

Existentialism as Empiricism

Perhaps the best way to describe existentialism is to call it neo-empiricism or perhaps subjective empiricism, or better yet, Romantic Empiricism. For the emphasis on experience is qualitatively widened to include emotion, will, intuition, and instincts, yet quantitatively narrowed from the public domain to that of the individual.

Historically, existentialism lies in the line of development of empiricism and pragmatism, and relies on scientific theses and findings in refuting Platonic rationalism and Christian thought, rejecting the essential and metaphysical as causative or real. It is intensely personal, and subjective, and is susceptible to the same Socratic refutation as the “man-is-the-measure” position of the Protagorean notion that knowledge-is-perception.

Western philosophy first meets the prototype of the existentialist in Plato. Although it is true that Plato’s existentialists were not so riddled with angst as the twentieth century variety, they were still faced with the same philosophical uncertainty as the moderns. Both are personified in Plato by the sophists, who believed that “whatever they cannot squeeze between their hands is just nothing,”¹ and that “man is the measure of all things . . .”² and that all else is characterized by contingency and uncertainty. But Plato was able to remedy the situation of their epistemological uncertainty. He knew both the empiricists and the subjectivists, and dealt with their epistemology on the basis of “the divided line.”³

Aristotle, inverting Plato’s notion of being, became the father of classical empiricism. Although his logic explicated platonic thought (because it was deductive), his own later work broke new ground in empiricism and induction. And although neither Plato nor Aristotle laid too much stress on the division between subject and object, Aristotle’s line of followers succeeded in undoing the certainty Plato had forged.

Rene Descartes first produced the extreme form of the subject-object dualism and laid great emphasis on the knowing subject. This extreme dualism has never been overcome; nor has anyone been able logically to establish objectivity beginning only from the self. And in whatever philosophy the subjective element of the dualism is supreme, the possibility of error and the logical inevitability of individualism are endemic to the enterprise.

For even Descartes’ own search for objective certainty logically ended in the subjective tautology beyond which logic cannot go. For *cogito ergo sum* implies nothing at all beyond the subjective. It gives rise to no clear certainty beyond itself. And it forces one into a subjectivism from which there is no logical escape.

Kant and his followers implicitly accepted this state of affairs. For them, real knowledge is restricted to the limitations imposed upon it by empiricism, and hence cannot have as its object absolute or eternal truth. Because knowledge was thought to be empirical and reasoning mostly inductive, it was also relative and the notion of truth itself later became relativistic.

In the century that followed it was demonstrated that knowledge cannot be restricted to mere sense perception, but is subject to other personal forces as well, such as will to power, desire, release

of tension and so forth. Put another way, because knowledge no longer has as its object an eternal or absolute realm, it must be demoted to one of several human mental aspects temporally determined and thereby prone to error. Both the new notion of truth (being subjective) as well as the fact that subjective forces other than mere sense perception have a legitimate claim to our attention, aid and abet the knower-as-central-syndrome in the replacement of rationalism and metaphysics with an intense need for psychology and that itself on a strictly empirical basis.

Phenomenology, insofar as it is an attempt to explicate sense perception (empiricism) by means of reference to psychological states and processes (empiricism again, in an extended, subjective sense), is to be located nowhere but within the empiricist tradition.

Similarly, Romanticism, another precursor of existentialism, is to be located within the empiricist tradition because of its discontent with the results of rationalism and for its attempt to explain the great ideals by recourse to a largely created history, or mythical past.

Empiricism (*empeiria*, *experiencia*), as we know it today, takes it as axiomatic that “experience, rather than reason is the source of knowledge. . . . Weak empiricism states that all knowledge comes from experience. The extreme form of this thesis would be the claim that no source other than experience can provide knowledge at all. . . . All conceptions are derived from experience, no matter the use which may later be made of them.”⁴

As Sartre claims that existentialism is a humanism, we claim that it is an empiricism. Not empiricism as merely empiricism, nor academically pure empiricism, but a logical and psychological manifestation of empiricism just as pragmatism and utilitarianism are ethical manifestations of empiricism. It is empiricism as it was widened by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and their followers.

This assertion does not entail great research, lengthy or copious citations, or a parade of witnesses. So enmeshed in the empirical tradition is existentialism that its every assertion is pervaded by the spirit of empiricism. One would be surprised to find an exception to this thesis. In fact, if when reading the existentialists we determine to give forth a sharp exclamation of “Rationalism” each time we read an assertion of proof for a transcendental value, an assertion advocating rationalism in method or doctrine, or homage to a universal truth other than that all men die, we can safely read it during a wedding or church service. Looking for specific citations linking existentialist authors to empiricism is like looking for a piscine description of water.

A Full understanding of existentialism as empiricism, or a development within the empiricist tradition, depends upon the meaning of the words themselves. For whatever it means at other levels, existentialism certainly wishes to stress its emphasis on existence rather than essence, i.e., what we see rather than what we conclude by reason alone. Its very name breathes the spirit of empiricism and anti-rationalism. Granted that this is not Humean empiricism, it is clearly the continental “Kantian” variety found in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

If one denies that Existentialism is a form of empiricism, he has only to consult Kierkegaard or Nietzsche to see that it has at least settled down comfortably in the intellectual universe created by it, and has counted empiricism’s enemies as its own. Nor have later existentialists departed from the assumptions of the empirically produced world. Absolutes are abolished, transcendentals are nonexistent, and ethics are to be risen above.

Recognizing the world of epistemological uncertainty for what it is, Kierkegaard presented a portrait of individual need, an elaborate psychology as explanation, and a “leap of faith” as the “cure.” His work assumes the heritage of empiricism and a world where the old rationalism has

become superfluous. Kierkegaard's most glaring philosophical inconsistency was an example of wanting to have one's cake and eat it too. Having amply demonstrated his anti-rationalist methods, he then makes his celebrated "leap of faith" into the tenuous far-reaches of the realm of rationalism, in the form of Christian orthodoxy. Never mind that he has done nothing by means of logic or method to get there; forget the fact that he has claimed such values are not open to the ways or means of reason, here clearly defined in empirical terms. Suffice it that this transcendental God of Christianity is what he wants – needs – for the peace of his soul. And so, not having a Christianity of certainty, he settles for a probable Christianity; his convictions are founded upon personal need, not upon knowledge, despite the fact that Christianity was never meant either to be merely probable or to be presented that way.

Key tenets for Nietzsche (and those which most clearly betray his empirical bent) were many. He praised instinct as being man's surest source of psychology and as a substitute for ethics. He praised science for its empirical and antirationalist emphasis on the here and now. He constantly defined the terms *reality* and *actuality* in immanent, this-worldly terms. The realm of nature was for Nietzsche the only objective realm, and provided man with that which he was himself to transcend. He was unstinting in his reviling of priests and priestcraft as the last bastion of transcendentalism. Nietzsche praised psychology, and was an astute and original psychologist. Indeed, psychology comes to replace ethics for Nietzsche, not in the sense of a direct replacement of one with the other, but in the sense that if one dispenses with ethics, there must be a way of dealing with reality and filling the void left by the banished transcendental. His religion was an uncompromising faith in cause and effect in a finite and closed system. He juxtaposed and contrasted morality and reality, as though morality is opposed to reality – as if for being "unnatural," morality ought to be unthinkable.

Nietzsche hated the "herd mentality,"⁵ chandala morality, and the concept of equality or equal rights⁶ – He was an elitist, and enlisted the power both of the intellect, and especially of the will in the service of maintaining the aristocratic.

In all respects, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were proponents of the individual, the human particulars. So were those who came after them. Indeed, the supposed *sine qua non* of existentialism is radical individuality. Supposedly an existentialist, to *authenticate his being*, or to *live authentically* in the face of death and the need to choose, may as easily (and subjectively) make a leap of faith to Platonism as to Christianity (Kierkegaard) or to "the will to power" (Nietzsche). The possible effects of radical individuality and subjectivism on these leapt-to-notions are intriguing. But more interesting, perhaps, is a second, and ubiquitous feature of existentialism, i.e., the denial of the transcendent, either as existing, or as empirically attainable, and the denial of rationalism on its own terms. This is totally consistent with the purest empiricism, in its refusal to entertain any other epistemology on its own terms.

We may list characteristics common to the two. One feature of empiricism which is essential to existentialism is inductive reasoning as characteristic of its approach to knowledge and discovery. This includes such notions as "man's existence precedes his essence," and the overwhelming emphasis on dealing with individuals and particulars rather than classes and universals.

Another empirical feature characteristic of Existentialism is that it is sense-based in every way that Plato defined "true opinion;" i.e., empiricism has neither a theoretical use for nor a logical means of obtaining universals, or transcendentals of any kind, despite the ubiquitous "individual"

need for them.

Therefore, yet another empirical feature arises within existentialism, i.e., that all universals or transcendentals are the result of *wanting* them, not of *reasoning* to them, i.e., of realizing a personal need for that which empiricism cannot obtain. Much of Existentialism can be read as a revolt against the merely mechanical nature of the physical universe which science has produced; as the supposition that man cannot well be treated in such impersonal terms. Yet the obvious solution, i.e., to return to a thorough rationalism is even more odious to existentialism, apparently because modern writers agree, on the basis of its brilliant success, that science has disproved rationalism. The notion of “a leap of faith” is consistent with the “under-determined” conclusions of the inductive method, or the empirical production of generalizations. What is called induction in science, is called a “leap of faith” in life and morality on the basis of psychology and personal preference. Existentialism may be characterized as a Psychological squirming out of the mechanical universe of empiricism and the physical sciences, but it must not be forgotten that such psychological squirming is (insofar as it is conscious and intelligent) itself characterized by empiricism.

Humanism (itself the empirical limitation of human inquiry) limits the field of Existentialism’s objects of study to that which is human, particularly the here and now. This is evident in the recurring theme of finitude and temporality, in “authentic being”; always it is the concern with the here and now not as I know it, but as I experience it⁷

In existentialism, man is enclosed in the empiricist’s system of subject matter, method, and so forth. Empiricism is that which gives rise to conclusions to which the response “so what?” remains unanswered by anything more than an appeal to personal preference. Existentialism psychologically justifies personal preference as an adequate court of appeal.

But there arises an emptiness in the human psyche which centuries of Christianity and rationalism had filled with the metaphysical and ethical. This emptiness, to the sensitive soul, is intolerable, and must be remedied. It has been called possibility and despair by Kierkegaard who sought to overcome it by a leap of faith; it was simply possibility to Nietzsche who wanted to exploit it to the fullest in the production of Overman.

For Kierkegaard it was despair because, he felt, one must relate oneself to oneself. Despair because one cannot rationally relate oneself to God. Therefore despair is a function of the frustrated need to relate oneself to God and being able only to integrate oneself to oneself with any degree of epistemological certainty.

For Nietzsche, the possibility of being wholly what he wanted to become, what he could become, meant steering clear of any outside influence which might exercise an undue influence over his own self. In becoming Overman, Nietzsche held, one had to embrace his finitude and suffering, both to *will* it, and to *rise above* it.

Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche saw clearly the epistemological nature of their world and its implications. Both dealt with the same subjects, occasionally right down to the illustrations. Both directed their steadiest gaze at the relationship of Christianity to the modern world. The difference, of course, was that Kierkegaard could not live with the implications of the new science and Nietzsche embraced and praised them. Kierkegaard embraced the transcendent God; Nietzsche advocated *becoming* transcendent gods; both men acted on the basis of the belief that science had demonstrated that what is transcendent is beyond the reach of reason grounded in experience. This is nothing if it is not empiricism.

It is no secret that those we call existentialists, following after Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, share the concerns, methods and generally adopt the conclusions of empiricism. They may add personal anecdotes, new insights, tighter definitions or additional wrinkles to the basic notion of existentialism, but they share the basic heritage of empiricism, i.e., a world divested or disabused of both its transcendental outlook, and the method of reasoning to one, a world steeped in induction and sense perception. Indeed, the existentialists, even though they feel most keenly the despair caused by modern science, magnify this to the glorification of the self and its own senses. So much is this the case that despair stands where rationalism and peace once served, and nihilism⁸ logically engulfs us where we do not psychologically steel ourselves.

Existentialists are in agreement with other forms of empiricism that anything is permissible except rationalism, provided that it is not gotten by rationalistic means, but obtained by means of the leap, and that it not be espoused dogmatically; that any suffering is tolerable if it avoids Rationalistic certainty. This on the assumption that empiricism, in the guise of natural science, has “disproved” (or at the bare minimum made dubious the notion of) the existence of the Biblical God, and with Him, all else transcendental or metaphysical.

Existentialism, following Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, assumes and agrees with the empirical placement of “reality” in the realm of particulars rather than the realm of universals, in opposition to Platonic philosophy⁹.

Epistemology is linked irrevocably to Ontology. One cannot speak of one without implying the other. To define what we can know is to imply how it is knowable, and vice versa. Epistemology defines its corresponding Ontology by pointing out its limits, and Ontology defines Epistemology by implying a suitable means of access. Nietzsche’s notion of “reality” and one’s access to it, were Aristotelean rather than Platonic. His assessment of Christianity is right on the basis of his empirical bias, i.e., his empirical epistemology and its corresponding ontology. He simply stated it negatively because he was an empiricist and psychologist, and he knew why he didn’t like Christianity. The staunchest fundamentalist needn’t be ashamed to admit that on Nietzsche’s principles, God is indeed dead.

With the departure of the object of rationalism goes the importance of the concept of the eternal; with the advent of empiricism comes the ascendancy of immediacy, or the importance of the here and now.

While it is true that Existentialism has redirected empiricism in upon itself, making the individual and psychology of paramount importance, and in so doing has taken a more descriptive form, it should be remembered that to be descriptive in the manner of existentialism is nothing if not empirical. For surely it seeks to be descriptive of something -- some non-transcendent entity -- whether physical object or state of mind.

But it is also true that Existentialism is an expansion of Empiricism. It includes more than mere inductive reasoning, and is not primarily interested in the external, physical world. In this sense, existentialism has a different field of interest, one which places man at its center, and an extended empirical method which adds faith and volition at the periphery as a means of dealing with external matters impinging on man’s “spiritual” aspect.

Thus several new emphases or ideas have arisen from existentialism, the foremost being a keen sense of individualism. Men have always been self-aware, but before the rise of existentialism their self awareness was tempered by the societal norms and consciousness in which they found

themselves. Existentialism brings an empirical understanding of the self to each self, an understanding which presupposes oneself to be not only unique, but an island unto himself. This is seen in the primacy of the individual over groups or collectives, transcendentals and the metaphysical, as well as over nature and physical being. The basis upon which the primacy of the individual is predicated is the failed promise of rationalism, or more accurately, the mitigation or destruction of that promise by empiricism and science.

“Modern existentialism, particularly in the writings of Sartre, has made much of the thesis: ‘existence precedes essence’. In the case of man, its meaning is not difficult to grasp . . . as Ortega y Gasset puts it, ‘man has no nature, only a history . . . ‘ However differently the various existentialists may put this thesis, they are all agreed on it as a cardinal point in their analysis of man.”¹⁰

Closely associated with this notion of the individual as primary is the notion of freedom as a necessary condition of man (although one cannot easily see how freedom can be so universal in scope and not be of the "essence" of man). It is in regard to man *qua* man, and the necessity of choice that both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were concerned that "one become what one is."¹¹ What could be a more individualistic injunction?

In this connection there is an instructive contrast between existentialists and the Early Christian Monks. While both were intensely individualistic, the Monks were Christian Rationalists. Modern Existentialists are anything but Rationalists. In both the Monks and the Empiricists can be discerned a certain subjectivism. In the monks, subjectivism is limited by the objective interpretive apparatus of the Bible and by tradition. Existentialist subjectivism knows no limits. Many of the Monks kept silence in certainty for many days and weeks on end. Existentialists are threatened by silence; they are compelled to scream their angst to the world without knowing why they should do so, or what purpose is thus served. The Monks were in touch with the eternity they sought; the Existentialists are not sure how firmly in touch they are with the present. The Monks lived in a universe pregnant in its every shadow with profound meaning. The Existentialists cannot even agree upon what it is to be meaningful. The Monks put off the desires of the flesh as that which stood between them and their rewards. The existentialists fear that fulfilling the desires of the flesh may be the only "rewards" that exist.

The list could be extended indefinitely, but it is surly clear by now that it is not mere individualism that comprises the essential feature of Existentialism, but the extended individualistic empiricism which characterizes it.

The Monk's individualism was not dictated so much by forces of subjectivism, as by adherence to the logical and more of less objective character of the Biblical teachings. There were varieties of monasticism, and several degrees of individualism within it, yet there was one goal, and for the most part, the monks recognized kinship in one another, rather than alienation. It is the case that Existentialists are forced by the "logic" of pure empiricism into a universe where human connections, when they are recognized, are tenuous and superficial at best.

Compare this to the individualism which characterizes Existentialism. According to the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (vol. 3, p. 148)¹² "if any single thesis could be said to constitute the doctrine of existentialism, it would be that the possibility of choice is the central fact of human nature." This involves at least three different contentions, that "choice is ubiquitous," that the criteria by which choice is made "are themselves choices with no rational grounds for such choices," and that

human behavior is not subject to "causal explanation" or interpretation. Clearly the focus is on the free agency of the individual or the human particular. This emphasis is part of the legacy of empiricism and the inductive method.

But whence this emphasis on human choice? It arises from the rejection of that last lingering aura of rationalism which remained even after empiricism had taken over every existing discipline and "invented" others, and equally from a rejection of the nineteenth century materialism which was a result of Kantian and post-Kantian development of the Cartesian Dualism.

Another new emphasis of existentialism, and one logically arising from empiricism, in eliminating (or "discovering" the absence of) the transcendental and metaphysical, is the destruction of meaning and ethics, which devolve to mere pragmatics, relativism, or worse, personal preference. For "meaning," in the traditional rational sense, assumed a relationship to a metaphysical entity, or "participation in a higher category;" ethics were based upon universals and/or the character of God. Sartre had it right when he said that "no finite point has any meaning apart from an infinite [and one might add, *transcendent*] reference point."

With existentialism, philosophical development itself proceeds no longer on the basis of logical necessity, but on that of volitional inevitability. That is why at a certain low point of life, a basic need is found in common in all the existential writers, although their individual responses in the pursuit of that meaning differs so widely in them. The Existentialists are like goats who, after having followed the Judas (empiricism) into that slaughtering pen of a meaningless universe, all realize their predicament, and seek to escape via various unsuitable and impossible means, some jumping, some squirming, some kicking the walls, and so forth. The low point of life is not necessary; but without rationalism or revelation, it is inevitable; an acceptable definition or limitation of rationalism can define and direct life meaningfully and never produce a universe of absurdity.

As an offshoot of, development within, or manifestation of empiricism, existentialism is susceptible to many of the same criticisms. Just as empiricism and positivism have no basis for assuming that experience itself is meaningful apart from rational (but often unacknowledged) presuppositions, so existentialism finds itself blazing away at any preconceived notion of human essence while philosophizing feverishly to produce an individual one. More basically, it was strictly voluntary to give up on eternal truth or absolutes, for they are still attainable in much the way Plato described. The forfeiture of objective grounding was unnecessary. But given the ego flattering importance placed upon the individual by empiricism, it was inevitable. For nothing flatters the self like being the master of the objective rather than its slave.

Similarly, empiricism and all its spawn have had real ethics wrenched from their grasp, only to reappear in the garb (and with the nullifying status) of pragmatism and utilitarianism, non-ethics all. True ethics, absolute ethics, universal notions of right and wrong attainable by reason, exist in the transcendent realm. When we define away this transcendent realm we define away its contents as well.

Kierkegaard saw that acts of faith such as that of Abraham were not ethical, but were beyond the reach of ethics. They can in no way be informed by ethics; they are of another realm altogether. This is in fact Kierkegaard's acquiescence to the supposition that the transcendent cannot inform the temporal, living, particular human life at its deepest point. Even if there had in fact been in Abraham's time Biblical ethics prohibiting the sacrifice of a son, the New Testament is clear that the faith was placed in the *Author* of ethics, and that therefore Abraham was not himself a slave to

ethics.

Nietzsche worked diligently (and with a shocking logical consistency) to remove completely good and evil as meaningful categories. He was the first to strip the notion not only of its transcendence, but therefore of its meaning, assigning it a rather pedestrian place among the particulars. The will to power does not itself replace the good in the sense of transcendence; it is an abstract phrase which refers to a wide variety of particular instances of overcoming traditional notions of good and evil. It is a subjective Aristoteleanism replacing a Platonism, a pragmatic-personal replacing an ethical-objective.

However, in the sense that Nietzsche attempted to transcend, in the sense that the "Overman," by means of the will to power, must go beyond good and evil as empirically meaningless, he would make of man himself a transcendent god. For Kierkegaard, Man must make a leap of faith to grasp the transcendent; for Nietzsche, man must will himself to *become* the transcendent.

A further feature of the existential worldview is the production of (as well as, the need for) psychology. Whereas we find true ethics in its purest "type" in Platonism, we can neither discover nor produce such ethics on the Aristotelean model. On the other hand, modern Aristoteleanism produces a more particular and observant psychology which does handstands to convince us that it is "scientific" because of its dependence on the inductive method, analysis of particulars, and abstraction of patterns.

So not only individualism but psychology resulted from the destruction of rational theology (i.e., the rational interaction of the individual with a community and/or God) which gave a person meaning. One cannot live without meaning. But existentialism, accepting the logical outcome of empiricism, relinquished both the theology and the rationalism within which these larger features (community and God) were understood and upon which meaning was predicated. It is no wonder that there is a huge strain of either psychology or painful self analysis and soul baring in almost all the existentialist writers.

The problem is that psychology (on the basis of its empiricism) can logically do nothing more than sometimes describe and explain (sometimes brilliantly) certain human behaviors and mental states. It cannot give anything like a cogent account of their values. In fact, many psychologists are tempted to view human behaviors and mental states as value neutral. Others cast about for a handy, if somewhat arbitrary, standard such as the societal norm, physical harm, or self destruction upon which to judge such phenomena.

Although psychologists don't generally recognize the fact, the conflict of psychology and ethics, i.e., the collision of ethical demands and personal psychological "needs," prove the fallen nature of man and vindicates the concept of divine revelation, both general and special. For even Plato could not adequately explain the presence, origin, or essence of Good as the category.

Kierkegaard and Nietzsche may have been more prophetic than causative. In fact given the tight progression of thought from Hegel to the present, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both look like they were merely the harbingers of inevitable change rather than the revolutionaries who bring it. Nietzsche's notion of the transvaluation of all values has certainly become a reality, even if in ways he could not have anticipated nor appreciated. The old values of rational thought have been abandoned in favor of personal preference. Plato's "good" has given place to Tom, Dick, and Harry's "own thing." The same forces which in the nineteenth century Nietzsche hoped would shape "Overman," in the twentieth century have been watered down in "Everyman." The fact that they are

everything Nietzsche loathed, would suffice to send Nietzsche quietly to his eternal non-return.

Man is closed up alone in a universe open only to his limited experience; gone or useless are rationalism and metaphysics. Empiricism alone remains. It has been teased and tormented to such an extent as to lend epistemological validity to unbridled subjectivism and emotion as seen in psychology, and personal preference in a world devoid of anything higher than man himself. The Existentialist finds himself locked up in a world of particulars which have no necessary linkage either to each other or to a higher being or meaning. Hence, one is left with the ubiquitous despair and a sense of alienation and absurdity, forcing one to a fearful leap (of faith) into the darkness where there is no objective basis for belief that there is anyone or anything there to catch him.

Platonism and rationalism are almost completely gone; certainly they are responsible for no one's views of reality, or for the shaping of any policy. Pragmatism has become Everyman's means of authentication. Christianity exists only in individuals and in a relatively few enclaves. Capitalism has largely given way to socialism. Only the costly, angst-ridden individualism is lacking from today's pop philosophy. It has given way to group-think, political action groups, and "minorities." In other ways, one individual is still revered as being the essential feature in the world, and his opinions are as good as any one else's. (Cf. Plato's *Theaetetus* where Socrates questions Theaetetus concerning Protagoras' views that perception is knowledge, and that "Man is the measure of all things . . .")

Existentialism is the logical conclusion of, or the conclusion within, empiricism. It is the failure of empiricism on display within an absurd universe of its own creation and with all its bridges burned behind it. It is that overpowering despair which realizes too late that it is the last heir to a failed philosophical enterprise. It is nothing less than empiricism's shocked reaction at the meaninglessness of its own conclusions. Existentialism is the realization of empiricism's limitations in meeting man's spiritual needs while adopting its methods and objects because of its apparent success in refuting rationalism.

While it may be true that we may "leap" to Christianity or even to rationalism, the fact that it requires a leap is an indictment of our understanding of Christianity and rationalism. For these are not properly understood as "leaps" or "gambles" but are to be approached by evidence and reason, and are meant to produce epistemological certainty.

Given that empiricism is based upon sense perception, and therefore is itself subjective in a way rationalism is not; given the subjective and individual nature of existentialism; given the individualistic emphasis of democracy and capitalism; and given the prevalent, if unspoken, notion that all opinions are created equal, it may serve us well if we immersed our age in *The Theaetetus* and *The Sophist*. We owe it to the impoverished souls of our age to expose and expunge Protagoras' little trite lie that "man is the measure of all things."

1. *The Sophist*, 247 c.

2. *Theaetetus* 152 a.

3. *Res Publica*, Book IV. It is important to note that Plato forged a unity between the knower and the known on the basis of being, and that his “divided line” distinguished not so much between the knower and the known, but between opinion and knowledge.
4. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol II, p. 499 f.
5. In this respect similar to Kierkegaard, who thought that the “crowd is a lie.”
6. Particularly as this relates to seeking salvation. In this regard he is very UNlike Kierkegaard, who thought it incumbent on every self to avail itself of God. Cf. Anti-Christ aphorisms 43 and 46.
7. The shift in the definition of knowledge is itself instructive. For Plato and the schools of rationalism which followed, knowledge meant certainty, and had as its object the immutable and eternal. The rest was mere opinion or judgment, which had as its object the changing and temporal, the realm of Heracleitean flux.
8. In fact, Nietzsche has been characterized as an “epistemological nihilist” -- denying all transcendental values.
9. *Irrational Man*, William Barrett. p. 85.
10. *Irrational Man*, William Barrett. P. 102.
11. Kierkegaard in *Point of View of My Work as an Author*, Chapt. I, Part II, and Nietzsche in *Ecce Homo*.
12. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (vol. 3, p. 148)