It is a desirable, inevitable and happy thing that new philosophies are born from time to time, for times change, social circumstances undergo a transformation, new attitudes come into existence and the human field of knowledge ever goes on widening, and old philosophies may not be able to solve new problems. Philosophical systems are not born in vacuum; personal actions, historical events and the cultural milieu influence the intellectual activity of some lovers of wisdom. Philosophy represents the intellectual activity of these individuals and reflects the cultural milieu of the society in which they live. Every new school of philosophy is related to every school that has gone before -- it is either a modification of or a reaction to it. Some philosophical ideas have been there from ancient times, but they lie dormant, so to speak, until the time comes when they become prominent because they become relevant. Existentialism is one such important idea. It is nothing new since it goes back to the Delphic axiom "Know thyself", repeated by Socrates. It became a new phenomenon in the nineteenth century as a reaction to philosophy's habit of system-building, classical rationalism.
Hegel's Idealism and the study of man as an object. Man, in this new philosophy, ceased to be considered as an object in metaphysics, epistemology and ontology. The subjective aspect of man is its central concern.

Existentialism has been defined as "an attitude and outlook that emphasizes human existence -- that is, the distinctive qualities of individual persons -- rather than man in the abstract or nature and the world in general." It is a protest in the name of individuality against the concepts of "reason" and "nature" which had become prominent during the eighteenth century Enlightenment. It has something in common with Romanticism which emphasized the emotional, intuitive and subjective rather than the logical and objective. It is, therefore, no surprise that a Romantic poet like Coleridge anticipated the element of subjectivism before it become the subject of philosophy. He wrote in "Dejection: an Ode":

I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

1 Harold H. Titus, Living Issues. p.296

He means that only subjectivity, not objectivity and reason, can count in a world in which objects may well be meaningless and reason absurd. He emphasizes the self, as did the existential philosophers beginning with Soren Kierkegaard. It is only man that matters and philosophy must be in terms of man's existence, that is, existential.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe were times of political upheavals, industrialization, wars and turmoil. Men lived almost from crisis to crisis. It is significant that England and America, which did not go through any great political crisis, have not produced a body of existential literature. "Existentialism is preeminently the philosophy of crisis; it has interpreted the whole of human, and likewise of cosmic existence, as a succession of critical situations, each fraught with danger and demanding for its resolution all the inner resources of the individual; each crisis gives rise to a new crisis requiring similar resolution, and the entire series leads to ultimate 'shipwreck'."3

Again, existentialism was a protest against the impersonal nature of the industrial and technological world of the nineteenth century, for in an industrial age the individual is subordinated to the machine, the extreme form of which is probably Ford's method in the twentieth century of the production of automobiles during which process man becomes a part of the machine. The conveyor-belt brings a skeleton of a car to where the worker stands and he performs one single mechanical operation like an automaton before the belt moves it on to the next worker. Meanwhile the belt brings on the next car, the worker repeats automatically the same operation as before, and so on ad infinitum. This may be a very efficient way of putting together a car and taking apart a man. A car is assembled but an individual is fragmented.

Existentialism is also a protest against the totalitarian systems like communism and fascism which have no respect for man and the individual is submerged in the collective mass of men. An individual, if he is sensitive, is almost destroyed in a world dominated by technology and totalitarianism. The existential movement led by Kierkegaard is proof that man as an individual does not like to be a "faceless" nonentity. There was a time when an individual could find support from
familiar external things like customs, traditions or beliefs, but the technological civilization deprived him of these props and he had to turn to himself and make his own decisions. It is also significant that existentialism was popular in Germany after World War I and in France during and after World War II. Historically considered, existentialism is a basic response to cultural crisis.

When there is little external to himself that an individual can rely on, the belief in the primacy of his own existence becomes firm. "Existentialism emphasizes the uniqueness and primacy of existence -- the inner, immediate experience of self-awareness. The fundamental drive or urge is to exist and to be recognized as an individual. If man is so recognized, he may gain a sense of meaning and significance in life. The most meaningful point of reference for any person is his own immediate consciousness, which cannot be contained in systems or abstractions. Abstract thinking tends to be impersonal and to lead away from the concrete human being and the human situation. Reality or being is existence that is found in the 'I' rather than the 'it'. Thus the centre of thought and meaning is the existing individual thinker."4

Existential philosophers make a distinction between existence and essence. What they mean by existence is not merely the act of living, but living with a certain meaningfulness. If the meaning of life is lost, it is not worth being alive, for it is meaningless to live. To exist is to live meaningfully, that is, with a rich and positive content.

Essence is what is common to all beings of the same kind. What a thing is is essence; that it is is existence. Once one has comprehended this concept, one can think of the essence of a thing apart from its existence.

Existentialists claim that existence precedes essence. That is, an individual has to exist as an individual before we can talk about what is common to all individuals. Man comes before man-ness. Personal existence has to be experienced before it can be described through propositions.

Man's personal or inner life is the only thing which is valid for the existentialists since they are opposed to all forms of objectivity. According to them, objectivity as expressed by the philosophical and psychological representatives of modern science and industrial society has
tended to make man of secondary importance to things. An objective interpretation makes life in general and men in particular hollow and meaningless. Hence the existentialists' emphasis on the subjective experience of man. The emphasis is all on subjective awareness. It is a turning inward, a probing of the self to penetrate to the very centre.

Hence important existential philosophers like Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre "assume that existentialism is a philosophy of man, that its philosophical 'answers' are not responses to technical problems in metaphysics, epistemology, or ontology, but those concerned with the welfare of man here and now, with that part of himself which he cannot escape. It provides, as Sartre feels, a new basis for humanism in which man instead of God is the divine creator and in which subjectivity is the sole universe man must explore." It is significant that humanists like Camus and Malraux hold the same views.

Many of the existentialists, stressing the intimate and concrete aspects of man's existence, have turned to literary forms of expression through which men's emotions and moods can be more vividly portrayed. Gabriel Marcel wrote plays, Kafka

5 Frederick R. Karl and Leo Hamalian (ed.) Imagination, p.15.
wrote novels and plays; so did Sartre, Doestoevsky, Camus and Samuel Beckett are some of the other artist-existentialists.

The emphasis on personal existence and subjectivity has made the individual more free and consequently more responsible at the same time. The nature of men in general, biological determinism, sociological naturalism, psychological forces and environment are not the concern of the existentialist. His main concern is the individual who is free to a great extent to choose and is responsible because he is free in making his choices and decisions. He has a free will and the responsibility that goes with it. As Aristotle tells us in his Poetics, character is revealed wherever a choice has to be made. A man is defined by the sum of his choices. So if a character refuses to choose or lets outside forces determine for him, he is contemptible. Existentialism is the assertion of the significance of personal existence. Nothing can be certain except the individual's certainty of his own response. He has to be alone, for in his very aloneness is his salvation. Nietzsche said, "God is dead" and the individual has to proceed from there. His are the maturity and responsibility. This point is dramatised by Doestoevsky in the character of Ivan Karmazov. Michael Karpoviah, a Slavic
scholar explains the basic concern of Dostoevsky: "To him, freedom meant first of all freedom of will, freedom of choice between good and evil. In this moral freedom he saw both the greatest right granted to man by God and man's greatest responsibility. Everyone must himself make the choice between good and evil, and everyone must carry the responsibility for the choice he has made."  

Man seeking happiness and reason confronts a meaningless universe. He finds implicit antagonism between the individual mind and the collective world. They strain against each other without the possibility of a resolution and harmony. The condition that results is absurd and the resultant literature is a literature of despair. The existentialists are concerned with man's sense of anxiety, despair, dread, loneliness and death. Death does not fulfill human existence but simply ends it in nothingness. A sense of the meaninglessness of life and the inevitability of death results in anguish which is reflected in existential literature.

The crisis of life prepares man for the leap into authentic existence. This may come through faith and dependence on God according to theistic existential.

6Quoted in, ibid., p.12.
philosophers or through an act of the will according to the atheistic ones. This assertion of the self in the face of frustration is concerned with the conduct of an individual. It is an ethical philosophy, but it has to be admitted that existential imagination is not heroic. Its defiance of existing taboos and traditions, superstition and bigotry is in a low key. The climax of an existential story is not the usual climax of a story of adventure, not even the polite but firm defiance by Elizabeth Bennet of the imperious authoritativeness of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, "but simply a ripple of behaviour, a sense of nausea overcome or experienced, a broken relationship recognised by both parties, a meaningless journey completed to nowhere."\(^7\)

Paradoxically though, existential philosophy does not provide us with a code of ethics, although it is concerned with ethical behaviour. If the ethics of an individual is motivated by his own subjectivity, the result could be chaos. If objective values are rejected just because they do not agree with one's subjective ones, there could be arbitrary immorality. Of course, existential philosophy claims that people must transcend their baser selves, but this is an ideal\(^7\) Ibid., p.17.
more often devoutly wished for than attained. On the other hand, existential philosophy is needed because it tells people to strip away the illusions they live by, to examine themselves honestly and their motives realistically so that they can live integrated lives.

Referring to existential philosophers as a school would be a kind of exaggeration, since there are as many existential philosophies as there are existential thinkers. There is first the broad division between the theistic and atheistic branches. Amongst them, again, there are differences of opinion, but on the whole they have more in common with each other than they together have with any other school.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the Danish philosopher, may be said to be the founder of the modern existential school. For him, existence implies a being who strives, chooses, decides and commits himself. His philosophy is theological in motivation, aesthetic in its literary form and ethical in its import. He was profoundly influenced by the insight of the Protestant church -- the freedom and value of the human individual. His ethical philosophy is individualistic in that each individual is confronted with ethical choices which he alone can make and for which he alone
is responsible. Philosophical Fragments and Concluding Unscientific Postscript are central to his work.

Kierkegaard's three principal conceptions are truth, choice and God. He holds that concrete truth about an individual is attainable only through existential thinking. The central concept of his thinking is choice, a phenomenon which is to be experienced, not explained. In his early work Either/Or, the choice is presented between two ways of life — the aesthetic life devoted to art, music, drama, and the ethical to happiness in marriage, business or profession.

He sees three stages in the development of man's self-consciousness, each one the result of choice. The first is the aesthetic stage. At this level, he acts according to his emotions and impulses. During the next stage, the ethical, he recognizes rules of conduct that reason formulates. The third is the religious stage, which is achieved by a leap of faith.

The culmination of his existential thinking is the knowledge of God. For him, the individual means one who is in communion with God through faith. He calls such persons the Knights of the Faith.
Like other existentialists, he is opposed to systematization, but he is also opposed to "that deadening wall which is built up round man by daily routine." Enveloped in this, he becomes ego-centric. "The completely self-centred individual, shut up within himself, is, in Kierkegaard's eyes, the truly demoniac." Again, he holds that what a man does is much more important than what happens to him. "It is not what happens to me that makes me great, but it is what I do, and there is surely no one who thinks that a man became great because he won the great prize in the lottery."10

Some critics doubt whether Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) is an existentialist at all, but that he exerted great influence on existentialism is above doubt. "In the story of existentialism, Nietzsche occupies a central place: Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre are unthinkable without him."11

10 Quoted in Dr.(Mrs.) Lakshmi Saxena, Encounter with Transcendence (3823, Chawri Bazaar, Delhi : GDK Publications), p.9; hereafter referred to as Encounter.
puts it neatly: "Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are as divided as
the poles and as close as twins. Nietzsche cast his supreme
choice upon the finite world which Kierkegaard rejected and
resigned."\textsuperscript{12} They have something in common: each man was to
them an existential being whose life could not be described in
the conventional ways. Both opposed the rationalistic thought
of the nineteenth century and the shallowness of middle class
morality. Their main concern was the human predicament. But
while Kierkegaard's main problem was how to become a true
Christian, Nietzsche attacked Christianity, and he knew what
he was writing. "The Christian faith from the beginning is
sacrifice; the sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all
self-confidence of spirit; it is at the same time subjection,
self-derision, and self-mutilation."\textsuperscript{13} He declared God to be
dead and he gave all emphasis to life, instinct and power. He
held the Earth (Supermen) would embody higher values, not the
virtues of mediocrity which, according to him, were exhibited
in Christianity, democracy and socialism. Man does not
discover values, he creates them. He revolted against
conventional morality which he defined as "the mob instinct

\textsuperscript{13}Quoted in, ibid., p.39.
working in the individual."\textsuperscript{14} He firmly believed that for a man's philosophy to be real, it must be the outcome of his own psychic constitution. He appreciated solitude because, as he said, "The universal truths have always been evolved in the desert."\textsuperscript{15} This image of man struggling with himself and achieving victory is characteristically existentialist. While Kierkegaard's main problem was how to become a Christian, Nietzsche's was how to love as an atheist.

Some have criticised Nietzsche for being a nihilist, but he is not a nihilist if by nihilism is meant a negation of all values. "It was Nietzsche who discovered that nihilism could be put to the service of the truth: 'Nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals -- because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these 'values' really had. When the ego recoils passionately from the human condition, new values are created, values through which man tries to cope with his unique sense of morality and isolation."\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} Quoted in, ibid., p.27.
\textsuperscript{16} Frederick, R. Karl and Leo Hamalian (ed.) \textit{Imagination}, p.9-10.
The idea of sin which is crucial for Kierkegaard has no meaning for Nietzsche. He "dismisses the feeling of sin lightly as not a fact but a mere interpretation of a fact, of a physiological discomfort."\(^{17}\)

Martin Heidegger (1899-1976), the German existentialist, refuses to identify spirituality and existence, as Kierkegaard had done, and declares, "Existence precedes spirituality." His professed theme in *Being and Time* (1927) is: when personal existence understands itself, it also understands the world.

Heidegger analyses the individual man in his relation to himself, to this environment and to other men. He considers it dangerous for a philosopher to take any philosophical position without due thought, because a wrong decision will affect not only himself, but others, and, since the individual is imbedded in the world, the world itself.

According to Heidegger, an individual can attain self-transcendence through resolute decision. However, the word "transcendence" has no theological connotations as it had for Kierkegaard. The first transcendence is with reference to the

\(^{17}\)K.Guru Dutta, *Existentialism*, p.28.
world. The individual's relation to the world is not of subject-object relation, but one of direct, active participation. The second mode of transcendence is the individual rapport with other individuals, a relation of direct intercourse rather than mere communication. Finally the individual achieves time-transcendence of his present momentary existence in his pre-occupation with death.

The unauthentic life is absorbed in the petty things of life -- cares, pre-occupations, etc. Man can free himself from this to pass on to the authentic life by acceptance of death. "Full-blooded acceptance of death, lived out, is authentic personal existence."\(^1\) According to him, death is the clue to authentic living, for his freedom can be attained only in the face of death. One has to anticipate death not by suicide but living in the process of death as though death may come any time.

Heidegger and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) are called the source of the atheistic branch of existentialism. Jaspers quotes Nietzsche frequently but he really does not go along with either anti-Christianity or Kierkegaard's "leap of faith" into Christianity -- his is a secularised version of existential thought.

Jasper's three-volume work *Philosophy* (1932) is a systematic formulation of his existential philosophy. Addressing himself to the methodological problem, he distinguishes three methods which have evolved in the course of the history of philosophy: (1) The method of philosophical world-orientation uses scientific knowledge in the search for a philosophical understanding of man and the world but the chief limitation of science is its incompleteness. (2) The elucidation of existence -- the method of existential thinking. "The freedom of the individual in all his choices and his resultant absolute responsibility are the chief deliverances of existential elucidation." The emphasis here is on the intercourse among free individuals. There has to be inter-play between persons since no individual can live utterly isolated. This intercourse can be not merely among contemporaries, but among individuals of different eras, by which individuals realise their freedom. (3) The mode of meta-physics which is a quest for "the one being", which is the philosopher's equivalent of God.

According to Jaspers, there are in man (1) a historically conditioned self, conditioned by the physical background and

cultural environment. This is studied by psychology. Then there is the self of intimate human emotions like love, joy, hate, etc. which remain beyond the scope of objective psychology. But man is not merely temporal. Man has also an authentic self. "We live in time, yet touch existential eternity. This authentic self gives life its meaning." 20

Jaspers explains existenz as "man's possibility of being himself by transcendence, his realization of his full potentialities, that by which the word, 'human' is decisively removed from the category of the biological. .... Opposed to it is 'Dasein', being, merged in a particular, determinate situation, circumscribed in time and space. Real existence is the transcending of this situation." 21

While other existentialists had rejected objectivity in favour of the subjective, Jasper's is not an entirely subjective view. "For Jaspers existence runs a middle course between a form of subjectivity and a form of objectivity. Supported by objectivity in order to gain stability, it plumbs the depths of being through subjectivity." 22

21 K.Guru Dutt, Existentialism, p.34.
22 Ibid, pp.36-37.
Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1990) is the most famous of the atheistic existentialists. He attained fame both as a philosopher and writer. His most famous work of philosophy is Being and Nothingness (1943) and his most famous novel is Nausea, both of which (with other novels, plays, poems and essays) propagate the same existential ideas. His writing has, in the words of Bernard Frechtman, "the alert quality of the perception of individual life in motion and is, to use one of Sartre's key-phrases, 'involved in action'." It is also "characterized by a kind of bohemianism which reacts against the social order itself." He quotes with approval Dostoevsky's saying, "If God did not exist, everything would be possible," and declares that to be the charter of existentialism. He states that man is condemned to be free and he wants to make him aware of such freedom and "since freedom is an ambiguous state both sought and feared, the philosophy is both frightening and liberating." 

23 Quoted in, ibid., p.46
24 Ibid., p.46.
25 Ibid., p.46.
26 Ibid., p.46.
Sartre writes, "First of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene and only afterwards defines himself." In other words, "Existence precedes essence."

While this is what most other existentialists also say, unlike some other existentialists, Sartre agrees with the Cartesian position and admits, "There can be no other truth to take off from, than this. 'I think, therefore, I exist'." According to him, it is this which gives dignity to man. He extends the Cartesian conception of subjectivity which is considered to be his most note-worthy contribution to philosophic thought.

He writes,

But the subjectivity that we have thus arrived at, and which we claim to be the truth, is not a strictly individual subjectivity, for we have demonstrated that one discovers in the *cogito* not only himself but others as well... The philosophy of Descartes and Kant to the contrary, through this I think we reach our own self in the presence of others, and the others are just as real to us as our own self... as the condition of one's own existence... In order to get at any truth about myself, I must have contact with another person. The other is indispensable to my own existence, as well as to my knowledge about myself. This being so, in discovering my inner being, I discover the other person at the same time, like a freedom placed in front of me, which thinks and wills only

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27 Quoted in, ibid., p.47.
28 Quoted in Ibid., p.47.
for or against me. Hence let us at once announce the discovery of a world which we shall call inter-subjectivity. This is the world in which man decides what he is and what others are.

That is, awareness of "others" is inseparable from the shock of the encounter with "freedom". He writes, "He [man] exists only to the extent that he fulfils himself".  

For Sartre there are no values external to man -- he has to create them himself. He creates values as he wills and acts. Hence they can have no objective or permanent basis. In this sense, everything is permissible. Man's situation may seem meaningless and absurd, but he can still live by the rules of integrity, nobility and valour and create a human community.

The goal of human striving, according to Sartre, is a more ideal self -- a heightened consciousness and existence that may come to free and responsible men.

It may be seen from the above that existentialism is an attitude that emphasizes the distinctive qualities of individuals and not of man in general. It was an attempt to overcome the predicament of despair, futility, fragmentation

29 Quoted in Ibid., p.48.
30 Quoted in Ibid., p.49.
and dis-orientation that man had been experiencing. It was a move towards self-identification or self-realization, an effort to overcome the alienation of man from his deeper self.

Existentialism devalued human reason as well as the objective standards of truth, goodness, etc. If all objective values are rejected and if every one is to be motivated by his own ethic, the result might be chaos. It would work well only for those who were authentic, existential beings, "existence" meaning "a full vital, self-conscious, responsible, growing life". This implies, according to Kierkegaard, being a certain kind of individual, an individual who strives, who considers alternatives, who chooses, who decides and who, above all, commits himself. Subjectivity and a retreat from reason may be the reason why existentialism has garnered more support from writers and artists than from philosophers and scientists. Since existential philosophy is subjective, existential literature is extremely personal. Isolation, alienation, lack of identity, nothingness are the common stuff of this literature. The writers have been depicting the angst and the dread and the despair that human beings suffered from in the environment which produced existential thinkers. The

most widely known of existential novelists and playwrights are Feodor Dostoevsky (Russian), Miguel de Unamuno (Spanish), Luigi Pirandello (Italian), Marcel Proust (French), Robert Musil (Austrian), Franz Kafka (German), Bertolt Brecht (German), Andre Malraux (French), Samuel Beckett (Irish) and others. Some of the well-known novels and plays revealing existential imagination are Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov (1881), Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author (1921), Franz Kafka's The Trial (1925), Sartre's Nausea (1933), Albert Camu's The Outsider (1942) and Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot (1952). There is one thing common to all these literary works of existentialism - they insist on actions, including acts of will, as the determining things.

The Brothers Karamazov is the greatest novel of Dostoevsky. There are three brothers. Ivan is so shocked with the senselessness and cruelty of human life that he rejects God who has so ordered things. The youngest brother Alyosha is dedicated to the life of the spirit. Dimitri, the eldest brother, is in between -- he is a believer, but doubt, which is in the air, has corrupted him and he has become a sensualist. He is arrested for the murder of his father and whatever pride he had is broken down by the grilling the
police give him. He admits to a crime which he has not committed, because he realises the salutary power of suffering and wants to expiate a crime which, though he has not committed, he had wished in his heart.

Dostoevsky, like Kierkegaard, is a theistic existentialist and in the legend of the Grand Inquisitor, which the writer himself considered the culmination of the book, he makes it clear that an individual's support must come from within, represented here by Christ. Christ trusts the soul of men and is prepared to give them freedom, while the godless Inquisitor mistrusts his fellow-men and tries to keep the truth from them.

Pirandello’s Six Characters in Search of an Author anticipates the theatre of the Absurd, which Albert Camus developed. This philosophy has certain common characteristics with existentialism. It holds that one can accept the ultimate meaninglessness and absurdity of existence without submitting to it in one’s own life. But one can make it meaningful by deliberate commitment to helping one’s fellow-men.
The line between theatrical illusion and reality virtually disappears in *Six Characters*. The play is a kind of dramatic criticism of the artificial, popular and well-made play of the nineteenth century. Six characters want their stories to be used as drama and they are allowed to fashion their story into an actable drama. Inexperience, clashes of opinion and interruptions defeat their purpose. That itself becomes a play.

Franz Kafka's novels show man trapped in night-marish situations from which they cannot escape. In *The Trial*, the nameless victim-hero is accused of a crime that is never specified. Kafka's themes are of anxiety, frustration and cosmic unity.

In *Nausea* the hero is disgusted by what he calls the viscosity or stickiness of existence. In all of his representative works, Sartre is concerned with defining the limits of man's freedom.

In Albert Camus' *The Outsider*, the hero refuses to explain or excuse his actions, even when they lead to his own execution. Camus had an intuitive belief in the meaninglessness of the universe.
Waiting for Godot is one of the most well-known and expressive of modern plays. Two tramps are waiting on the road below a leafless tree for the arrival of a mysterious Godot. They are aware of pain, hunger and cold. They vacillate between hope and despair. They are obsessed by uncertainty. Another two fellows come along and plenty of satirical farce follows. They go away but Godot does not come. The two tramps who had intended to hang themselves on the tree decide to wait for another day for Godot. The play is symbolic. Godot is God, and the tree, which has sprouted during the night, is the Tree of Life. Godot does not come on the second day either, but the tramps decide to wait still another day, suggesting man’s endurance.

All the works mentioned above reflect the despair, futility and frustration of life, but some of them end on a note of hope.

Such a philosophy, it is difficult to believe, could have anything to do with humanism which is more optimistic and claims the right to happiness, but below the surface of such contradictory schools of philosophy, there is lot of common ground. That is why there is no inconsistency in a person’s being an existential-humanist, which Sm. Shashi Deshpande is.
Carl Becker, a hostile critic of humanism, formulates the articles of humanism as:

1) Man is not natively depraved; 2) the end of life is life itself, the good life on earth instead of the beatific life after death; 3) man is capable, guided solely by the light of reason and experience, of perfecting the good life on earth; and 4) the first and essential condition of the good life on earth is the freeing of men's minds from the bonds of ignorance and superstition, and of their bodies from the arbitrary oppression of the constituted social authorities.

That is, the main concern of humanism is a man's well-being and happiness on this earth. It is concerned with life here and not with the life hereafter. The purpose of the humanist is to live intently and happily as long as his life lasts. He has probably a sense of the sadness and sorrow of life which he tries to lessen or remove by positive qualities like kindness, help, charity, etc. Humanism accepts man with all his weaknesses. To close one's eyes to them would be folly. To bring into harmony, to resolve the conflict between them is a precondition to happiness. That is possible only when man knows himself.

From this it appears that there are three aspects on which humanism and existentialism differ:

1. In humanism reason is more well-marked and accepted than in existentialism. The latter rejects reason as an instrument for seeking the truth about individual existence and depends on intuition. In existentialism, man has a certain amount of freedom to make a choice about what kind of life to lead, and he will require some reason to make the choice, though, according to Kierkegaard, making the choice is intuitive, a "leap over the abyss".

   "A person is free, and he or she alone is responsible for their existence. Freedom, as Boss (a Swiss psychiatrist and existential psychologist) points out, is not something which humans have, it is something they are. It is this tenet of existential psychology that makes it appealing to the humanistic movement in American Psychology".  

2. In humanism, happiness, which is its aim, is a positive thing, while in existentialism, it is more a state "free from tension". For people who have been suffering from despair, frustration, and tension, a tension-free state of mind is more

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than relief. Psychologically it is probably no less satisfying and more lasting than the happiness of the hedonist.

It is significant to note here that the pre-condition of happiness for a humanist is resolving the conflict between the various emotions of man, as has been noted above. For how can there be harmony without unless there be harmony within? That is, man has to know him-self. And this is the basic aim of existentialism, too.

3. While the humanist wills the happiness and good of human beings consciously, goodness flows naturally from the very nature of an "authentic" being.

4. While the humanist stresses objectivity, existentialism emphasizes the intuitive, emotional and the subjective aspects of man. But this distinction is not so clear-cut, as it would appear to be. K.Guru Dutt writes, "Jaspers claims: I am not in the world but in my world. The world that I conceive is always a party to my point of view; I discover it by finding my way about in it. I am not merely its observer. Yet this is not a purely subjective view either. For Jaspers existence runs a middle course between a form of subjectivity and a form
of objectivity. Supported by objectivity in order to gain stability, it plumbs the depth of being through subjectivity".  

So it is clear that though there are some differences of opinion, there is some common ground, too, between these two schools of philosophy.

It is to professional philosophers that distinctions and differences are sacred. Every man has his own philosophy about the universe and man's place in it, which is made up of or influenced by traditions, customs, family members, friends, what he read in school or the papers he reads now or the T.V. programmes he watches. For most men, pleasure or happiness is the motive force of most of their actions, whatever their ideas of happiness be, as it is for the protagonists of Shashi Deshpande. They feel it is their right to seek happiness, biological and material, to which they are entitled like any other human being. They are also humanists in that they reveal an interest in human aspirations, a confidence in man and reason. They stress the worth of every human being as an individual. The values they hold are the product of human relationships. They do not believe in traditional religious

34 K. Guru Dutt, Existentialism, pp.36-37.
rituals. They feel that man is the measure of things. They exercise their choice rationally and do not shirk the responsibility of their choice. And when they are disillusioned about what they have got either because what they have got is not what they wanted to get or because what they have got is less soul-satisfying than they thought it would be. Deshpande's protagonists are not philosophers but intelligent, sensible and sensitive human beings who, feeling frustrated in a world of turmoil and changing human values, try to achieve inner integration which will give them a sense of fulfilment.

Deshpande is not writing a text-book of philosophy; she is writing novels. She does not hold a brief for any school of philosophy imposing it on her characters willy-nilly. Her protagonists usually have fine sensibilities which ultimately set them on the right path even if they go astray in the initial stages.

Her protagonists are atheistic existential humanists. Not a single one of them has in him/her the "unique dimension of being which is capable of responding to God's wishes by carrying them out unflinchingly and with pleasure" — which, Dr. (Mrs) Laskshmi Saxena, *Encounter*, p.1.
according to Søren Kierkegaard, is the characteristic of a theistic existentialist. Her protagonists are atheistic existentialists in search of self-identification, but without eschewing happiness.

Deshpande's characters are not representative or symbolic figures standing for any school of philosophy, but complex human beings who come happily and surprisingly alive.