

According To The Existential View, Anxiety Is Seen As:an Unhealthy Feelingpart Of The Human Conditiona

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Understanding human emotions has always been a central concern of philosophy and psychology. Among these emotions, anxiety stands out as a complex and pervasive experience that has intrigued thinkers for centuries. The existential perspective, in particular, offers a profound and nuanced interpretation of anxiety, viewing it not merely as a fleeting or irrational feeling but as an intrinsic aspect of the human condition. This article explores the existential understanding of anxiety, examining why it is considered an unhealthy feeling and how it reflects fundamental truths about human existence.

What Is Existential Philosophy?

Before diving into the specifics of anxiety from an existential standpoint, it is essential to grasp what existential philosophy entails.

Core Principles of Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice. It focuses on:

- The subjective experience of individuals

- The inherent absurdity or meaninglessness of life
- The responsibility of creating personal meaning
- Confronting mortality and the finite nature of human existence

Prominent existentialist thinkers include Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Martin Heidegger. Their work often revolves around confronting the unsettling aspects of human life—particularly anxiety and despair—and understanding how humans navigate these feelings.

Existential View of Anxiety

From the existential perspective, anxiety is not a trivial emotion or a mere psychological disturbance. Instead, it is a fundamental aspect of human existence—an unavoidable response to the awareness of certain existential truths.

Why Is Anxiety Considered Unhealthy in the Existential View?

While some psychological theories interpret anxiety as a disorder or imbalance, existentialists see it as a natural, even necessary, part of authentic human life. However, they also acknowledge that anxiety can become problematic when it leads to avoidance, denial, or superficiality.

Some reasons why existentialists consider anxiety as an unhealthy feeling include:

- **Loss of Authenticity:** When individuals are overwhelmed by anxiety, they may retreat into inauthentic behaviors or conform to societal expectations rather than embracing their true selves.
- **Paralysis and Inaction:** Excessive anxiety can immobilize decision-making, preventing individuals from engaging with life's challenges and opportunities.

- **Denial of Mortality:** Anxiety often arises from the confrontation with mortality. Denying or repressing this reality leads to superficial living and loss of deeper meaning.
- **Escaping Responsibility:** Anxiety might push individuals to avoid taking responsibility for their freedom and choices, leading to a sense of guilt or despair.

In this view, unhealthy anxiety is characterized by its capacity to distort genuine engagement with life and hinder personal growth.

Existential Anxiety Versus Neurotic Anxiety

It is important to distinguish between what existentialists refer to as "existential anxiety" (or "angst") and neurotic anxiety:

- **Existential Anxiety:** A normal, unavoidable response to the realization of life's fundamental dilemmas—freedom, death, isolation, and meaninglessness. It can serve as a catalyst for authentic living if confronted courageously.
- **Neurotic Anxiety:** An abnormal, often excessive fear that arises from repressed conflicts or unconscious processes, typically viewed as maladaptive and unhealthy.

The existential perspective encourages acknowledging and confronting existential anxiety rather than suppressing it.

The Role of Anxiety in Human Existence

Rather than viewing anxiety solely as a negative emotion, existentialists see it as a vital component of human life—an indicator of our awareness of core existential issues.

Confronting Freedom and Responsibility

One of the central themes in existential philosophy is human freedom. Recognizing our capacity to choose and shape our lives inevitably leads to anxiety because:

- We become aware of the weight of our choices
- We realize that our existence is not predetermined
- We face the responsibility for creating meaning in an indifferent universe

This anxiety, often called "existential dread," is an intrinsic part of authentic human existence.

Awareness of Mortality

Death is perhaps the most profound source of existential anxiety. Acknowledging mortality confronts individuals with the finiteness of life, prompting questions about purpose and legacy.

- The fear of death can motivate meaningful action
- Ignoring mortality may lead to superficial living or nihilism
- Facing death authentically can foster a more genuine engagement with life

How to Address Unhealthy Anxiety from an Existential Perspective

While existentialism emphasizes the inevitability of anxiety, it also offers pathways for transforming it into a constructive force.

Authentic Engagement with Life

Confronting anxiety involves embracing one's freedom and responsibility. This entails:

- Making conscious choices aligned with personal values
- Accepting vulnerability as part of authentic living
- Creating personal meaning despite life's uncertainties

Acceptance of Mortality

Acknowledging mortality can be liberating rather than paralyzing. Strategies include:

- Reflecting on mortality to prioritize meaningful pursuits
- Living fully in the present moment
- Cultivating a sense of gratitude for life's transient nature

Developing Courage and Resilience

Facing existential anxiety requires courage—an ability to confront discomfort without avoidance.

Building resilience involves:

- Mindfulness practices
- Philosophical reflection
- Engaging in authentic relationships

Conclusion

From an existential perspective, anxiety is more than just an unhealthy feeling; it is a profound testament to human consciousness and the awareness of life's fundamental truths. While it can become problematic when it leads to avoidance or superficiality, existential philosophy encourages us to confront and embrace anxiety as a pathway to authentic living. Recognizing the role of anxiety in confronting freedom, mortality, and responsibility allows individuals to transform it from a source of distress into a catalyst for growth, meaning, and genuine engagement with life.

By understanding anxiety through the lens of existentialism, we gain insight into the core challenges of human existence and discover ways to navigate them with courage and authenticity. Ultimately, acknowledging and accepting existential anxiety can lead to a more meaningful and fulfilled life, grounded in genuine self-awareness and responsibility.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the existential view say about anxiety?

According to the existential view, anxiety is seen as an inherent part of the human condition that arises from facing freedom, choice, and the uncertainties of existence.

Is anxiety considered unhealthy in the existential perspective?

No, existentialists do not view anxiety as merely unhealthy; instead, they see it as a natural and necessary aspect of authentic human experience.

How does existentialism differentiate between normal anxiety and pathological anxiety?

Existentialism considers normal anxiety as a natural response to life's uncertainties, whereas

pathological anxiety is viewed as a distortion or avoidance of these fundamental human experiences.

Why do existentialists believe anxiety is part of the human condition?

Because humans are confronted with mortality, freedom, and the search for meaning, which inevitably produce feelings of anxiety as part of confronting these existential realities.

Can existential anxiety lead to personal growth?

Yes, existentialists argue that facing and embracing anxiety can promote self-awareness, authenticity, and meaningful living.

How does existential anxiety differ from everyday stress?

Existential anxiety is rooted in fundamental concerns about existence itself, whereas everyday stress typically relates to specific external pressures or situations.

What role does anxiety play in existential therapy?

In existential therapy, anxiety is viewed as a vital signal that encourages individuals to confront their freedom and take responsibility for their lives.

Is anxiety viewed as a sign of weakness in the existential perspective?

No, existentialism sees anxiety not as a weakness but as an unavoidable and authentic part of human existence that can lead to deeper understanding.

How can individuals cope with existential anxiety according to this perspective?

Individuals can cope by embracing their freedom, finding personal meaning, and living authentically despite the inherent uncertainties of life.

Additional Resources

According To The Existential View, Anxiety Is Seen As: An Unhealthy Feeling Part Of The Human Condition

In the realm of existential philosophy, anxiety is not merely dismissed as an undesirable emotion or a sign of personal weakness. Instead, it is fundamentally intertwined with the human condition itself. When we explore according to the existential view, anxiety is seen as: an unhealthy feeling part of the human condition, we delve into a profound understanding of human existence—one that acknowledges anxiety not just as a fleeting emotion but as an intrinsic aspect of being alive. This perspective challenges conventional notions that seek to eliminate anxiety, instead positioning it as a vital, if uncomfortable, component of authentic living.

Understanding the Existential Perspective on Anxiety

Existentialism emerged as a philosophical movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus contributing foundational ideas. Central to existential thought is the emphasis on individual freedom, responsibility, authenticity, and the inherent uncertainties of life. Within this framework, anxiety is not an anomaly but a natural consequence of confronting the realities of existence.

Why Do Existentialists View Anxiety as Part of the Human Condition?

1. Anxiety as a Response to Freedom and Choice

At the core of existential philosophy lies the concept of radical freedom. Human beings are free to choose their paths, values, and identities. This freedom, while empowering, also brings with it a profound sense of responsibility—often leading to anxiety.

- Freedom as a Double-Edged Sword: The awareness that our choices shape our lives can trigger feelings of dread or anxiety.
- The Burden of Responsibility: Recognizing that we are responsible for creating meaning can be overwhelming.

Example: A person contemplating a career change might feel anxious because they realize they hold the power—and the responsibility—to shape their future.

2. Anxiety as an Acknowledgment of Mortality and Finitude

Existentialists emphasize the inescapable reality of death. Facing mortality is a fundamental human concern that can evoke intense anxiety.

- Death as the Ultimate Unknown: It underscores the fragility and fleeting nature of life.
- Living Authentically: Confronting mortality can motivate individuals to live more genuinely but also generate existential anxiety.

Example: Reflecting on one's mortality can lead to feelings of unease and a reassessment of life's priorities.

3. Anxiety as an Encounter with the Absurd

Camus and others have described life as inherently absurd—meaning it lacks inherent purpose or meaning. Recognizing this absurdity can induce existential anxiety.

- Absurdity and Disorientation: The clash between human desire for meaning and the universe's indifference fosters discomfort.
- Revolt Against Absurdity: Confronting this can lead to a conscious acknowledgment of life's lack of ultimate meaning.

Example: A person questioning the purpose of their existence may experience a profound sense of

anxiety rooted in this confrontation.

How Do Existential Thinkers Differentiate Anxiety from Unhealthy Feelings?

While existentialism recognizes anxiety as natural, it also differentiates between healthy, constructive anxiety and unhealthy, debilitating feelings.

1. Healthy Anxiety: The Catalyst for Authentic Living

- Motivates Reflection: Encourages individuals to confront life's fundamental concerns.
- Fosters Growth: Acts as a catalyst for self-awareness and authentic choices.
- Engages with Reality: Promotes honest acknowledgment of life's uncertainties.

Example: Anxiety that prompts someone to reevaluate their life choices and pursue genuine passions.

2. Unhealthy Anxiety: Avoidance and Despair

- Paralyzes Action: When anxiety leads to avoidance or despair, it becomes unhealthy.
- Distorts Perception: Excessive anxiety can distort reality, impairing decision-making.
- Undermines Authenticity: Prevents engagement with genuine life experiences.

Example: Chronic anxiety that results in social withdrawal, hopelessness, or inability to function.

The Existential View of Anxiety as an Unhealthy Feeling Part of the Human Condition

Despite recognizing anxiety's natural role, existentialists also acknowledge that when anxiety becomes overwhelming or persistent, it can be detrimental, transforming from a tool for growth into a source of

suffering.

1. Anxiety as a Sign of Being Overwhelmed

- Existence as Unmanageable: When the weight of freedom, mortality, and absurdity becomes too heavy, anxiety can turn into despair or neurosis.
- Loss of Meaning: Excessive anxiety may lead to feelings of nihilism or meaninglessness.

2. Anxiety as a Source of Alienation

- Disconnection from Authentic Self: Unhealthy anxiety can cause individuals to feel estranged from their true selves.
- Isolation: It can foster feelings of alienation from others and the world.

3. Anxiety and Psychological Pathology

- Potential for Pathology: Prolonged or intense anxiety, if unmanaged, can develop into mental health issues such as depression or anxiety disorders.
- Distinction: The existential view sees these as distortions of an otherwise natural emotion, often compounded by societal or personal factors.

Navigating Anxiety According to Existential Thought

While recognizing anxiety as part of the human condition, existentialists also emphasize approach strategies to cope with or transcend unhealthy anxiety:

1. Confrontation and Acceptance

- Face the Anxiety: Instead of avoiding, acknowledge and confront feelings.

- Acceptance of Uncertainty: Embracing life's inherent unpredictability.

2. Authentic Living

- Make Genuine Choices: Engage in actions aligned with true self.
- Create Personal Meaning: Find purpose through personal projects, relationships, and values.

3. Developing Resilience

- Embrace Mortality: Use awareness of death to motivate purposeful living.
- Find Courage: Cultivate bravery to face life's ambiguities.

Summary: The Dual Nature of Anxiety in the Human Condition

In conclusion, according to the existential view, anxiety is seen as: an unhealthy feeling part of the human condition—but only when it becomes unmanageable or leads to despair. Recognizing its roots in our freedom, mortality, and the absurdity of life allows us to understand anxiety not solely as a foe but as an intrinsic aspect of human existence that can catalyze growth, authenticity, and deeper self-awareness.

Key Points Recap:

- Anxiety arises naturally from human freedom, responsibility, and awareness of mortality.
- It can serve as a vital catalyst for authentic living and personal growth.
- When it becomes overwhelming, persistent, or unaddressed, anxiety transitions into an unhealthy feeling, potentially leading to mental health issues.
- The existential approach advocates for confronting and accepting anxiety as part of our condition, rather than suppressing it, to live more genuine and meaningful lives.

By embracing the existential perspective, we learn to view anxiety not just as a painful emotion to be eliminated, but as a profound signal—an invitation to engage more deeply with the reality of being human.

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