

## Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe, regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts.

## Existentialist Crisis

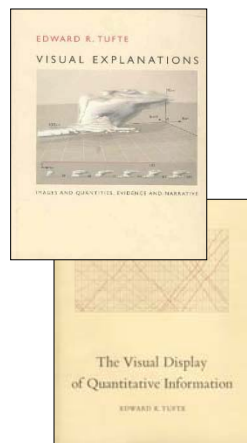
- In existentialism, the individual's starting point is characterized by what has been called "the existential attitude," or a sense of disorientation and confusion in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world.
- A person experiencing this disorientation and confusion is facing an "existentialist crisis."



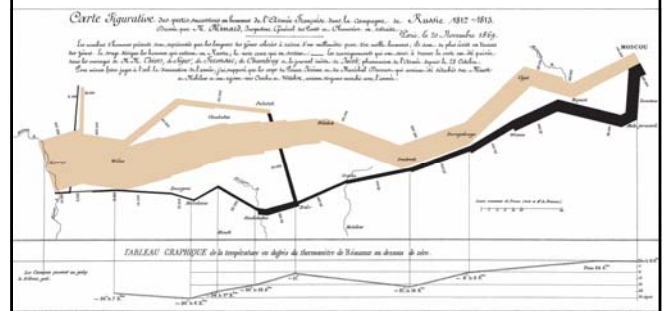
Emperor Napoleon, 1812

## Edward Tufte

- Edward Tufte is an American statistician and professor emeritus at Yale University. He is noted for his writings on information design.
- Information design is the skill and practice of preparing information so people can use it with efficiency and effectiveness.
- He coined the term "chartjunk" to refer to useless, non-informative, or information-obscuring elements of quantitative information displays.



## Charles Minard's flow map of Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia



Minard was a pioneer of the art of information graphics.

## Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo, 1815



## Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

- Founder of Existentialism
- He made philosophy personal by posing these questions:
  - Who am I?
  - What am I doing here?
  - Where am I going?
- He rejected the traditional pieties and systematic answers of both philosophy and the orthodox Christianity of his time.
- Instead, he embraced a vision of faith in which belief is considered to be a real choice and one that absolutely can't be validated or justified by reason.

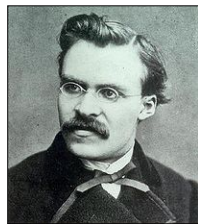


*“Religion is the opiate of the masses.”*

- Karl Marx, 1843

## Nietzsche (1844-1900)

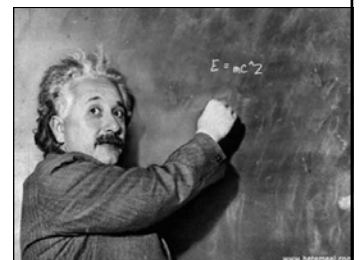
In Nietzsche's view, developments in modern science and the increasing secularization of European society had effectively 'killed' the Christian God, who had served as the basis for meaning and value in the West for more than a thousand years.



*“God is dead.”*

## Scientific Truth?

In 1905, Einstein introduced his theory of special relativity and deduced from it the shocking notion that mass and energy were not distinctly separate concepts.



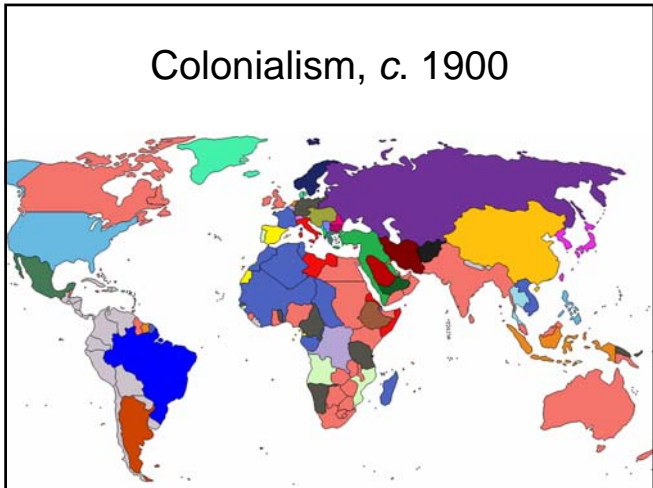


### The Emergence of Germany

- During the Napoleonic Wars, the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved with the abdication of the Emperor in 1806.
- During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Kingdom of Prussia and the new German Empire were unified into a major European power.
- At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Germany was under the rule of Wilhelm II (better known as "The Kaiser").

**Wilhelm's Full Title as German Emperor**

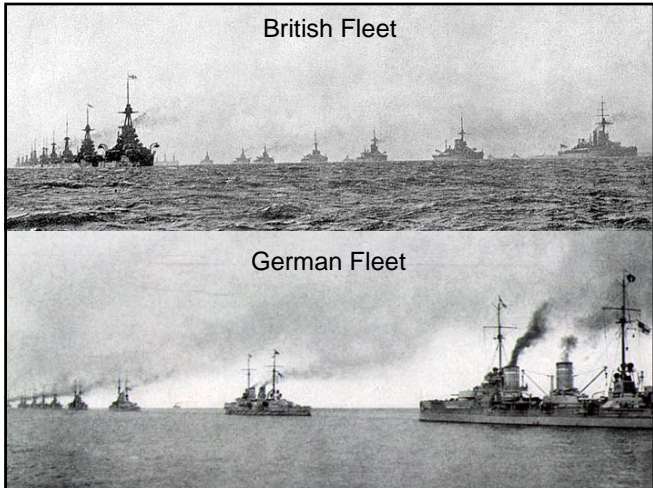
His Imperial and Royal Majesty Wilhelm the Second, by the Grace of God, German Emperor and King of Prussia, Margrave of Brandenburg, Burgrave of Nuremberg, Count of Hohenzollern, Duke of Silesia and of the County of Glatz, Grand Duke of the Lower Rhine and of Posen, Duke of Saxony, of Angria, of Westphalia, of Pomerania and of Lunenburg, Duke of Schleswig, of Holstein and of Crossen, Duke of Magdeburg, of Bremen, of Guelderland and of Jülich, Cleves and Berg, Duke of the Wends and the Kashubians, of Lauenburg and of Mecklenburg, Landgrave of Hesse and in Thuringia, Margrave of Upper and Lower Lusatia, Prince of Orange, of Rugen, of East Friesland, of Paderborn and of Pyrmont, Prince of Halberstadt, of Münster, of Minden, of Osnabrück, of Hildesheim, of Verden, of Kammin, of Fulda, of Nassau and of Moers, Princely Count of Henneberg, Count of the Mark, of Ravensberg, of Hohenstein, of Tecklenburg and of Lingen, Count of Mansfeld, of Sigmaringen and of Veringen, Lord of Frankfurt.



French political cartoon from the late 1890's. A pie represents China and is being divided between caricatures of:

- Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom
- William II of Germany
- Nicholas II of Russia
- The French Marianne
- Meiji Emperor of Japan

A stereotypical Qing official throws up his hands to try and stop them, but is powerless.



## European Treaties Prior to WWI

- The Dual Alliance 1879
- Three Emperor's League 1881
- Austro-Serbian Alliance 1881
- The Triple Alliance 1882
- The Austro-German-Romanian Alliance 1883
- The Franco-Russian Alliance 1894
- The Russo-Bulgarian Military Convention 1902
- The Entente Cordiale 1904
- The Anglo-Russian Entente 1907
- The Triple Entente 1907



On 28 June 1914, Gavrilo Princip, a Bosnian-Serb, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in Sarajevo.



## World War I

A.k.a. WWI, the First World War, the Great War, the War to End All Wars

### *Peace*, a poem by Rupert Brooke (1914)

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,  
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,  
With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,  
To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,  
Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,  
Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,  
And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,  
And all the little emptiness of love!

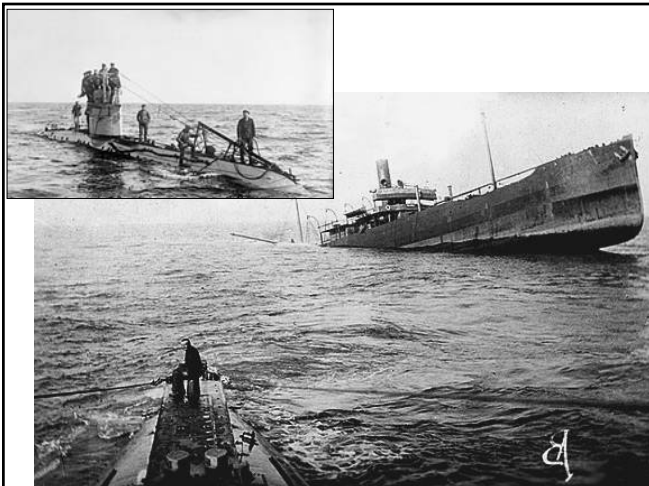
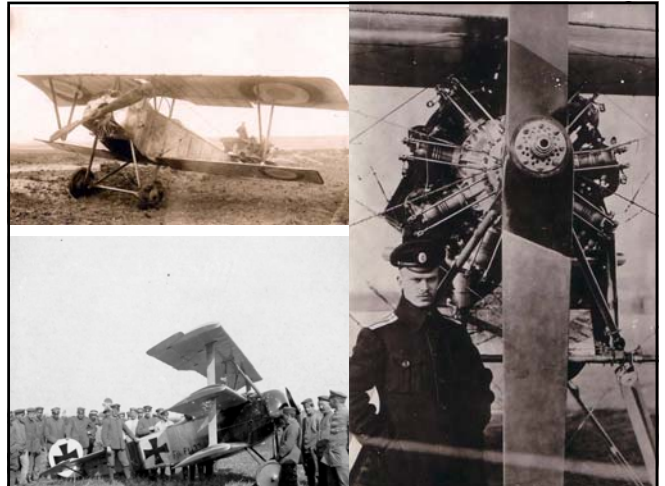
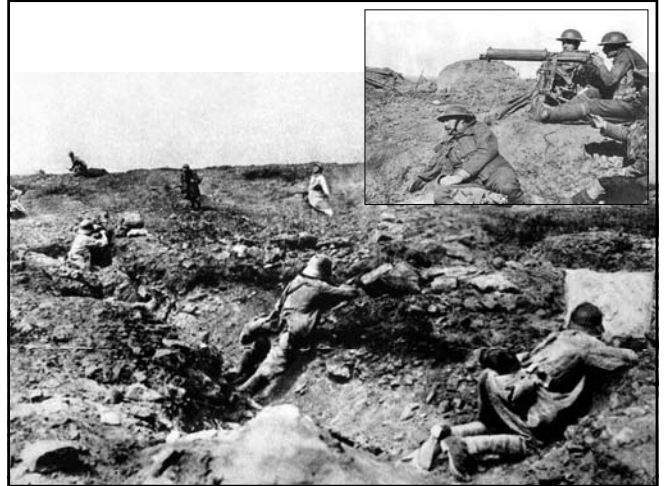
Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release there,  
Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,  
Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;  
Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there  
But only agony, and that has ending;  
And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.



## Innovations in Warfare



Machine guns changed the face of warfare; instead of heroic cavalry charges over open fields, trench warfare became the norm. Extremely long range artillery, tanks, poison gas and airplanes were also employed for the first time in WWI. These new weapons however, did not make the war end more quickly, they just made the death toll rise.



World War I was a global war which took place primarily in Europe from 1914 to 1918. Over 40 million casualties resulted, including approximately 20 million military and civilian deaths.

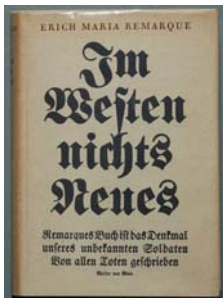


## The "Great War" and Its Significance

- Drastic loss (waste) of life...
- Sociopolitical consequences
  - October Revolution (Russia)
  - Hitler's National Socialist movement
  - Japanese Empire
- Technical innovations
  - Transportation and Manufacture (cars, planes)
  - Communication (radios)
  - Entertainment (movies)

## All Quiet on the Western Front

- Written by Erich Maria Remarque, 1929.



A constant theme in Remarque's book is that the youth of Germany (and the world) had been betrayed by teachers, parents, and other leaders who told them war was a great patriotic adventure.

*"The first bombardment showed us our mistake, and under it the world as they had taught it to us broke in pieces."*

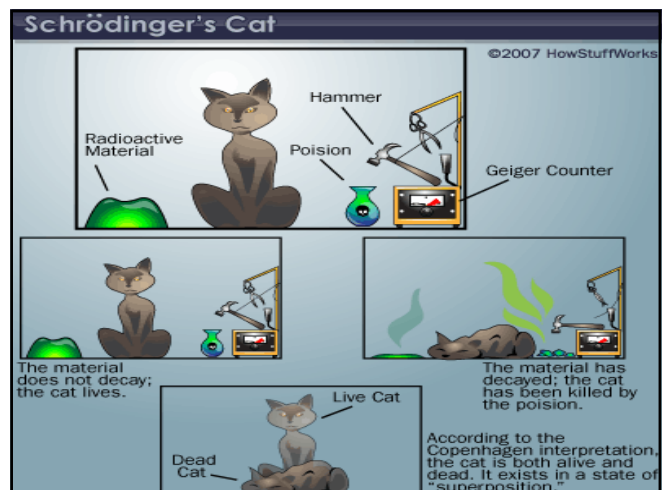
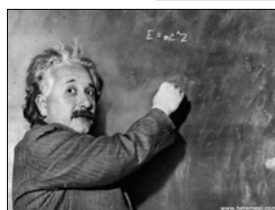
## The 'Lost Generation'



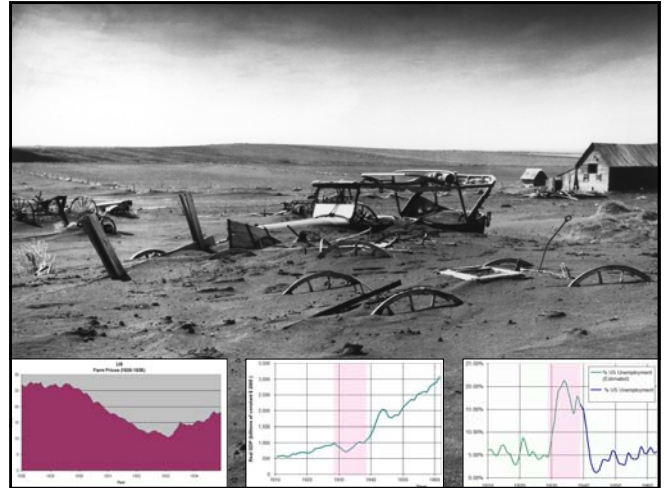
- The 'Lost Generation' is a phrase made popular by Ernest Hemingway in his novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, to refer to literary ex-pats who lived in Paris and other parts of Europe after WWI.
- For the British, the 'Lost Generation' is the generation of young men (i.e. future leaders) that died in the trenches of WWI.

## After WW I, where is truth and peace of mind to be found?

- By following our leaders?
- In God and religion?  
Nietzsche - "God is dead"
- In Newton's mechanical universe?
  - 1905: Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity
  - 1927: Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle



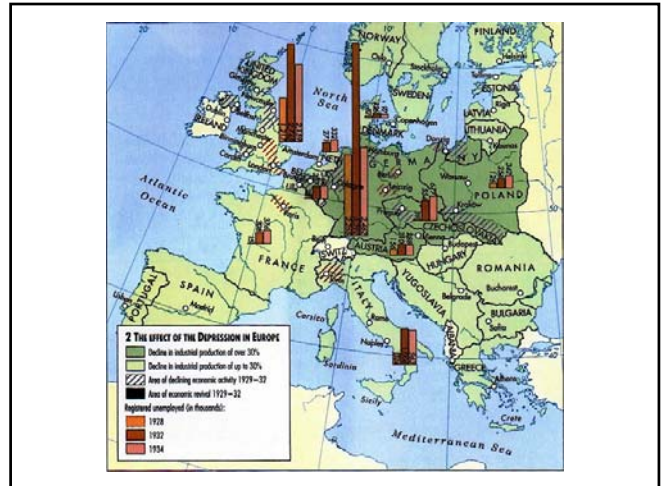
# The Great Depression (c. 1930-1940)



1937 photo by Margaret Bourke-White



Dorothea Lange's Migrant Mother depicts destitute pea pickers in California, centering on Florence Owens Thompson, age 32, a mother of seven children, in Nipomo, California, March 1936.



## Soviet Union: The Great Purge

- Following Lenin's Red Terror, Stalin orchestrated The Great Purge, a series of campaigns of political repression and persecution in the Soviet Union against its own citizens in 1936–1938.
- According to the declassified Soviet archives, during 1937 and 1938, the NKVD detained 1,548,367 victims, of whom 681,692 were shot - an average of 1,000 executions a day.
- Additionally, from 1929-1953, perhaps 20 million people were arrested and placed in Gulags, forced labor camps. At least a million of those people died while imprisoned.



**Fascism:** A system of government marked by centralization of authority under a dictator, stringent socioeconomic controls, suppression of the opposition through terror and censorship, and typically a policy of belligerent nationalism and racism.

## World War II



World War II was a global military conflict which involved a majority of the world's nations, including all of the great powers. Over 70 million people, the majority of them civilians, were killed, making it the deadliest conflict in human history.

## Hermann Göring

"It is always a simple matter to drag the people along. . . That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the peacemakers for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in any country."



The **Holocaust** is the term used to describe the genocide of approximately six million European Jews during World War II, as part of a program of deliberate extermination planned and executed by Nazi Germany under Adolf Hitler.

### Organised religion in Germany 1933-1945

Christianity in Germany has, since the Protestant Reformation, been divided into Catholicism and Protestantism. As a specific outcome of the Reformation in Germany, the large Protestant denominations are organized into *Länderkirchen* (roughly: Federal Churches). The German word for denomination is *Konfession*, however, this translation has been considered misleading, since it might suggest that the context of religion in Germany could be described with the common parlance of the religious marketplace, which is not the case.<sup>[1]</sup> In Germany, "to this day religion nominally remains a state affair."<sup>[2]</sup> For the large churches in Germany (Catholic and evangelicist) the German government collects the church tax, which is then given to the Churches. For this reason membership in the Catholic or Protestant (evangelicist) Church is officially registered. It is important to keep this official aspect in mind when facing to such questions as the religious beliefs of Adolf Hitler or Joseph Goebbels. Both men had ceased to attend Catholic mass or to go to Confession long before 1933, but neither had officially left the Church and neither of them refused to pay his church taxes.<sup>[3]</sup> Accordingly, Hitler and Goebbels can be classified as nominally Catholic.<sup>[4]</sup> Considering this, Stegmann-Gall holds that "nominal church membership is a very unreliable gauge of actual piety in this context."<sup>[5]</sup>

**"Kirchenaustritt" - Leaving the Church**

Other historians disagree and have taken a closer look at the numbers of people who left the church in Germany 1933-45. The option to be taken out of the church rolls (*Kirchenaustritt*) has existed in Germany since 1873, when Otto von Bismarck had introduced it as part of the *Kulturkampf* aimed against Catholicism.<sup>[6]</sup> For partly this was made possible for Protestants, too, and for the next 40 years it was mostly they who took advantage of it.<sup>[7]</sup> Statistics exist since 1924 for the Protestant churches and since 1917 for the Catholic Church.<sup>[8]</sup>

An analysis of this data for the time of the Nazi rule is available in a paper by Sean Gracow et al., published in a collection edited by Götz Aly. Although more Protestants than Catholics left their church, however, several Protestants and Catholics decided similarly.<sup>[9]</sup> The number of *Kirchenaustritt* reached its "historical high"<sup>[10]</sup> in 1939 when it peaked at 480,000. Gracow et al. see the numbers not only in relation to the Nazi policy towards the churches,<sup>[11]</sup> (which changed drastically from 1935 onwards) but also as indicator of the trust in the Führer and the Nazi leadership. The decline in the number of people who left the church after 1942 is explained as resulting from a loss of confidence in the future of Nazi Germany. People tended to keep their ties to the church, because they feared an uncertain future.<sup>[12]</sup>

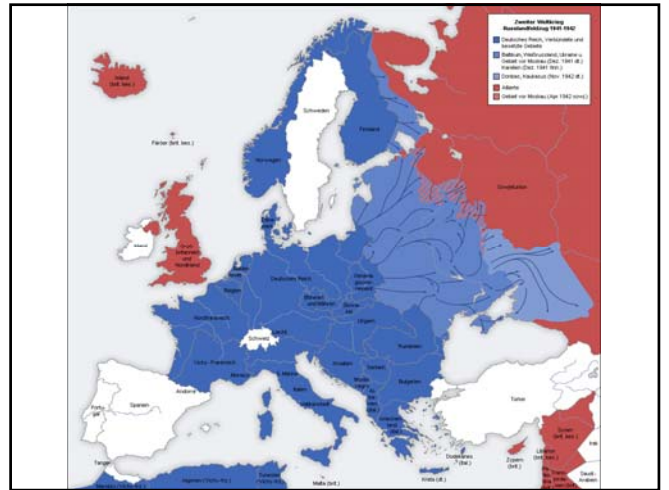
Kirchenaustritt 1933-1944 <sup>[13]</sup>	Cath.	Protest.	Total
1932	52 000	225 000	277 000
1933	34 000	57 000	91 000
1934	27 000	29 000	56 000
1935	31 000	53 000	84 000
1936	40 000	70 000	110 000
1937	104 000	138 000	242 000
1938	97 000	143 000	240 000
1939	95 000	395 000	490 000
1940	52 000	160 000	212 000
1941	52 000	195 000	247 000
1942	37 000	105 000	142 000
1943	12 000	35 000	47 000
1944	6 000	17 000	23 000

**Nazi policy towards the Churches**

Soon after that takeover of power in Germany, the Nazi government resumed talks with the Holy See concerning the establishment of a concordat, conciliating, regulating the relation between the Catholic Church and the state, had been established in Bavaria (1924), Prussia (1929) and Silesia (1932), but talks had failed on a federal level for several reasons. The *Reichskonkordat* was signed on July 20, 1933.

Like the idea of the *Reichskonkordat*, the notion of a Protestant Reich Church, which would unify the Protestant Churches, also had been considered previously.<sup>[14]</sup> Hitler had discussed the matter as early as 1927 with Ludwig Müller, who was at that time the military chaplain of Königsberg.<sup>[15]</sup>

Further information: *Kirchenkampf*



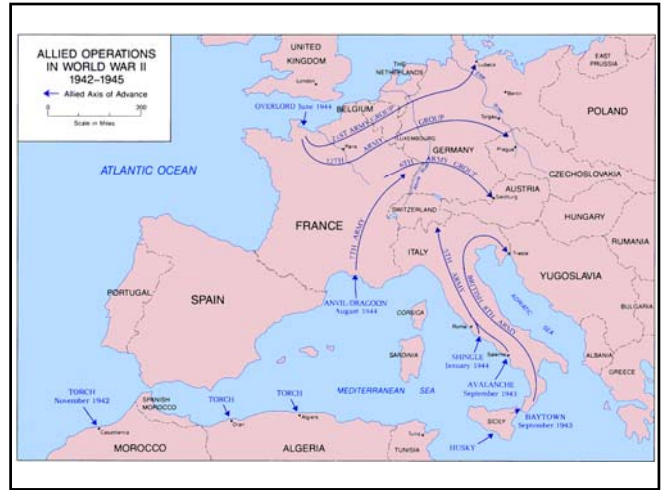
## Winston Churchill – PM of the UK

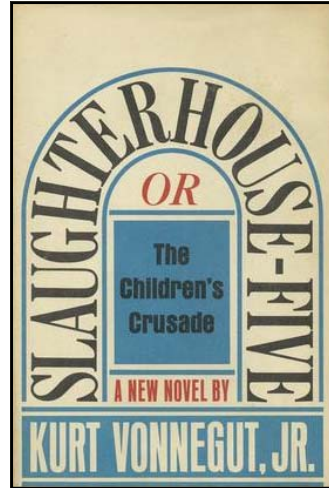
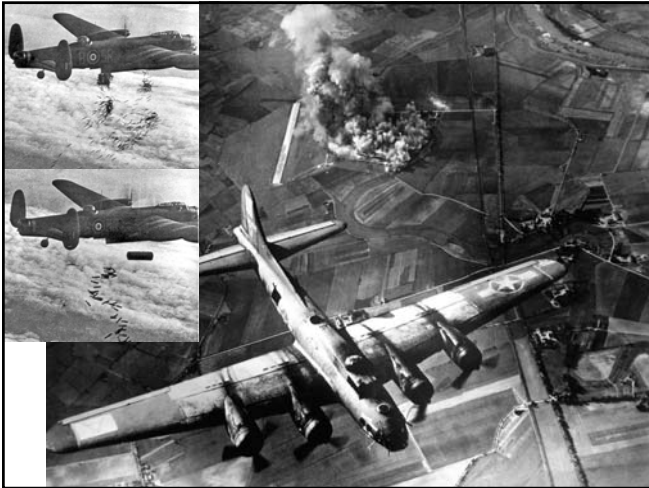
*Into the Storm*



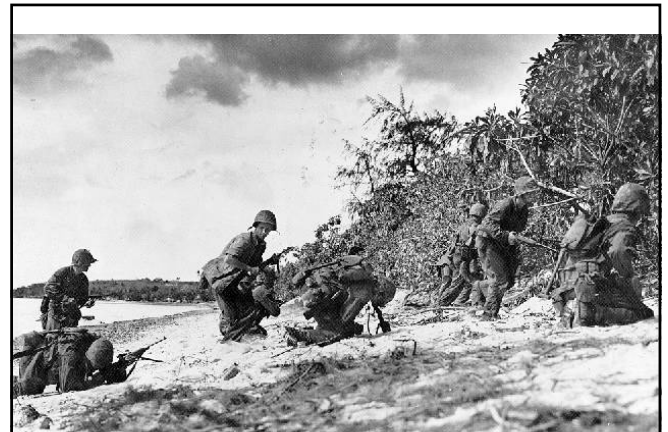
## 1941 – Attack on Pearl Harbor

**PEARL HARBOR**





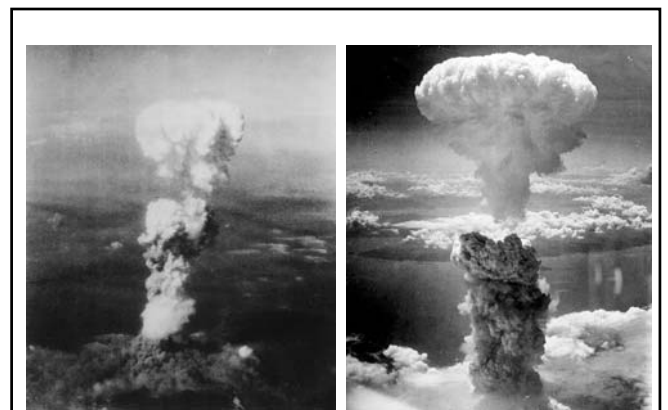
Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) was based on his own experiences as a prisoner of war at Dresden during the bombing. Vonnegut recalled "utter destruction" and "carnage unfathomable." The Germans put him and other POWs to work gathering bodies for mass burial. "But there were too many corpses to bury. So instead the Nazis sent in troops with flamethrowers. All these civilians' remains were burned to ashes."



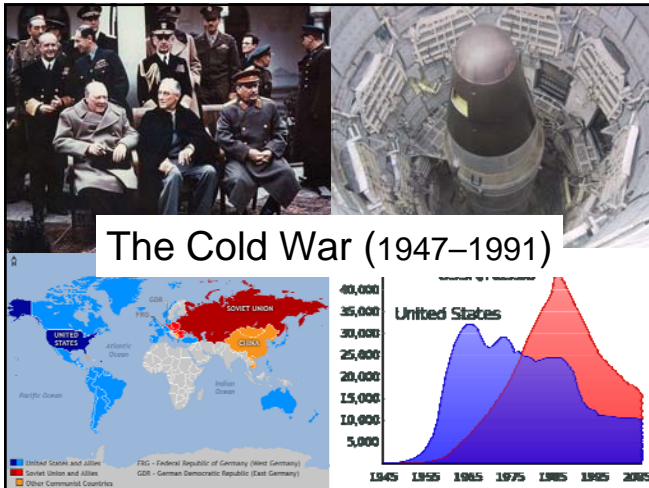
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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic\\_bombing\\_during\\_World\\_War\\_II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strategic_bombing_during_World_War_II)



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atomic\\_bombings\\_of\\_Hiroshima\\_and\\_Nagasaki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atomic_bombings_of_Hiroshima_and_Nagasaki)



You've been through the First World War, the Great Depression, the Second World War, the Holocaust, the invention, use, and proliferation of atomic weapons...

Science and religion no longer seem to provide the comfort and certainty that they used to...

How are you feeling?

## Nihilism

- The term nihilism is sometimes used synonymously with *anomie* to denote the general mood of despair at the pointlessness of existence that one has when they realize there are no necessary norms, rules, or laws.
- Most commonly, nihilism is presented in the form of existential nihilism which argues that life is without meaning, purpose, or intrinsic value.
- The existentialists were not nihilists. Their philosophy tries to find a way out of nihilism.

## Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

- Founder of Existentialism
- He made philosophy personal by posing these questions:
  - Who am I?
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  - Where am I going?
- He rejected the traditional pieties and systematic answers of both philosophy and the orthodox Christianity of his time.
- Instead, he embraced a vision of faith in which belief is considered to be a real choice and one that absolutely can't be validated or justified by reason.



## Sartre (1905-1980)

- French existentialist philosopher, playwright, novelist... etc.
- Popularized existentialism
- *Being and Nothingness* (1943)
- *L'existentialisme est un humanisme* (1946)
  - Seen by many as one of the defining texts of the Existentialist movement.
  - "Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world - and defines himself afterwards."



## Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973)

- Coined the term "existentialism"
- Leading Christian existentialist
- Marcel found his philosophical starting point in a condition of metaphysical alienation; the human individual searching for harmony in a transient life.
- Although Jean-Paul Sartre adopted the term "existentialism" for his own philosophy in the 1940s, Sartre's thought has been described as "almost diametrically opposed" to that of Marcel.



## Camus (1913-1960)

- An Algerian-born French author, philosopher, and journalist who was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1957.
- Rejected the label of being an existentialist, but devoted his life to opposing the philosophy of nihilism while still delving deeply into individual freedom.
- *The Stranger* (1942)
- *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942)



"I am not an existentialist."

## Main Themes of Existentialism

- **Absurdity:** For the existentialists, life is absurd; it makes no sense and has no meaning or ultimate purpose, but human beings need life to make sense, to have meaning and purpose.
- **Rejection of meaning-giving narratives:** It isn't enough to say that life is absurd; the existentialists repeatedly make the point that when philosophy, religion, or science tries to make sense of life, the attempts always fail.

## Main Themes of Existentialism

- **Alienation:** This is the feeling that you're a stranger in your own life, a stranger in the world.
- **Anxiety:** This is the feeling of unease you get when you start to recognize that life is absurd.
- **Forlornness:** This is the feeling of loneliness you get when you realize that no one can help you make sense of your existence.
- **Death:** This is the ultimate context for all human actions and an important source of the absurdity of life.

## Main Themes of Existentialism

- **Responsibility:** Everyone bears responsibility. If no one is going to give you a guidebook to life, you have to bear responsibility for making your way through it and creating some kind of meaning for it.
- **Authenticity:** People want authenticity — to live in a way that's in tune with the truth of who they are as human beings and the world they live in.

## Main Themes of Existentialism

- **Individuality:** An important part of developing an authentic and satisfying life is individuality. Reason, science, and systems that try to cover up the absurdity of life often take individuality from you.
- **Passion/engagement:** Being passionate or engaged is another important aspect of living an authentic life, and it's under attack from the same forces that take away your individuality.

## Steps Towards Existentialism

1. The Unexamined Life
  - One believes that life has meaning.
2. Existentialist Crisis
  - Something happens to cause one to lose faith in the meaning of life. Does life have any meaning?
3. Nihilism
  - Realization that it's impossible to 'prove' life has meaning.
  - Now one faces a choice...

## The Choice (from an existentialist's perspective)

### Option A: Suicide?

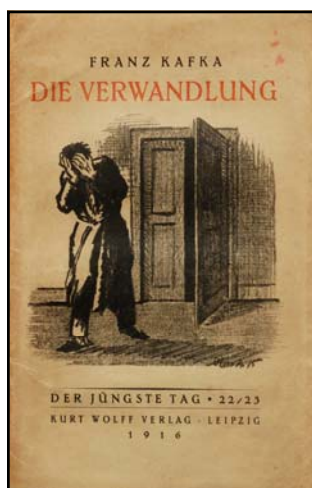
### Option B: Choose to believe in "fairy tales".

- Like religion or any other established system of belief.
- Existentialists would consider either of these choices the easy (coward's) way out.

### Option C: Choose to live an "authentic" life.

- Courageously accept the responsibility of the choice
- Independently choose the manner in which you find meaning in life.
- But remain constantly aware of the true absurdity of human life.

## Existentialism: Practice



### Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*

What would happen if one day you woke up and found yourself transformed into a gigantic insect?

### *The Trial*

- A novel by Franz Kafka, 1926.
- *The Trial* tells a story of a man who is arrested, tried, convicted and executed without ever learning what his crime was.
- The parable within Kafka's novel highlights the essence of his philosophy. Assigned unique roles in life, individuals must search deep within the apparent absurdity of existence to achieve spiritual self-realization.

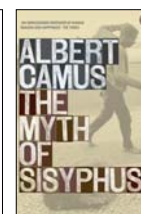


### Sisyphus



In Greek mythology, Sisyphus was a king punished in the underworld by being cursed to roll a huge boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down, and to repeat this process throughout eternity.

### Three different Sisyphus'



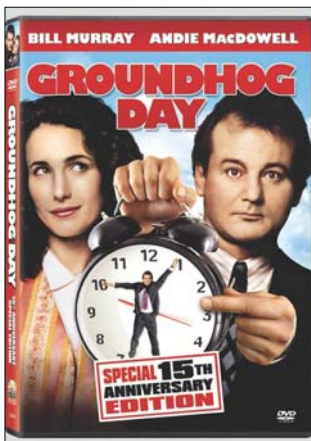
## Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*

- *The Myth of Sisyphus* is a 1942 philosophical essay by Albert Camus.
- In the essay, Camus introduces his philosophy of the absurd: man's futile search for meaning, unity and clarity in the face of an unintelligible world devoid of God and eternal truths or values.
- Does the realization of the absurd require suicide? Camus answers: "No. It requires revolt."
- At the end of the essay Camus writes, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy."

## Consider Sisyphus...



- Absurdity
- Rejection of M.G. Narratives
- Alienation
- Anxiety
- Forlornness
- Death
- Responsibility
- Authenticity
- Individuality
- Passion/Engagement



What does Phil do after he realizes he's trapped in the same day?

- Hedonism
- Suicide
- Self-improvement
- Charity work
- All of the above



1. How and why was Phil trapped?
2. Is the movie religious? Which religion?
3. How would you characterize the phases that Phil goes through?
4. How is Phil's journey related to Existentialism?

## Practice Questions

- If you were trapped in your own Groundhog Day, where would you be and what would you do?
- What does your answer to that question say about your beliefs about the meaning of life?



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