Existentialist Quotes

“People] cannot endure [their] own littleness unless [they] can translate it into meaningfulness on the largest possible level."
~ Ernest Becker, 1973, *The Denial of Death*, p. 196

"What is the ideal for mental health, then? A lived, compelling illusion that does not lie about life, death, and reality; one honest enough to follow its own commandments: I mean, not to kill, not to take the lives of others to justify itself."
~ Ernest Becker, 1973, *The Denial of Death*, p. 204

"…the purpose of psychotherapy is to set people free."
~ Rollo May, 1981, *Freedom and Destiny*, p. 19

"...no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself."
~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1948, *The Ethics Of Ambiguity*, p. 67

"...the individual is defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals; he exists only by transcending himself, and his freedom can be achieved only through the freedom of others. He justifies his existence by a movement which, like freedom, springs from his heart but which leads outside of himself."
~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1948, *The Ethics Of Ambiguity*, p. 156

"A myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world. Myths are narrative patterns that give significance to our existence. Whether the meaning of existence is only what we put into life by our own individual fortitude, as Sartre would hold, or whether there is a meaning we need to discover, as Kierkegaard would state, the result is the same: myths are our way of finding this meaning and significance."
~ Rollo May, 1991, *The Cry for Myth*, p. 15

"There can be no stronger proof of the impoverishment of our contemporary culture than the popular - though profoundly mistaken - definition of myth as falsehood."
~ Rollo May, 1991, *The Cry for Myth*, p. 23

"Our greatest challenge today...is to couple conviction with doubt. By conviction, I mean some pragmatically developed faith, trust, or centeredness; and by doubt I mean openness to the ongoing changeability, mystery, and fallibility of the conviction."
~ Kirk Schneider, 1999, *The Paradoxical Self*, p. 7

"I call a lie: wanting *not* to see something one does see, wanting not to see something *as* one sees it... The most common lie is the lie one tells to oneself; lying to other is relatively the exception."
~ Friedrich Nietzsche, 1894/1990, *The Anti-Christ* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.), p. 185

"The notion of ambiguity must not be confused with that of absurdity. To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert

that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won. Absurdity challenges every ethics; but also the finished rationalization of the real would leave no room for ethics; it is because man's condition is ambiguous that he seeks, through failure and outrageousness, to save his existence."

~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1948, *The Ethics Of Ambiguity*, p. 129

Forever I shall be a stronger to myself. In psychology as in logic, there are truths but no truth."

~ Albert Camus, 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* , p. 19w667q

"Indeed, compulsive and rigid moralism arises in given persons precisely as the result of a lack of sense of being. Rigid moralism is a compensatory mechanism by which the individual persuades himself to take over the external sanctions because he has no fundamental assurance that his own choices have any sanction of their own."

~ Rollo May, 1958, "Contributions of Existential Psychotherapy" in *Existence*, p. 45

"Our age is one of transition, in which the normal channels for utilizing the daimonic are denied; and such ages tend to be times when the daimonic is expressed in its most destructive form."

~ Rollo May, 1969, *Love and Will*, p. 130

"It is absolutely impossible for a subject to see or have insight into something while leaving itself out of the picture, so impossible that knowing and being are the most opposite of all spheres."

~ Nietzsche, 1873/1962, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, p. 83

"...less and less is life animated through personal discovery, intimacy with others, or self-reflection. While life has become more manageable for many people, it has become commensurately less engaged."

~ Kirk Schneider, 2004, *Rediscovery of Awe*, p. 20

"Therefore, it is we who are responsible for much of the evil in the world; and we are each morally required to accept rather than project that ponderous responsibility-lest we prefer instead to wallow in a perennial state of powerless, frustrated, furious, victimhood. For what one possesses the power to bring about, one has also the power to limit, Mitigate, counteract, or transmute."

~ Stephen A. Diamond, 1996, *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic*, p. 85

"No shepherd and one herd! Everybody wants the same, everybody is the same: whoever feels different goes voluntarily into a madhouse."

~ Nietzsche, 1892/1966, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.), p. 18

". . . the best existential analysis of the human condition leads directly into the problems of God and faith..."

~ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 1973, p. 68

"The desire for a strong faith is not the proof of a strong faith, rather the opposite. If one has it one may permit oneself the beautiful luxury of skepticism: one is secure enough, fixed enough

for it."
~ Friedrich Nietzsche, 1889/1990, *Twilight of the Idols* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.), p. 85

"I can negate everything of that part of me that lives on vague nostalgias, except this desire for unity, this longing to solve, this need for clarity and cohesion. I can refute everything in this world surrounding me that offends or enraptures me, except this chaos, this sovereign chance and this divine equivalence which springs from anarchy. I don't know whether this world has meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms."
~ Albert Camus, 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* , p. 51

"I would say that our patients never really despair because of any suffering in itself! Instead, their despair stems in each instance from a doubt as to whether suffering is meaningful. Man is ready and willing to shoulder any suffering as soon and as long as he can see a meaning in it."
~ Viktor Frankl, 1961, Logotherapy and the Challenge of Suffering,
In *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry, Volume 1,* p. 5

"One must have at least a readiness to love the other person, broadly speaking, if one is to be able to understand him."
~ Rollo May, 1958, "Contributions of Existential Psychotherapy" in *Existence*, p. 39

"When we are dealing with human beings, no truth has reality by itself; it is always dependent upon the reality of the immediate relationship."
~ Rollo May, 1958, The Origins of the Existential Movement in Psychology, in *Existence*, p. 27

"One must not let oneself be misled: they say 'Judge not!' but they send to Hell everything that stands in their way."
~ Friedrich Nietzsche, 1894/1990, *The Anti-Christ* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.), p. 170

"There can be no question of holding forth on ethics. I have seen people behave badly with great morality and I note every day that integrity has no need of rules."
~ Albert Camus, 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* , p. 67hh

"...that because of this interplay of conscious and unconscious factors in guilt and the impossibility of legalistic blame, we are forced into an attitude of acceptance of the universal human situation and a recognition of the participation of every one of us in man's inhumanity to man."
~ Rollo May, 1961, The Meaning of the Oedipus Myth
In *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry, Volume 1,* p. 50

"*Viewed from an existential standpoint, questions of choice, freedom and responsibility cannot be isolated or contained within some separate being (such as 'self' or 'other').* In the inescapable interrelationship that exists between 'a being' and 'the world', each impacts upon and implicates

the other, each is defined through the other and, indeed, each 'is' through the existence of the other. Viewed in this way, no choice can be mine or yours alone, no experienced impact of choice can be separated in terms of 'my responsibility' versus 'your responsibility', no sense of personal freedom can truly avoid its interpersonal dimensions."

~ Ernesto Spinelli, 2001, *The Mirror and the Hammer: Challenges to Therapeutic Orthodoxy*, p. 16

"Artistic symbols and myths speak out of the primordial, preconscious realm of the mind which is powerful and chaotic. Both symbol and myth are ways of bringing order and form into this chaos."

~ Rollo May, 1985, *My Quest for Beauty,* p. 155

"Without awareness, we are not truly alive."

~ James F. T. Bugental, 1999, *Psychotherapy Isn't What You Think*, p. 257

"Self-awareness or self-consciousness can lead to the enlarging of consciousness. It can lead to the expansion of control of one's life. Self-awareness involves the capacity of not only looking back, but also looking ahead. Self-awareness is not only a gift, but it is a responsibility."

~ Mufti James Hannush

"The Development of the Self in the Light of the Existential-Humanistic Psychology of Rollo May"

In *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, Volume 24, 1999, pp. 75-76

"...how hard it must be to live only with what one knows and what one remembers, cut off from what one hopes for!... There can be no peace without hope."

~ Albert Camus, 1948, *The Plague* (Trans. Stuart Gilbert), p. 262-263

"Whether you think of it as heavenly or as earthly, if you love life immortality is no consolation for death."

~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1965, *A Very Easy Death*, p. 92

"The earthly meaning of eternal life was death, and she refused to die."

~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1965, *A Very Easy Death*, p. 60

"Today, however, we are having a hard time living because we are so bent on outwitting death."

~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1948, *The Ethics Of Ambiguity*, p. 120

"There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy."

~ Albert Camus, 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* , p. 3

"...man is free, in so far as he has the power of contradicting himself and his essential nature. Man is free even from his freedom; that is, he can surrender his humanity."

~ Paul Tillich, 1957, *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 2), p. 32

"A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied. And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom. I am oppressed if I am thrown into prison, but not if I am kept from throwing my neighbor into prison."

~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1948, *The Ethics Of Ambiguity*, p. 91

"...convictions might be more dangerous enemies of the truth than lies."

~ Friedrich Nietzsche, 1894/1990, *The Anti-Christ* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.), p. 185

"Words are but symbols for the relations of things to one another and to us; nowhere do they touch upon absolute truth.... Through words and concepts we shall never reach beyond the wall off relations, to some sort of fabulous primal ground of things."

~ Nietzsche, 1873/1962, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, p. 83

"Our thesis is that symbols and myths are an expression of man's unique self-consciousness, his capacity to transcend the immediate concrete situation and see his life in terms of 'the possible,' and that this capacity is one aspect of his experiencing himself as a being having a world."

~ Rollo May, 1961, "The Meaning of the Oedipus Myth"
In *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry*, Volume 1, p. 44

"Science, is the creation by humans of a particular paradigm and methodology for discovering truth and understanding reality. Hence it can never fully reflect the hidden face of humanity, its creator, in the same sense that a computer can never become fully human or know what it means to be human: however sophisticated, these machines will forever remain mere artifacts of humanity."

~ Stephen A. Diamond, 1996, *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic*, p. 179

"Awe is not a very comfortable standpoint for many people... Hence, all about us today, we see avoidance of awe-by burying ourselves in materialist science, for example or in absolutist religious positions; or by locking ourselves into systems, whether corporate, familial, or consumerist; or by stupefying ourselves with drugs."

~ Kirk Schneider, 2004, *Rediscovery of Awe*, p. xiii

"Good art wounds as well as delights. It must, because our defenses against the truth are wound so tightly around us. But as art chips away at our defenses, it also opens us to healing potentialities that transcend intellectual games and ego-preserving strategies."

~ Rollo May, 1985, *My Quest for Beauty*, p. 172

"This sign I give you: every people speaks its tongue of good and evil, which the neighbor does not understand. It has invented its own language of customs and rights."

~ Nietzsche, 1892/1966, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.), p. 49

"Integrity is unity of the personality; it implies being brutally honest with ourselves about our intentionality. Since intentionality is inextricably bound up with the daimonic, this is never an easy, nor always pleasant pursuit. But being willing to admit our daimonic tendencies - to know them consciously and to wisely oversee them - brings with it the invaluable blessing of freedom, vigor, inner strength, and self-acceptance."

~ Stephen A. Diamond, 1996, *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic*, p. 233.

"Sometimes I think it is my mission to bring faith to the faithless, and doubt to the faithful."

~ Paul Tillich as quoted by Rollo May, 1988, in *Paulus: Tillich as Spiritual Teacher*, p. 71

"The truth is that everyone is bored, and devotes himself to cultivating habits."

~ Albert Camus, 1948, *The Plague* (Trans. Stuart Gilbert), p. 4

"In those days it was possible for a Greek to flee from an over-abundant reality as though it were but the tricky scheming off the imagination-and to flee, not like Plato into the land of eternal ideas, into the workshop off the world-creator, feasting one's eyes on the unblemished unbreakable archetypes, but into the rigor mortis off the coldest emptiest concept off all, the concept of being."

~ Nietzsche, 1873/1962, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, pp.80-18

"A historical perspective can also help free us from the ever-present danger -- especially at danger in the social sciences -- of absolutizing a theory or method which is actually relative to the fact that we live at a given moment in time in the development of our particular culture."

~ Rollo May, 1979, *Psychology and the Human Dilemma*, p. 56

"But freedom is the possibility of a total and centered act of the personality, an act in which all the drives and influences which constitute the destiny of man are brought into the centered unity of a decision."

~ Paul Tillich, 1957, *Systematic Theology* (Vol. 2), p;. 42-43

"We might say that psychoanalysis revealed to us the complex penalties of denying the truth of man's condition, what we might call *the costs of pretending not to be mad*."

~ Ernest Becker, 1973, *The Denial of Death*, p. 29

"...once I gave up the hunt for villains, I had little recourse but to take responsibility for my choices ...Needless to say, this is far less satisfying that nailing villains. It also turned out to be more healing in the end..."

~ Barbara Brown Taylor, 2006, Experiments with Truth, in *Sojourners* (Nov. 2006), p. 46

"Evil, in this system of ethics, is that which tears apart, shuts out the other person, raises barriers, sets people against each other."

~ Rollo May, 1985, *My Quest for Beauty*, p. 158

"When one has served in a war, one hardly knows what a dead man is, after a while. And since a dead man has no substance unless one has actually seen him dead, a hundred million corpses

broadcast through history are no more than a puff of smoke in the imagination."
~ Albert Camus, 1948, *The Plague* (Trans. Stuart Gilbert), p. 35

"Every war, every revolution, demands the sacrifice of a generation, of a collectivity, by those who undertake it."
~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1948, *The Ethics Of Ambiguity*, p. 99

"The misfortune is that although everyone must come to [death], each experiences the adventure in solitude. We never left Maman during those last days... and yet we were profoundly separated from her."
~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1965, *A Very Easy Death*, p. 100

"The man of knowledge must not only love his enemies, he must also be able to hate his friends."
~ Nietzsche, 1892/1966, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.), p. 78

"One repays a teacher badly if one always remains nothing but a pupil."
~ Nietzsche, 1892/1966, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.), p. 78

"To grasp life and meaning, we assume constancy where it does not exist. We name experiences, emotions, and subjective states and assume that what is named is as enduring as its name. Human beings blessed and cursed with consciousness - especially consciousness of their own being - think in terms of names, words, symbols."
~ James F. T. Bugental, 1999, *Psychotherapy Isn't What You Think*, p. 170

"*Symbols* are specific acts or figures, while *myths* develop and elaborate these symbols into a story which contains characters and several episodes. The myth is thus more inclusive. But both symbol and myth have the same function psychologically; they are man's way of expressing the quintessence of his experience - his way of seeing his life, his self-image and his relations to the world of his fellow men and of nature - in a total figure which at the same moment carries the vital meaning of this experience."
~ Rollo May, 1961, "The Meaning of the Oedipus Myth"
In *Review of Existential Psychology & Psychiatry*, Volume 1, p. 44

"A symbol always transcends the one who makes use of it and makes him say in reality more than he is aware of expressing."
~ Albert Camus, 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* , p. 124

"It is interesting to note how many of the great scientific discoveries begin as myths."
~ Rollo May, 1991, *The Cry for Myth*, p. 25

"All modern philosophizing is political, policed by governments, churches, academics, custom, fashion, and human cowardice, all off which limit it to a fake learnedness."
~ Nietzsche, 1873/1962, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, pp. 37-38

"All that philosophers have handled for millennia has been conceptual mummies; nothing actual has ever escaped from their hands alive."
~ Friedrich Nietzsche, 1889/1990, *Twilight of the Idols* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.), p. 45

"What makes us most human is not whether we are or are not biologically driven and determined beings; but, rather, *how we respond to this relative truth*. The conscious choices we make in related to the dynamic, psychobiological forces of the daimonic define our humanity."
~ Stephen A. Diamond, 1996, *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic*, p. 179

"Terrorism and the whole drug scene are vivid examples of the fact that what persons abhor most of all in life is the possibility that they will not matter."
~ Rollo May, 1985, *My Quest for Beauty*, p. 214.

"Finally, the oppressor has a good case for showing that respect for freedom is never without difficulty, and perhaps he may even assert that one can never respect all freedoms at the same time. But that simply means that man must accept the tension of the struggle, that his liberation must actively seek to perpetuate itself, without aiming at an impossible state of equilibrium and rest; this does not mean that he ought to prefer the sleep of slavery to this incessant conquest. Whatever the problem raised for him, the setbacks that he will have to assume, and the difficulties with which he will have to struggle, he must reject oppression at any cost."
~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1948, *The Ethics Of Ambiguity*, p. 96

"Like most human behavior, violence has meaning: it only seems 'senseless' or 'meaningless' to the extent we are unable--or unwilling--to decode it."
~ Stephen A. Diamond, 1996, *Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic*, p. 9

"As long as there have been men and they have lived, they have all felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition, but as long as there have been philosophers and they have thought, most of them have tried to mask it."
~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1948, *The Ethics Of Ambiguity*, p. 7

"I mistrust all systematizers and avoid them. the will to a system is a lack of integrity."
~ Friedrich Nietzsche, 1889/1990, *Twilight of the Idols*, (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.), p. 35

"Science requires an engagement with the world, a live encounter between the knower and the known."
~ Parker J. Palmer, 1998, *The Courage to Teach*, p. 54

"Indeed, there is nothing more arbitrary than intervening as a stranger in a destiny which is not ours..."
~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1948, *The Ethics Of Ambiguity*, p. 86

"But thus I counsel you, my friends: Mistrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful. THey are people of a low sort and stock; the hangman and the bloodhound look out of their faces. Mistrust all who talk much of their justice! Verily, their souls lack more than honey. And

when they call themselves the good and the just, do not forget that they would be pharisees, if only they had - power.
~ Nietzsche, 1892/1966, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.), p. 100

"Man is not what he believes himself to be in his conscious decisions."
~ Paul Tillich, 1961, "Existentialism and Psychotherapy, in *Review of Existential Psychology & Psychiatry*, Volume 1, p. 13

"Obviously, all religions fall far short of their own ideals..."
~ Ernest Becker, 1973, *The Denial of Death*, p. 204

"...philosophical systems are wholly true for their founders only."
~ Nietzsche, 1873/1962, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, p. 23

"Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from a blue sky."
~ Albert Camus, 1948, *The Plague* (Trans. Stuart Gilbert), p. 34

"Science. Nietzsche had warned, is becoming a factory, and the result will be ethical nihilism."
~ Rollo May, 1958, "The Origins of the Existential Movement in Psychology" in *Existence*, p. 36

"If we possess our *why* of life we can put up with almost any *how*."
~ Friedrich Nietzsche, 1889/1990, *Twilight of the Idols* (Trans. R. J. Hollingdale), p. 33

"There is scarcely any passion without struggle."
~ Albert Camus, 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* , p. 73

"Like great works, deep feelings always mean more than they are conscious of saying."
~ Albert Camus, 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus: And Other Essays* , p. 10

"There are cases where the slave does not know his servitude and where it is necessary to bring the seed of his liberation to him from the outside: his submission is not enough to justify the tyranny which is imposed upon him."
~ Simone de Beauvoir, 1948, *The Ethics Of Ambiguity*, p. 85