

NOTES BY THE EDITOR

Although it has been scorned as a sensational fad, existentialism has received both serious criticism and popular explanation, and it cannot be overlooked in any consideration given to contemporary philosophy. The basic axiom of existentialism may be put thus: "Existence is prior to essence." The system holds that the world antedates man's ideas, and that real existence is more than his ideas about it. The essence of a thing is *what* we say it is, but existence is *that* which is prior to and beyond the *what*. All definitions are limited to essences, and existence itself is beyond analysis.

The difficulty of grasping existentialism is increased by the fact that it parts into three main streams. Inspired by Karl Barth and Paul Tillich, the new Protestant orthodoxy has used existential ideas to develop the theology of "crisis" to which Kierkegaard owes so much of his posthumous fame. Roman Catholic thinkers, Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain, uphold existentialism of another type. God is a *That* which becomes a *What* only through revelation, and the Roman Church can impart saving information about the existential *That-What*. In Jean-Paul Sartre, on the other hand, existentialism turns into atheism. Man is confronted with a universe beyond his reason. What it is, what God is, is only man's thoughts. One can never assert a God except to choose to create one; and man creates his own world, out of his own choices—in anguish, since he must realize that he is alone with his choices.

Students of Swedenborg's philosophy will have little difficulty in rejecting the gloominess of Protestant and French existentialism or the atheism of Sartre—regretful as it seems to be. But all existentialists seem to agree that the production of being occurs immediately in the theater of human existence, and that the free choices of men are responsible for it. In this, and in some of its tacit recognitions, there is a plausible appearance that existentialism echoes certain teachings of Swedenborg; though it can be sustained only by separation from the frame of reference. For this reason, because false theories may contain a certain amount of truth which should not be confused with them, and because existentialism is not an insignificant movement, a critique by a competent writer might be of interest to our readers.