terror of Fascism and Nazism. During this turbulent period of history, man lived in chaos all over, and around, him. His social, economic, political, ethical and religious life was hanging in the air of uncertainty and doom. Man has in him the capacity to undergo a psychological development under all circumstances. Faced with the kind of situation that robbed him of his essential dignity of a person, man was left with no other alternative than acquiescing to the standards set by his political dictators. He was caught up in a situation where he experienced fear and the loss of his integral personhood. In such a time of extreme stress, man can either seek the support of something outside of him, and express his need for transcendence, and thus transcend himself or he can believe in himself, assert the innate power of his own self, and thus pull himself somehow through. As man was faced, during those extreme times, with decadence looming large, he had to do something extraordinary to rise up from such a hopeless situation. But, we see that man was not given the opportunity to decide, make his own decisions regarding which cause he was to follow. With narrow rationalism dominating every aspect of his life, man was left with no freedom to decide his future. It was the kind of rationalism that desiccated the power of his will and heart. The absolute demand by the state on the obedience from the individuals left no choice, and therefore, no freedom for man. With the state demanding entire loyalty, man had to do everything the state required of him to do, and, in doing so, he was forced to seek support from the state, in as much as he was identified with the state and its aspirations. He had only a collective identity as a member of the state. Everything he did was for the sake of the state. All his action was a result of the identity that the state bestowed on him. Thus, his every action was justified on the ground that it was for the nation’s glory. Every act was universally rationalized.
It was further reasoned that for the absolute glory of the nation, all other outside forces must cease to exist; no other state has the right to exist. This kind of reasoning and justification naturally led to large scale violence and blood-shed. The two world wars that we witnessed are the results of narrow nationalism come to roost in idealism. There was a complete submergence of human values during the two world wars, because reason gave no place for freedom. Hitler snatched away the freedom of those men, whom he executed for the simple reason that they were suspected of their loyalty to the state. Any man who stood on the way of the state was mercilessly eliminated, and such ruthless actions were entirely justified in the name of the state. With only a lip service to partisan reason, man was no longer in a safe environment, because his very being was threatened. Exclusive emphasis on reason makes man blind to all other needs of human beings, except those of the state.

Human beings have the better perception of the truth only in retrospective. When the full scale of the atrocities committed by the political movements came to light after the wars, man was jolted by the fact that rational human beings are capable of committing barbarism to an unimaginable extent. The two world wars were the outcome of man rationalizing and legitimizing all his (mis)deeds. Man, dictated solely by his faculty of positivistic reason, understood his life only to a limited extent, and this extent did not attempt to add value to his life. With no freedom guaranteed, man was reduced to a mere instrument to be wielded by the state. This highly applauded trend in thinking struck at the root of transcendence in human life, especially the one encountered in morality and religion; it also desiccated concrete human ties, resulting human slaughter on a scale never witnessed in history. Man failed to see the true reality and value of his own being. He saw only one aspect of his being, namely reasoning, but failed to see that he possessed other and equally important aspects of his life. He, in a way, failed to bring about a harmony within himself, because he denied other elements in favour of his reasoning ability. As a result his actions resulted in dire consequences to the quality of human life.
Further, it can be said that the aim of Fascism and Nazism was to establish the supremacy of their respective nations. They claimed that their actions are justified under all circumstances. In retrospect, man was confronted with the question: can rationalizing justify actions? Let us take the case of executing those who were not loyal to the state. On being asked why the Nazi (read tentatively reason) killed the innocent men, the Nazi replied that those men were not loyal to the state. On face value, it gives enough reason to kill all those who resisted the narrow partisan political agenda of the state. This is surely a justification. But, if one is not convinced of this justification and persisted on knowing the other hidden motives for killing, we can expect an answer that the Nazi killed, because he experienced fury and the need to kill. But what led him to such negative feelings towards his fellow human beings? It can now be answered that, when he learnt of those men’s disloyalty towards the state, it was against his own strong belief in the sovereignty of the state that led him to such negative feelings. Thus the analysis finally leads us to admit that the cause is rooted in the intolerance of a group against another group, because the latter holds a view different from the former on what may be considered as loyalty to the state. Shockingly, here, the justification for the action is also the same as the cause of the action; the cause and the justification turns out to be one and the same. The rationalist has really not catered to the demands of justification, because his cause and justification of actions have been the same. Cause of an action is a weak form of justifying the act. This is bound to happen, if we do not respect human freedom.

To snatch away one’s freedom is a grave offence. Every man has a right to freedom. Freedom is man’s specific way of life. It is impossible to think of man without his freedom; man is by nature free. When Jean Jacques Rousseau claimed that man is born free, he also observed that even the liberty of the whole of humanity was no warrant for violence. Man’s freedom does not mean he can resort to violence at his whims and fancies. Justification given by the Nazis and Fascists does not hold water, indeed, it is a trivial ground, and trivial justifications cannot be accepted. The rationalist cannot satisfactorily justify his actions, and this only throws light on the fact that such actions have no place in civil society. The rationalist Nazis and Fascists compelled the individual
to look up to the state for his very survival. The individual was to be loyal and obedient to the state. The individual therefore sacrificed everything for the sake of the state. The individual reached out to the state, leaving aside his own needs. But in reaching out to the state, the individual lost everything. He was lost by merging himself in the state, his identity was irrevocably lost in the universal that the state was. In reaching out to the state, he was stuck with it. He cannot move away from the state, so that he can find himself. By gaining the state he lost his own state of being, -- in short, he lost himself. However, existence is what makes man “stand out”. To exist is to stand out of everything, and be himself. Only then can he have his existence. The political ideologies of the time, or rather of rationalistic essentialism, did not do justice to the concrete and individual man. They committed a grave mistake by taking away the freedom of man, indeed, they abrogated the existence of man, for the sake of saving his essence in the universal man. The state had become the universal man.

Humanity had to undergo a “dark” age, because the human beings failed to understand themselves. They failed to understand that being rational is only one aspect of their being and that they were blind to the fact that they were much more than just being rational. The wars in retrospect opened man’s eyes, and look at himself from a much enlarged and healthier perspective. He realized that the directive principle for man was one of value, which was largely absent in the Hegelian essentialism and rationalism. When everything around him failed, man ultimately had to look within himself, in order to bring forth what he had lost due to his mere idealistic approach to life. The serious concern for man as a being, who must first find his values, served as the impetus to lead him to existentialism. In a world, where all values seem to have vaporized, it is only man himself who can resurrect values and give meaning to human beings.

B. Discovery of the Individual

Existentialism is not a system of philosophy, it is basically a reflection on human ontology. The existentialist’s philosophy is focused on answering the question of human
"being", or What does it mean to "exist". If Kierkegaard is discussed here, first, it is only fidelity to chronology. Existentialist philosophers like Kierkegaard, Sartre and Heidegger do not differ much, when it comes to the fundamentals in answering the question, despite their divergent orientations. However, the question of God is applicable only to some existentialists, among them, to Kierkegaard, in particular. The theist and atheist views do not differ much on the question of authenticity of human existence, they all project man as a being, who is in space and time, capable of self-experiences which set him apart from all other creatures on earth. They all contend that man cannot be said to exist, if he fails to realize his own reality. Needless to say, his reality does not consist in defining man in terms of mere essence, or cerebrality. What man is will have to take into account the situation that the individual is forced to respond to. His being is not made once and for all, rather it continually makes itself by responding consciously and responsibly to his environment. Therefore human existence consists in bringing all the different aspects of his individuality together within himself.

First of all, let us try to understand how existentialism is a new and positive turn in understanding man. All the existentialists, especially Kierkegaard, reject vehemently the essentialism of Hegel. In Hegel’s philosophy, we find that thought takes a prominent place, which finally results in defining man as rational being. Being rational is the essence of human being. While all reality is rational, in man, rationality reaches self-awareness. Therefore, man is identified as “rational”. But, to identify man as rational is definitely not appropriate, because, “rational” is a concept, and what is conceptual is the universal. Man however is “this individual existent”, not a universal essence. Man cannot be reduced to concepts, and Kierkegaard then rightly rejects the “essence”, or “universal”, of Hegelianism. Kierkegaard saw man in an altogether different light, which was to result in a new awakening in human ontology. Not without reason is he claimed to be the “father of existentialism”. He brought to light the much needed significance of acknowledging man as a particular, and not as representing the universal. He asserted, “existence involves first and foremost particularity”.
The serious difficulty to which Hegel opens himself is that, for him, the universal takes precedence over the particular. The particular has any meaning at all only when understood as an instantiation of, or as “swallowed” by, the universal. The universal is invariably understood in terms of the abstract concepts, therefore, the particular, now, which is within the universal, has the danger of becoming a concept, thus an abstracted essence. Its concrete existence is irrevocably lost. The conceptualized particular, far from standing out among the concepts, gets equated with the rest of the concepts. All the concepts are treated equal, there is no scope for distinctive individuality, because it is severed from the concrete existence. But, for Kierkegaard, the particular is higher than the universal, as the individual is higher than the race. It is the particulars that constitute the universal, and it is the individuals who make up the race; if there is no particular and the individual, there is no point in talking about the universal and the race. The absence of the individual nullifies the race. Kierkegaard observes, “The fact is that at every moment the individual is himself and the race”\textsuperscript{15}. The individual exists in time, and we have history on account of time; and it is only in history that we come to know of the race. The capacity of man at once to be himself and the race makes him stand out as someone special from the rest. The history of the race is nothing other than the history of the individuals, and it is brought about by the individuals. That which is brought about cannot stand on its own, nor can it be placed above that which is responsible for its bringing about. In the opinion of Kierkegaard, the individual is the master, the race is the slave. In no way is the situation tolerated, if the slave were to command the master, in fact, the moment such a thing happens, the slave becomes the master, establishing the law, once again. Likewise the individual, who is responsible for bringing about the race, can never be treated as subordinate to the race. Thus the particular, or individual, precedes the universal, or race. Kierkegaard thus resurrected man from the dark shadows of the nameless collectivity, which Hegelianism was proud to have achieved. Kierkegaard reestablished man as the particular, who is capable of existing as a concrete being, living a human life, as he experiences his feelings, emotions, and the capacities of making decisions on his own. Man can survive on his own, he is above the race. Because
there are concrete particulars we can also have the abstract universals, the other way round is not the case.

Hegel, the essentialist that he is, on the contrary, advocates that, "essence precedes existence", because the "rational" is the essence of man. For Hegel existence of man is known through the rational, and, even so, truth is the only coherence of ideas. But Kierkegaard challenges the Hegelian essentialistic epistemology. It is impossible to contend that there is thought without any reference to spatio-temporal world. Reasoning, it is true, is unique to humans, but it is not the same as saying man is reasoning. Reasoning belongs to the man, who has a spatio-temporal dimension. The idea exists, because it is produced by man who is in space and time. All reality for man is to be found within the integrity of his own person, in as much as man gives meaning to it to the extent it is relevant to him. Therefore, truth is subjectivity, and not an idea. Thus the existentialist holds that "existence precedes essence". That which does not exist cannot be known in essence. Essence is a product of qualities inherent in the existing man. Since man is capable of reasoning, he is said to be rational; but we are able to know of man's essence, because first of all he exists. To infer existence from essence is like putting the cart before the horse. That which is real is conditioned to space and time, that which is in space and time alone can exist. Only the existent reality can be known. Thus we see that the problem of human ontology is at the centre of existentialism. Existence, contends Kierkegaard, is strictly personal in nature, it cannot be reduced to concepts or essence, because it can only be understood concretely by the individual.

Since existence is primordial, essence, therefore an idea, can never explain existence. We qualify things on the ground that they are determined, for example, "Stone is hard". We actually feel the hardness, and so it can be said that the essence of stone is 'hardness'. Can existence be considered a quality? It makes no sense because there is no way to determine it. The question of essence may be, to some extent, successfully applied to objects, but it fails to account for the nature of human beings. Existence cannot be a quality that can be applied from outside to human beings, because his existence precedes
The much acclaimed Hegelian idealism is rooted in the speculative, abstract thinking. It is a dialectical philosophy, after all. In abstract thinking, the thinker is thinking, and is oblivious to his bodily activities. In thinking he forgets his own body. Think of the philosopher who is found holding up his pen instead of an umbrella, on a rainy day! The anecdote only projects the ridiculous nature of idealism. Thinking has the power to elude existence. A thinker, who fails to acknowledge the relationship between his abstract thought and his own existence, makes himself ridiculous. In the words of Kierkegaard, such a person “is in process of ceasing to be a human being” 18. In thinking, he tends to think away his own existence. But a genuinely existing human being is one who is the synthesis of the finite and infinite, constantly holding these two factors together and, at the same time, infinitely interested in his existence. Kierkegaard says that man exists in the “moment” i.e. in the present. Indeed, the moment is applicable to something which is at once self-conscious and concrete. Along with the moment comes the “movement”, too. When man thinks, it can so happen that there is the danger that the moment and the movement become an imagination. Imagination by nature is not real. By thinking, the individual reduces moments and movements to mere images, and so they cease to be real. The moment man thinks, all that he thinks may become a figment of imagination. Existence on the other hand has to do with moments and the movements. In thinking man abrogates moments and movements, and thereby abrogates existence, too. “There is something which cannot be thought, namely existence” 19. Kierkegaard’s anti-intellectualism, we may note, was needed as a shock therapy to jolt man out of the influence of essentialistic philosophy of Hegel. It may not be taken to mean that Kierkegaard’s is an invitation for intellectual lethargy. We must not forget that Kierkegaard is philosophically countering the influence of essentialism so that the claims of existentialism are philosophically heard and cherished.
Hegelian system of thought advocates a finality of the unity of thought and being. This is a necessity for the logical absolute idealism of the Hegelian brand. Kierkegaard, on the contrary, observes,

System and finality correspond to one another, but existence is precisely the opposite of finality. It may be seen, from a purely abstract point of view, that system and existence are incapable of being thought together, because in order to think existence at all, systematic thought must think it as abrogated, and hence as not existing. 20

Needles to say, system for Kierkegaard is Hegelianism. There cannot be a unity of thought and being, and so existence has no finality. The existing man is not a finished product, but an ever making "project", as existentialists keep repeating to us. The very fact that man is placed on this earth and is living throws light on the truth that he is not a finished product. Existence is a "becoming", or a "being-in-the making", by the continual exercise of one's freedom, a constant striving. The striving is "as long as he is an existing individual, he is in process of becoming" 21. Only man has the capacity in him to be a center of continual building-up. Only man "exists", in the literal sense of "to stand out" (existere). He is the only unique creature, who has the capacity to encounter the pathos of existence. This encountering of the pathos is accentuated by the existentialists in the concept of "anxiety", "dread", "pain", "restlessness", in the existentialist jargon. It is an experience, which wakes man up to the reality that he is capable of actualizing possibilities, specifically, to human existence. Paul Tillich, an existentialist theologian, in his Systematic Theology 22, says that only a human being can experience anxiety, because only man can unite freedom and destiny, --, a restatement of Kierkegaard's perception of man being a synthesis of the finite and the infinite, or the temporal and the eternal.

Kierkegaard says that human existence implies the separation of thought and being. "It does not by any means follow that existence is thoughtless" 21. It rather means, according to Kierkegaard, that man is faced with possibilities, or choices, which he can turn to actuality, if he consciously wills to do so. Let this not be construed as
Kierkegaard's hostility to philosophy, much less an advocacy of skepticism. Kierkegaard does not rule out existential thought in his philosophy. In fact, his philosophy starts where the essentialist thought ends, but the purpose to which he puts the thought may not be the same as with other philosophers, in particular, the Hegelians.

But it must always be remembered that reflection is not in itself something harmful, that, on the contrary, it is necessary to work through it in order that one's action should be more intensive.  

To talk of something that it "exists" implies that it stands out as one, an integral whole, a totality. No outside force can disrupt it, because it is the expression of individuality, which is the important feature of existence. It exists, because it has individuality: To exist is to exist as an individual. For man, therefore, to have individuality means that the concern should posses something as his own, which can be only his and no one else's. In this light it can be said that the only thing of which man can say that it belongs to him, and only to him exclusively, is his "self-experiences". To have self-experiences means to be eminently subjective. Thus, to exist as a subjectivity implies that one is fully aware of what one is doing. Thus, self-awareness suggests that one experiences self-experiences, which are private to him, and thereby experiences that he stands alone in all that he experiences. Therefore he is that particular, or individual, who has the "courage" to exercise his freedom. He no longer identifies with the group, the race, the state, - - "the crowd", or "the rabble", in the existentialist jargon.

By thinking existence, speculative philosophy misses on the moment, but rather thinks existence as having existed in the past. But existence is not about the past. Existence has to do with the present, that which is existing. That is why, for the existentialists, existence cannot be thought, but can only be lived. Existence is an actuality, not an "ideality" extended either in the past or in the future. Existence is an actuality, because man actualizes his possibilities by continually exercising his freedom. When man exercises his freedom, it does not happen in the past, but in the present, here and now. Moreover, man does not exercise his freedom only once, but the exercise is an
on-going process. As long as he exercises his freedom, man exists. The act of exercising freedom is a forward, and not a backward, movement. This does not mean that existence lies in the future. Rather to exist means to move forward, to progress, to become --, indicative at once of the dynamism of the process that goes on in the present.

For Kierkegaard, man is an individual, because he is able to express himself in freedom in his actions. The individual is more than his thoughts, he has self-experiences not only in the cognitive, but also in the emotive and cognitive spheres. His affectivity far exceeds often his cognitivity; it serves as the springboard of activity. Therefore man expresses himself practically. Being a social animal, the individual interacts with his environment, both physical and social. He communicates through his emotions and actions, and not merely through cognition. For the individual, his actions speak volumes. “What ought to be done is expressed by – oh, noble simplicity! – his doing it” 25. To understand him we must understand the way he communicates in diverse ways. Through his actions he shows that he is very much involved in his physical and social surroundings. Through his actions he makes himself known to others. In other words, his actions speak out his existence: existence is concretely expressed. Wittgenstein gives expression to a similar existentialist thought, when he observes that the inner stands in need of the outer 26: We can say that, though existence cannot be defined, we can know existence by living. Kierkegaard reads even a sense of urgency in it: “The time has come for work to begin, for every individual must work for himself, each for himself” 27.

Starting with Kierkegaard, all existentialists agree that the individual is one who “exists”, in its fullest sense. They are of the view that only an individual, or a particular, and not a crowd, or universal, can experience existence, or truly exist. Kierkegaard decries the tendency of people to get lost in the crowd, refusing to take the responsibility of existing. People are unfortunately inclined to identifying themselves readily with others, in such a way as to keep their own existence in abeyance. They destructively feel at home with the crowd, the mass, which results in destroying their own identity. This crowd mentality is the in-authentic existence of man, a state in which man is “lost”. For
Heidegger, this in-authentic existence of man is projected in the "facticity" of man-in-the-world (Da-sein). Da-sein finds itself as being-already-in-the-world, as "thrown" into a particular situation. This is a situation which the Da-sein does not choose to be, but discovers himself to be in. As "thrown" into this world, he is observed with the present, which projects the "fallanness", or the inauthentic existence of man. Such inauthentic existence is characterized by Sartre as "bad faith". It is a case of man's self-deception which conceals from him the truth of his own existence, and yet the man prefers to look away from it. It is a false consciousness practiced without resistance. Thus, for all these existentialists, man is in a state of inauthentic existence, against which he has to fight to recover his authentic existence. Inauthenticity is a state where man is shunted away from his own reality.

The dimension of time plays a vital role in the thinking of the existentialists. Heidegger expressly includes "time" in the title of his celebrated Being and Time. For him, the world represents the past, the inauthentic existence constitutes living in the giveness of the past, merely acted upon in a stimulus-response frame of life, with no concern for the possibilities of realizing the truth of oneself, constituting the future. For Heidegger, the Da-sein then cannot be understood without his past, present and future. This significant reference to the dimension of time throws light on the fact that the human being cannot be considered at all except as a being in the midst of a physical world. The same is upheld by Kierkegaard when he says that the individual is a synthesis of body, mind and spirit. The individual cannot entertain his eternal element within himself unless he acknowledges also his physical and psychical aspects. He lives in the world in order to find his existence and establish himself. Sartre too holds similar view when he talks of "being-for-itself", a pour-soi, as being conscious of oneself, as distinct from the "being-in-itself", an en-soi, as being non-conscious of itself. En-soi is a self-enclosed reality, lacking freedom, whereas the pour-soi can break out of the limitation of itself by way of the exercise of choice. For Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre, the realization of authentic existence consists in man's realization of being through freedom. Despite Kierkegaard's falling back upon God, he, too, believes that to exist is to strive in the
exercise of freedom. All three philosophers believe that man’s life on earth is a “passion”, a “commitment” and an “anticipation”. As long as man lives, he is always moving forward, and with each experience, he knows a little more of his own existence, therefore, of himself.

To all the existentialists, one of the characteristic feature of the individual is the existential anguish, often referred to as “anxiety” or “dread”. Existentialists have often, through this category, have opened the “soul” of the modern man to us. Its analysis has provided us with a peep into the inexhaustible psychological make-up of man. Sartre makes a distinction between being-in-itself (en-soi) and being-for-itself (pour-soi). By being-in-itself he understands that which has no consciousness; it is the material reality. Being-for-itself is ordinarily understood as the being endowed with consciousness; it is the human reality. Man is said to live generally an inauthentic existence, when he fails to be conscious of his own reality, as distinct from the being-in-itself. In order to realize his existence he should consciously think and act in accordance with his native endowment of consciousness and freedom. As a result he realizes that he is very different from the things around him. Thus the burden of freedom introduces the element of existential anguish. For Heidegger, too, the most important feature which marks off the conscious life from other things devoid of consciousness is the ability to “consider” the world. This ability is restricted only to human beings, who think of themselves as separate from these things. This sets in man the awareness of being in the world, and also the awareness to transcend the world by exercising the freedom to choose. For, in the exercise of freedom, man exhibits that he is not tied down to the given facticities. But the freedom comes with the pain of decision.

Sartre, too represents the feeling of nothingness which exists within man. When man sees for the first time that he is “nothing”, in the sense of being a no-thing, i.e. free, he experiences the anguish, as if his being were a big “hollow” in its centre. This realization hits him with an enormous force, that he tries often to conceal his freedom, landing into a situation of “bad faith”. There is bad faith because man is free. But all
his efforts at bad faith are doomed to failure, because with the concealing he also recognizes his freedom. With the concealing of his freedom, he, in turn, realizes that the very act of concealing is also an execution of his freedom. Man needs to make a "leap" towards his authenticity, so that he can rise out of his bad faith, and it would consists in his accepting himself as a center of free action. But this is not without its concomitant angst.

For Heidegger, dread is primarily the basic feeling of man that he does not belong to the "they", but what constitutes the "I". Dread may be oppressive, but it is also liberative. For dread withdraws Dasein from the "they" to the particular, the individual, who has to face up to the requirements of genuine existence. For Heidegger, too, dread is about nothing. It is an objectless dread. Dread is of life as a whole. Life, taken as a whole, surely should include death, and so dread is dread of the death. Man is the only being, who has the consciousness of his having to die, the task of dying. Hence the very act of self-transcendence is also an experience of dread. Instead of facing it, man often sacrifices his particular identity for the sake of the crowd (dasman). Being in the world he easily embraces the crowd. This is his inauthentic existence. But in reality he is not the crowd. In order to rise from this inauthentic existence, he should realize his uniqueness. Dread is a feeling which opens the way for man in his quest for authenticity. If man is to rise from "forfeiture", or mistaken identity, to authenticity, he can do so only in isolation from the seductive "they". Only the relation to death brings such isolation, for death is the only event in one's life which is uniquely his. Heidegger thinks that, death can be most authentic, because it is one's own. Man lives in the anticipation of death. Heidegger is of the view that death alone brings to man his proper freedom. In experiencing the dread of death man both acknowledges, and makes a free decision to accept dread that he is to die one day. In dread man is rescued from the absurdities of worldly facts into accepting the possibilities of being himself, thus realizing his existence. In freedom, then, man transcends the facticity of being already in the world, which is yet inalienably his. There is a perceptible tension between forces, which challenge man to escape from enslavement to facticity into freedom, and the acute consciousness that he is
tied down to facticity. This represents a dual obligation for man: facticity and freedom. Man should realize this tension as his own. Heidegger is of the view that man actually realizes his ontological reality, when he creatively experiences dread. In dread man is able to make the right choice. Dread is the call of the self to authenticity. Heidegger acknowledges that death is inevitable, but that man moves closer to it as each day passes in the consciousness that he is a being-unto-death.

Kierkegaard too has an elaborate discussion on dread. Man experiences dread when he is faced with the possibilities, that is to say, in the exercise of his freedom. Thus for Kierkegaard, Heidegger and Sartre, though dread is an objectless state, confrontation with dread, or anguish, by the individual is inevitable, but it also provides man with the best possible opportunity for realizing his existence. In dread, man not only is aware of his inauthentic existence but is faced with the possibility of authentic existence. Kierkegaard has his own nuance, here, being a theistic existentialist. He conceives of man’s failure to truly exist as arising out of his separation from God on account of the lack of commitment in faith. For Kierkegaard, unlike the other two existentialists, man’s reality is realized in being committed to God. It is in God that man is able to exercise his freedom, and thus gain his reality. He masterfully elaborates on the psychological feeling of “guilt” that man is oppressed with in having failed to live authentically. This is what he shares with other existentialists. Kierkegaard however moves a step further, when he brings in the consciousness of the “sin”, and relates this ontological state with the psychological feeling of guilt. In dread, man is intensified in passion by projecting his inauthentic existence as sin before God. Sin is the refusal to acknowledge one’s true existence. Since existence is given by God, which man has failed to acknowledge and realize, man becomes a sinner; this also is his suffering. Kierkegaard says, “essentially it is the god-relationship that makes a man a man, and yet he lacks this.” In suffering man faces his obligations towards God, his creator. The failure to rescue him from suffering by any forces outside of him generates despair in man. But this feeling of despair positively helps man in taking “the leap of faith”. With this leap, man is able to make decisions which results in the meaningfulness of life in God.
For Kierkegaard the test of faith may become vital for an individual who truly exists. The trial of faith, in a way, projects the temporal and the eternal element in man. The temporal provides the “temptation” required for the test of faith. The possibilities of exercising his freedom however constitute the eternal element in man. Man is the synthesis of the finite and the infinite, the body and the mind. But this synthesis itself is made possible by the third component, the spirit, which is the unifying and regulative force in man. The spirit in man is the eternal element within him which relates the finite and the infinite. The spirit indeed is basically a relation. Kierkegaard notes,

Such a...relation is the human self, the relation which relates itself to its own self, and in relating itself to its own self relates itself to another.

Such a relation is projected in the feeling of dread by man, when dread is understood as bringing together, on the one hand, the in-authentic existence and, on the other, the infinite possibilities of freedom. In other words, dread brings into focus the finite and the infinite elements in man.

Man is best understood as the result of his being in the world with his eternal obligations. He struggles to strike a balance between the diverse elements which constitute his reality. On striking a balance, the temporal is not abrogated by way of a Hegelian dialectics, but the temporal, in fact, continues as an integral part of human existence. With the temporal serving as temptations, and with dread and despair serving as the impetus, the individual takes the much required “leap” of freedom. On willing to choose, he chooses freedom. Man, on choosing to exercise his freedom, chooses God. Freedom indeed is the expression of the spirit in man. Only through freedom, man knows of his existence as anchored in God. For Kierkegaard, to know God is at once knowing one’s own existence. All discovery of God is finally a self-discovery to man.

By focusing on the existence of man, existentialists draw our attention to the particular, the individual. As such, they break away from their predecessors, Hegelians,
in particular, who had successfully suppressed the particular in favour of the universal. The existentialists elaborate on the human predicament, in explaining the reality of man. The existentialists understand man as one who is conscious of his surroundings and his experiences. They think that a great deal of confusion in respect of the reality of man is due to the mind-body dualism of the Cartesians and the absolute Idea of the Hegelians. The Cartesians understand man as leading two separate lives, that of the mind and of the body. But this is inconceivable, because man, being a single entity, can and ought to be rightly understood only as an integral whole. The existentialist's approach to the human reality in terms of existence cannot be easily brushed aside, despite the possible one-sidedness of his approach. The existentialist has drawn the question of man to the outer and the inner, the temporal and the eternal, reality of man. It is their contention that man is the product of both elements, which have paved the way for a better understanding of man. Philosophers are often guilty of neglecting one or the other aspect of man, occasioning a partial apprehension of human reality.

Existentialism emphasizes on the pathos of existence, the affirmation of the concrete and the real. Human reality is not an abstract concept, much less a universal nature encountered in thought. In both theistic and atheistic existentialism, the self-transcendence of the individual in freedom is highlighted. In a given situation the existing individual, being imperfect, yet endowed with freedom, must constantly overcome his givenness to move forward to what he can become. He should transcend his present self to "become", to encounter the infinite possibilities. In exercising freedom he encounters his real self, his individuality. The reality of man is not given to abstract concepts, but to the experience of existence. Hence, one has to be wary of philosophies that ignore existence. Kierkegaard humorously observes

What the philosophers say about Reality is often as disappointing as a sign you see in a shop window, which reads: Pressing Done Here. If you brought your clothes to be pressed, you would be fooled, for the sign is only for sale. 37

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