

Reading Passage

In our individual routines, each and every person strives to be the best that he or she can be -- a peculiar notion, because although many people aim for similar goals, the methods that are used to enact these goals can be grossly different. Just as no two individuals have the same fingerprint, no two people have identical theories on how to achieve a goal or to live life from day to day. Some people follow religious outlines to aspire to a level of moral excellence, while others employ other approaches. Towards the end of the nineteenth century and on through the mid-twentieth century, a movement called existentialism was born -- a kind of "philosophical theory of life". Existentialism is not a philosophy, but instead has been likened as a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy. Even though the tenants of existentialism are complex, certain themes are common amongst existential philosophers and authors, including moral individualism, freedom of choice, responsibility, and alienation.

Fundamental to the understanding of existentialism is the conception of moral individualism. Existentialism rejects traditional ethical endeavors, which is contrary to the tenants of many philosophers prior to the existentialism movement. Philosophers since the time of Aristotle have held that most people aim for a common peak of ethical achievement. Aristotle argued for the existence of a divine being, described as the Prime Mover, who is responsible for the unity and purposefulness of nature. In order for humanity to attain such a climax, everyone must imitate the Almighty's perfect profile and strive to mimic his actions. Aristotle's basic philosophy deduces that humanity strives for an identical peak of moral excellence, as judged by a higher entity.

Existentialism declares that the individual must choose his way. Most importantly, there is no predetermination. Since the universe is meaningless and absurd, people must set their own ethical standards. The universe does not

Questions

1. The author's primary purpose in writing this passage is which of the following?
 - a. To criticize the existential movement
 - b. To explain a few tenants of the existential movement and to enumerate a few of the most prominent existentialists
 - c. To downplay existentialism and support classical divine philosophy
 - d. To describe the shortcomings of Aristotle's philosophies
 - e. To explain existentialism and to discuss the philosophies of several prominent living existentialists

2. The author implies which of the following?
 - a. Existentialism will not succeed because Aristotle's philosophies are too deeply rooted into today's cultures
 - b. Predetermination is a detriment to society
 - c. Goals are attainable only if a person has a person philosophy about life
 - d. A peak of ethical achievement is attainable
 - e. The universe is unpredictable, and existentialism permits for humans to find meaning and purpose in everyday activities

3. Which of the following is explicitly stated in the passage?
 - a. Existentialism is a philosophy
 - b. The Prime Mover is Aristotle's embodiment of a supreme being
 - c. Soren Kierkegaard was well-read and studied Aristotle's philosophies
 - d. Existentialism has its roots in ancient China
 - e. In the eighteenth century, existentialists were shunned because of their radical views

predetermine moral rules. Each person strives toward a unique moral perfection. The nineteenth century Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, who was the first writer to call himself existential, reacted against tradition by insisting that the highest good for an individual is to find his uniqueness. Kierkegaard's journal reads, 'I must find a truth that is true for me ... the idea for which I can live or die'. Existentialists believe that morality depends on the individual, rather than a supreme being.

Next to moral individualism, the inevitability of choice is the most prominent existentialist theory. Existentialism asserts that people do not have a fixed nature, as other animals and plants do. Our choices determine who we are. The twentieth-century French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre proclaimed that the most important choices that we make are those that directly affect ourselves. Each character makes choices that create his nature. Existence suggests freedom where mankind is open to a future that is determined by choice and action. Choice is inescapable and central to human existence; the refusal to choose is a choice. Even when a person seems to be acting out a given role or following given orders -- for example, acting upon the orders handed down by society -- the person is in fact choosing to do so.

4. What is the purpose in writing the second sentence of the first paragraph?
 - f. To explain that we are all unique
 - g. To explain that there are no two people who will ever have identical theories on how to set goals
 - h. To explain that living life from day to day is difficult
 - i. To introduce the concept of individualism, which later will help refute the idea that a common philosophy cannot be applicable to everybody
 - j. To explain the author's interest with forensics

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