



**T.C.**  
**EGE ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü**

**EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY IN JOSHUA FERRIS'S NOVELS**

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

**Büşra COŞKUN**

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**EGE ÜNİVERSİTESİ**

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**JOSHUA FERRIS'İN ROMANLARINDA VAROLUŞ FELSEFESİ**

**Yüksek Lisans Tezi**

**Büşra COŞKUN**

**Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Özlem GÜMÜŞÇUBUK**

**Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı**

**Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Yüksek Lisans Programı**

## ETİK KURALLARA UYGUNLUK BEYANI

Ege Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürlüğüne sunduğum *Existential Philosophy in Joshua Ferris's Novels* adlı yüksek lisans tezinin tarafımdan bilimsel, ahlak ve normlara uygun bir şekilde hazırlandığını, tezimde yararlandığım kaynakları bibliyografyada ve dipnotlarda gösterdiğimi onurumla doğrularım.

Büşra COŞKUN

## ÖZET

Bu tez varoluş felsefesinin çağdaş Amerikalı yazar Joshua Ferris'in *Then We Came to the End* ve *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour* adlı romanlarına yansımaları konu almaktadır. İngilizce ve Felsefe bölümünde lisans eğitimi almış olan Joshua Ferris eserlerinde felsefi kavramları başarı ile işleyen bir yazardır. Romanlarında felsefi temaları, özellikle de varoluş felsefesini yansıtanın yanı sıra modern Amerikan toplumunu da başarılı bir şekilde tasvir eder. İlk romanı, *Then We Came to the End*, günümüz Amerikan toplumunda yaşayan ve çalışan, varoluşlarına yabancılaşmış birbirlerine çok benzeyen bir grup insan hakkındadır. Son romanı, *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*, ise herkesin aynı düşündüğü, aynı şekilde davrandığı toplumda yer edinemeyen varoluşsal bir bireyin hayatı anlamlandırma çabasını konu alır. Bu tez üç ana bölüme ayrılmıştır. İlk bölümde, öncelikle, sırasıyla Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger ve Jean-Paul Sartre gibi önemli varoluş filozoflarının fikirlerine ışık tutulur ve bahsettikleri temel kavramların tanımlarından bahsedilir. Aynı bölümde daha sonra temel varoluşçuluk kavramları olan "Varoluş Özü Önceler," Özgürlük, Kaygı, Otantisite ve Ölüm açıklanır. Bu kavramların teorik bilgi olarak açıklanması daha sonraki bölümlerde Joshua Ferris'in romanlarının incelendiği bölümde tematik temel konularla da ilişkilidir ve romanların analizi açısından önemlidir. İkinci bölümde, romanların incelenmesine geçmeden önce, yazarın biyografik bazı özelliklerinin romanlara yansımaları bakımından Joshua Ferris'in hayatı ve edebi kimliğine odaklanılır. Üçüncü ve son bölümde ise Ferris'in romanlarının varoluş felsefesi yardımıyla okuması sunulmuştur. Bu tez toplumda yer edinemeyen modern Amerikalı bireylerin varoluşsal sorunlarını ve onların hayatı anlamlandırma çabalarını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Amerikan Edebiyatı, Varoluş Felsefesi, Özgürlük, Otantisite, Kaygı, Ölüm

## ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with existential philosophy and its reflection on contemporary American author Joshua Ferris's *Then We Came to the End* and *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*. Having obtained a degree in English and Philosophy, Ferris is very successful at employing philosophical concepts in his works. In addition to reflecting upon philosophical themes, particularly existential philosophy, he also successfully depicts modern American society in his novels. His debut novel, *Then We Came to the End*, is about a group of people who live and work in present-day American society and are alienated from their existence. His last novel, *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour* is about an existential individual who cannot exist in a society where everyone thinks and acts the same way and his efforts to make sense of life. This thesis consists of three main parts. The first chapter sheds light on the ideas of important existential philosophers, Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre, respectively, and discusses the definitions of the basic concepts they mentioned in their works. Later in the same chapter, five basic concepts of existentialism, which are "Existence Precedes Essence," Freedom, Anxiety, Authenticity, and Death, are explained. Explanation of these concepts as theoretical knowledge is also related to thematic basic issues in the section where Joshua Ferris's novels are examined in the following chapters and is important for the analysis of the novels. In the second chapter, before examining the novels, Ferris's life and literary identity will be explained in terms of the reflection of some biographical features of the author in the novels that are analyzed in this thesis. In the third and last chapter, the reading of Ferris's novels with the help of existential philosophy is presented. This thesis aims to analyze the existential problems of modern American individuals who cannot exist in society and their efforts to make sense of life.

**Keywords:** American Literature, Existential Philosophy, Freedom, Authenticity, Anxiety, Death

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## INTRODUCTION

Albert Camus, one of the most prominent and influential existential writers of all time, once stated, “a novel is never anything, but a philosophy expressed in images. And in a good novel, the philosophy has disappeared into the images” (199). Therefore, when analyzing literature, it would be beneficial to refer to philosophy. Considering works of existential philosophers such as Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir, it is seen that philosophy is an integral part of their literary works. Literary texts can explain more than what theoretical texts try to explain through plot, characters, and language; in other words, they can put flesh on philosophy. Contemporary American author Joshua Ferris is one of the best examples who can successfully reflect philosophy in his works. For this reason, by analyzing the novels of Joshua Ferris, this thesis aims to draw a picture of existential issues of 21st century American society and portray the crucial importance of existential thought in such a thematic representation.

For this reason, the purpose of this thesis is to evaluate how existential philosophy has been a major component of Joshua Ferris’s two novels, namely, *Then We Came to the End* and *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*. The reason why this piece of study attempts to analyze Ferris’s novels is that he is a contemporary American author who significantly portrays characters or incidents that take place in contemporary American society, yet the major theme that he chooses to reflect upon are issues related to the area of existential philosophy. With the influence of having a degree in philosophy and literature, his novels combine his two favorite areas of interest. For this reason, the novels of Joshua Ferris which picture existential issues of the twenty-first century American society are going to be analyzed from the lens of existential philosophy.

The next aspect that should be pointed out as one of the concerns of this thesis is that, although Ferris has a degree in philosophy and although it seems very obvious that the themes that the author chooses to depict are related to existentialism, Ferris himself has never depicted himself as an existential author. Even though he has not explicitly acknowledged himself as an existentialist writer, he deals with existential problems

skillfully in his novels. Apart from depicting existential themes in his novels, he also concentrates on presenting to the reader lonely individuals that are in one way or another trying to cope with problems that are often related to an existential crisis or feelings of alienation. The main characters of his novels tend to lack a feeling of fulfillment or happiness because existential questions or issues of alienation dominate their individual lives so much. Thus, Ferris is specifically gifted at illustrating the American individual who is always in search of “something” despite having “everything” and their effort to make meaning out of life.

Another factor that has contributed to his themes of existentialism and alienation in contemporary American society is connected to his experience in the advertising industry. Certainly having worked in such a demanding area and with Chicago being a symbol of capitalism, the years he has spent in this area have also contributed to his observations of capitalism, and have given Ferris a chance to observe how people have to conform to the rules of capitalism. This “obedience” to capitalism or working under the regulation of capitalism has also become of his representations of existential thought. In this globalized world, aside from criticizing modern American society in his novels, Ferris also depicts individuals who are both alienated and commodified because of the capitalist system that is presented as the “setting” of his novels. Therefore, under a hierarchical categorization, the greatest picture that Ferris attempts to draw is the demonstration of American cultural hegemony in which the standards of a consumer society portray individuals who lose their sense of selfhood and question their existential position in such a world. The characters that Ferris creates are individuals who lose their sense of selfhood in the consumer society which is the demonstration of American cultural hegemony.

The purpose of the first chapter in this thesis is to provide a theoretical framework in terms of how philosophers have defined existentialism. Since it is rather a difficult task to “define” what existentialism is, this chapter aims to present different opinions of major philosophers regarding the differences and similarities concerning their definitions of existentialism. Nevertheless, defining existentialism is difficult by its nature, because existentialism resists any kind of precise definition. The difficulty in defining

existentialism stems from the fact that by definition the word itself requires to be subjective, and it is impossible to make generalizations and it is also impossible to capture one definition that can uniquely be considered true. For this reason, existentialism requires individuals to find their own understanding or description of existentialism. That is why this chapter intends to provide various definitions by the major thinkers of existential thought to convey how this theoretical background contributes to the evaluation of existential themes in Ferris's novels.

Within the framework of the theoretical background, this work intends to provide the thoughts of famous existentialist thinkers such as Soren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Martin Heidegger in the first chapter of this study. By referring to these three major thinkers of existential thought, this work intends to clarify and evaluate their understanding of existentialism and the major concepts related to it. These three philosophers are important in terms of how they have contributed to existential philosophy. To begin with, Kierkegaard is considered as the "father" of existentialism who has formulated the seeds of existential thought. Next, Heidegger will be discussed, as he is the thinker who provided the philosophical foundations of existentialism. Lastly, Sartre's thoughts on existentialism will also be discussed, as he is the philosopher who has made the concept of existentialism widespread.

The other intention of this chapter, after presenting the thoughts of major philosophers on existentialism, is to refer to some thematic concepts that can be also related to the major themes that will be discussed in the novels of Josh Ferris. For instance, Sartre's famous statement 'existence precedes essence,' and concepts such as freedom, anxiety, authenticity, and death, will be discussed concerning existential thought. Even though philosophers have commented on such concepts in various ways, these five concepts are the most common ones that every existential philosopher has referred to when explaining their perceptions of existential philosophy. It will be wise to start with explaining Sartre's famous statement "Existence precedes essence" because this statement can be seen as the doctrine of existential philosophy. Additionally, Sartre is the philosopher who introduced existential philosophy to the world and his statement (Existence precedes essence) has turned out to be a statement that is widely known in

terms of existential thought. This idea glorifies the importance of the subjectivism, consciousness, action, and human experience of its existence. Therefore, to clarify these five concepts briefly, one must first acknowledge that human beings do not have an essence that makes them what they are; on the contrary, they can make themselves whatever they want to become. In other words, they are condemned to be free, and this freedom lays a burden on people causing them to feel anxiety. Sartre argues being free to choose from many options is the reason for anxiety, whereas Heidegger argues that death is the main reason for what causes anxiety. People feel anxiety since they know they will die eventually and therefore life becomes meaningless. One way to avoid anxiety is to escape from existence and conform to an already existing set of ideas or thoughts. However, this causes people to live an inauthentic life. To be able to live an authentic life, one should take responsibility for their existence and be toward Death, in Heidegger's terms. To put it another way, living authentically is living by being aware of the mortal world.

After the presentation of theoretical background, in the third chapter by referring to Ferris's two novels the major controversies and themes related to existentialism will be analyzed. Ferris's novels contain traces from his own life; that is why, apart from understanding philosophical concepts, it is also important to have some information about the author's biography. For this reason, in this study, after the exploration of existential philosophers and their views on such concepts are clarified, in the second chapter Ferris's life and literary identity will be explained.

The third chapter presents the analysis of Ferris's novels *Then We Came to End* and *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour* in terms of existential philosophy. Ferris's debut novel, *Then We Came to the End* is about a group of employees who are on the verge of being laid off and depicts the American contemporary office environment, focusing on issues such as freedom, inauthenticity, anxiety, and death. In the novel, the first-person plural narrative is employed and this narrative especially helps highlight the inauthenticity of people since the narrative does not concentrate on individuals. In *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*, the effort of the main character for making sense of life is presented, and it focuses on issues such as freedom, authenticity, anxiety, and death. In

this novel, a first-person singular narrative is used since it depicts the existential problems of an individual. The main character of the novel is a person who isolates himself from other people and who conforms to the status quo. The reader witnesses the anxiety of an authentic person through various instances of contemporary American society.

All in all, this thesis intends to analyze the novels of Joshua Ferris from an existential point of view. To achieve this aim, after providing the groundwork for the basic principles of existential thought by referring to three major philosophers and providing information on major concepts such as authenticity, freedom, anxiety, and death, how existential concerns are presented in the novels of Joshua Ferris is explored. Lastly, this study aims to provide information on how existential thought is represented in American literary works.

## FIRST CHAPTER

### EXISTENTIALISM

Existentialism is a way to understand the meaning of human existence. However, it is difficult to say what existentialism is since “there are as many existentialisms as there are existentialists” (Foulquie, 41). One can only define their understanding of existentialism. On this account, different existentialist philosophers have different notions of existentialism. Most philosophers such as Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty who are considered as existentialists do not share the same fundamentals for their understanding of existentialism. Even though Soren Kierkegaard is the philosopher who created the groundwork for existentialism and is considered as the father of this movement, the above-mentioned philosophers’ thoughts do not resemble Kierkegaard’s beliefs in every aspect. The matter of whether Kierkegaard is the father or not is even debated. David E. Cooper accounts for this view by quoting Paul Ricoeur:

The reality of existentialism as a philosophical movement, by contrast, has sometimes been doubted. It has been denied, that is, that there ever was a distinctive philosophical perspective or tendency shared by those thinkers who have been labeled “existentialists.” Thus Paul Ricoeur, in the course of repudiating Søren Kierkegaard’s reputation as “the father of existentialism,” asserts that “the supposed family of ‘existentialist’ philosophies never really existed,” so that there was nothing for Kierkegaard to have fathered. (Cooper, 27)

Furthermore, philosophers such as Martin Heidegger denies being called an existentialist. “Though in 1946 Heidegger would repudiate the retrospective labeling of his earlier work as existentialism, it is in that work that the relevant concept of existence finds its first *systematic* philosophical formulation” (Crowell, n. pag.). Even though there is no precise definition of existentialism and most existentialist philosophers did not want

to label themselves and their philosophies as existentialist, there are still some common properties of existentialist philosophy that bring existentialists together under the same title. According to Gündoğdu;

there are at least five common properties shared by these philosophers and that they can be used in deciding whether any philosophy be counted as an existentialist: (1) centrality of man; (2) considering man as a particular, concrete entity, namely an individual; (3) priority of existence over essence; (4) subjectivity of truth; (5) philosophizing from the standpoint of an actor. Yet, all these principles or properties, should not be considered equally applicable to every [philosopher] mentioned. (95)

These five principles or properties may help anyone who tries to portray a map of existentialism. However, in the end, since existentialism requires an individual standpoint, one must pursue the meaning of existence by their way of understanding and reasoning. After all, existentialism means seeking the meaning of existence or being. Nobody can think on behalf of another person. Furthermore, since all existentialists are humans and one of the main principles of existentialism is to explain existence taking the existence of humans into account, so far they have come up with similar concepts, terms, or ideas in the history of philosophy. Thus, there are some common concepts and ideas through which existentialist philosophers maintained their philosophy and on which they established and built their understanding of existentialism. The most common and well-known concepts can be listed as follows: individuality, “existence precedes essence,” freedom, choice, responsibility, Angst (dread, anguish, or anxiety), absurdity, alienation, authenticity/inauthenticity, death, and so on.

Existentialist philosophers have used these concepts from different perspectives. For example, some existentialists were in favor of religion (Kierkegaard, Marcel, etc.), while others used it against religions (Sartre, Nietzsche, etc.). Also, existentialist philosophers were influenced by different philosophical methods or theories. For example, whereas Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and especially Heidegger were influenced by Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology, Jaspers and Kierkegaard were mostly influenced by

the philosophy of Hegel. After all, they all share some characteristics. According to Kaufmann, the heart of existentialism is “the refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life” (12).

In this thesis, previously noted key concepts related to existentialism will assist readers to understand Joshua Ferris’s novels from the existentialist perspective. The main purpose of this is to present a map of existential concepts and fundamental terms or ideas of existentialism that will be used to disclose the meaning in Joshua Ferris’s novels. For this reason, we should begin with the origin or root of existentialism.

### **1.1. The Origin of Existentialism**

The answer to the question about where, when, how, and by whom existentialism originated is still uncertain. One of the reasons is that, as stated previously, there is no certain definition of existentialism. Another reason is related to the former one, since existentialism is, so to say, a way of life and something individual, the starting point of existentialism varies from one existentialist to another existentialist. However, it can be said that existentialism is a 20th-century philosophical movement with its roots in the 19th-century. It flourished first in Germany and then spread in France in the 20th-century, and Kierkegaard is the 19th-century precursor of this movement. Yet, there is no consensus on the first use of the term existentialism. Despite being called the fathers of existentialism, “neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche used the term ‘existentialism’” (Finkelstein, 13). Even Sartre who is the philosopher most identified with existentialism avoided defining it:

Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialism’s most famous exponent, rejected the invitation to define existentialism “It is in the nature of an intellectual quest to be undefined,” he wrote. “To name it and to define it is to wrap it up and tie the knot. What is left? A finished, already outdated mode of culture, something like a brand of soap, in other words an idea.” (Bernasconi and Judaken, 2)

Since “existentialism, in principle, rejects a neat dictionary definition or formulation” (Bernasconi and Judaken, 1), it can be inferred that being an existentialist means rejecting to be labeled as existentialist. Furthermore, the term “does not appear in any of the canonical texts of the tradition: neither in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* nor in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*” (Reynolds, 3). The reason for that is the term was not coined until Marcel used it to refer to the work of Sartre and his circle that is Simone de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

... the term “existentialism” did not come into currency until the mid-1940s. Though borrowing from Kierkegaard, the existential philosopher and psychiatrist Karl Jaspers was using the term “existence philosophy” after the First World War, but it was not until a couple of decades later that existentialism was officially baptized Simone de Beauvoir recounts the day in 1945 that she believes existentialism was born:

During a discussion organized during the summer . . . Sartre had refused to allow Gabriel Marcel to apply this adjective [existentialist] to him: “My philosophy is a philosophy of existence; I don’t even know what existentialism is.” I shared his irritation. . . . But our protests were in vain. In the end, we took the epithet that everyone used for us and used it for our own purposes. (Marino, n. pag.)

As a result, it can be said that Kierkegaard is the philosopher who shed light on existentialism as a philosophy. Even though “writers who appear invariably on every list of “existentialists” (...) are not in agreement on essentials” (Kaufmann, 11), it is still possible to label these philosophers as existentialists and their philosophy as existentialism considering their common concepts.

## 1.2. Major Existential Philosophers

### 1.2.1. Soren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard's way of philosophizing was fictional. His "most important works are pseudonymous, written under fictional names" (Burnham and Papandreopoulos, n. pag.). Additionally, his works have traces from his own life such as his relationship with his strict father or him breaking his engagement to Regina Olsen. What Kierkegaard was seeking was a subjective truth which is, as he says, "a truth which is true for me" (*Papers and Journals*, n. pag.). Therefore Kierkegaard was against Hegelian rationalist metaphysics and his understanding of God. According to Hegel, "religious belief may be rationally articulated within a philosophical framework" (Michelman, 149) and Kierkegaard's opposition to Hegel stems from Abraham's ethical experience. For Kierkegaard, Abraham's "experience, upon careful consideration, remains impenetrable to reason" (Michelman, 149), because "religious faith not only does not require the support of reason but is essentially at odds with it" (West, 118). As it will be seen in Abraham's case, God's commands do not always make sense. God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, but this is against common sense and human ethics. However, according to Kierkegaard;

then, we must believe even though, or perhaps even because, faith violates human rationality, nature and morality. A faith which was humanly reasonable, a faith conforming to human moral intuition, would have no distinctive significance. It is the absurdity of religion which proves its unique value, its irreducibility. (West, 125)

According to Kierkegaard, not only faith but existence can be known subjectively. Then, as Rohde says, the problem of existence should be understood "not dispassionately and objectively, but with the whole of our personality" (qtd. in West, 119). Yet, to reach it, human beings must find another way, an immediate method or 'indirect communication' to disclose the truth, rather than an inclusive or a reductive theoretical

method. Kierkegaard finds this tool in “the early German Romantics’ view that literature should ultimately serve ethics and religion” (McDonald, “Kierkegaard and Romanticism,” 86), and Socrates’ method of irony. However, he favors Socratic irony over German Romanticism. “In his doctoral thesis, he claims that ‘the concept of irony makes its entry into the world through Socrates’” (West, 126). This is an ideal method or way of “philosophical exploration of human existence” (West, 126) and “shaking the reader out of complacency” (Michelman, 188). Also, “Socratic irony forces his interlocutors to reflect on themselves, to distance themselves critically from their immediate beliefs and values” (McDonald, “Søren Kierkegaard (1813—1855),” n. pag.).

Kierkegaard’s dramatic and subjective method leads him to stand against certainty. For him, uncertainty is the essence of subjective truth. It “is a consequence of what is most essential to human life, namely our freedom to choose or decide” (West, 121). Freedom to choose and decide is the most human thing. However, freedom means being responsible. Human beings must choose or decide and live with the consequences of their decisions. Moreover, they can decide not to decide or choose, but even that will be a human action and will bring other consequences. Even being in a situation to choose has some consequences and it is the responsibility of humans’ freedom. This responsibility causes individuals to feel anxious or dreadful. That is the ambiguity of human beings: “Human beings are uniquely free in their ability to choose, uniquely burdened by the necessity to choose” (West, 121). Human beings “cannot flee from dread, for he loves it; really he does not love it, for he flees from” (Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, 40). Every individual at some point is exposed to this dread (Angest or Angst) inside and it is a way to reach spiritual realization. As Rohde explains, “dread is the point of intersection between two worlds inside man, that of spirit and that of nature, that of God and that of animal” (qtd. in West, 122).

Being aware of spirituality means being aware of, as Kierkegaard calls it, ‘despair’. It only occurs when people deny being a self or individual and when a person accepts the social norms and when “they are satisfied with the mediocre or the average. Rather than face up to the inevitability of death, they seek distraction in transient pleasures” (West, 122). According to Kierkegaard, “in his ignorance of his own despair

a person is furthest from being conscious of himself as spirit” (S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 71.) So, Kierkegaard’s mission is to make people aware of their despair and their existence as a free spirit. To be aware of despair and then exceed it to reach spiritual selfhood is to believe and accept God. “Only the self which comes to a self-conscious decision to accept God overcomes despair” (West, 123).

He divides existence/being and self-hood into three different stages: aesthetic, ethical, and religious. The aesthetic stage is the lowest stage and “is a life of hedonistic pleasure; such a life is a flight from selfhood rather than an autonomous choice of existence, for it is motivated by the desire to dim the awareness that one is a free, spiritual being” (Michelman, 202). This stage is, so to say, a stage of despair. The second stage, though, is where people make a conscious choice following social norms or ethical/moral ideas (such as marriage, occupation, being a good citizen, etc.). The ethical stage is a transition stage to a higher stage of existence and “it harbors dangers of mere conformity to social convention and the 'despairing' abdication of freedom that this implies” (West, 124). This stage is the religious stage and it is the only way to get “the fully self-conscious individuality of authentic existence” (West, 125). Again, as stated earlier, even though God’s orders, which correspond with religious and ethical stages, contradict each other, one should still follow God’s command. “If his solution to the problem of existence has not always been persuasive, his diagnosis of the problem is powerful” (West, 126) so that he influenced existentialists after him in many aspects.

### **1.2.2. Martin Heidegger**

Heidegger, in his *Being and Time*, specifically mentioned that his philosophy is not the philosophy of existence (Existenzphilosophie) regarding the existentialism of Karl Jaspers and “in a letter to Jean Wahl, Heidegger protested that his philosophy was not Existenzphilosophie, that his investigation of human existence or the being of human existence was but a preparatory stage to an examination of being in general...” (Copleston, 20). Additionally, he repudiated “any possible connection of his philosophy with the existentialism of Sartre” (Burnham and Papandreopoulos, n. pag.), but for all that it can still be asserted that his philosophy can be classified as existentialist. If not as

a whole, most parts of his philosophy can be considered existential philosophy for several reasons.

To begin with, Heidegger's main concern is the meaning of Being, of human being, its existence or being there, which he named as *Dasein*. "His magnum opus *Being and Time* is an investigation into the meaning of Being as that manifests itself through the human being, *Dasein*" (Burnham and Papandreopoulos, n. pag.). The meaning of being is possible due to human existence (*Dasein*) and "Dasein is to be the key to the meaning of Being in general" (West, 101). Because only *Dasein* can exist and understand the question and meaning of Being.

Secondly, Heidegger tried to stand against traditional Western metaphysics and challenged it to build his philosophy. Heidegger even goes further and reconsiders Western ontology to establish an ontological background for existentialism (especially of Kierkegaard). He considers *Dasein* in 'Being-in-the-world' (*In-der-welt-sein*) and 'Being-with-each-others' (*Miteinandersein*). Thus, Heidegger includes human consciousness and experience of *Dasein*'s existence as well just as later existentialists (such as Sartre, Ponty, and so on) would do.

Additionally, Heidegger deals with *Dasein*'s existence by using similar concepts with existentialism. As Reynolds explains;

(...) it is his interpretation of *Dasein* in terms of temporality, what he calls his "existential analytic", that most clearly relates to existentialism. Six main themes from Heidegger's "existential analytic" are particularly important to existentialism.

These are:

1. the initial priority that Heidegger accords to "average, everydayness" and what he calls the "ready-to-hand";
2. his analysis of authenticity and inauthenticity;
3. his descriptions of fallenness, they-self and *das Man*;

4. his discussion of the significance of moods such as fear, anxiety and boredom;
5. his insistence on care as being fundamental to Dasein;
6. his famous ruminations on death and its ontological significance in Division 2 of Being and Time. (23)

Moreover, as he states, “The question of being as a whole is onto-theo-ego-logical” (*Hegels Phenomenology of Spirit*, 126). That is, the question of being (Sein) is related to being or existence, God, self/hood, and language. For that reason, Heidegger inquires meaning of Being (onto); Dasein’s prejudices and faith (God); Dasein’s strive to become authentic and its relation with the world into which it was thrown, and its way of authentic existence (ego); and lastly, Dasein’s strive to disclose (*Alethia*) meaning or truth of Being, to be 'the shepherd of Being' and its language or understanding to enlighten the Being (logos). Therefore, Heidegger’s philosophy can be called phenomenological hermeneutic existentialism.

What makes Heidegger essential for this thesis is his innovative and detailed analysis of human existence. However, drawing Heidegger’s thought in simple words is not easy for two reasons. First, most of his terms are untranslatable, and second, it requires close reading. Therefore, the summary in this thesis will just attempt to grasp the very essence of Heidegger’s thought in terms of existential analysis. Especially his ideas, concepts, or terms that are crucial for existentialism and Joshua Ferris’s novels.

“Heidegger places increasing emphasis on the importance of diverting our 'thinking' from its individualistic concerns, from the concerns of the subject of consciousness, towards a greater 'attentiveness' to Being” (West, 110). Dasein is thrown (*geworfen*) into the world and therefore it is in the world. Dasein’s existence is different from the existence of other things. Unlike other beings which are things, Dasein can think about and concern with its existence. Dasein is always concerning about the existence of other beings. “Unlike other entities, Dasein has no determinate essence. Put another way, Dasein is distinguished by its freedom to make itself” (West, 101).

Dasein's relationship with others is experienced as states-of-mind (Befindlichkeit). This also includes Dasein's existential moods and attunements such as anxiety, boredom, fear, and releasement (Manav, 92). These states-of-mind disclose themselves within Dasein's "thrownness" in the world, being-in-the-world, and *worldhood* (Weltlichkeit). "Just as the fundamental relationship of Dasein to the world is care [Sorge], the primordial relationship to others (as Dasein) is one of 'solicitude' (Fürsorge)" (West, 102). However, being in a relationship with others may cause Dasein to lose its authenticity. Since Dasein is thrown into the world, it is possible for Dasein to be authentic or not to be authentic. That is another characteristic of Dasein, as "human beings are free to make or remake themselves" (West, 103). However, that makes Dasein ignore its freedom and possibilities because this freedom is just a possibility of Dasein's existence. Nevertheless, as West puts it clearly;

Awareness of freedom is inseparable from anxiety. It is much easier simply to go with the flow, to conform to the everyday. Authentic Dasein is possible only with intense awareness of the ever-present possibility of death. In an important sense, 'Care is Being-towards-death.' Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger sees awareness of the prospect of our own death as an important condition of a genuinely authentic existence. Death forces us to confront our evasion of the most important questions, our absorption in the trivia of everyday life. The awareness of death can awaken us from the conformist forgetfulness of the everyday, from our fallen state of 'fleeing in the face of death': 'Death is a possibility-of-Being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case. With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being (...). If Dasein stands before itself as this possibility, it has been assigned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being.' (103)

Being-towards-Death (sein zum Tode)'s other potential is Dasein's wholeness so that it will not be Dasein (being-there) anymore, but no-longer-Dasein (no-longer-being-

there). Therefore, it can be said that Dasein's existence is formed by time. Dasein is incomplete and "death completes Dasein's existence" (Wheeler, n. pag.). Dasein is in time and therefore its existence is temporal. "Temporality reveals itself to be the sense of authentic care': existentialism, facticity, and falling correspond respectively to the future, past and present" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 300). Besides, for Heidegger, the "primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future" (*Being and Time*, 303). To sum up, Dasein's existence is temporalizing and has three characteristics; its existentialism, facticity, and being-fallen, and it is always Being-ahead-of-itself, on its way to its potentiality-for-Being.

### **1.2.3. Jean-Paul Sartre**

Jean-Paul Sartre was, just like Heidegger, influenced by Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Sartre's two main sources are Heidegger and Husserl. He improved his theory of existentialism in his two works, the first being his masterwork *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and the second being his lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946). Sartre applied states of human and mind to explore an individual's freedom and responsibility. His main purpose was to assert a solution to the problem of human beings' existence. For that reason, Sartre denied all forms of determinism and put forward his existentialist proposition in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, which is accepted as the fundamental principle of existentialism: "Existence precedes essence." "By this, he means that there is no pre-existing blueprint for humanity; no human nature to which we must conform" (Warburton, 389). Human beings determine their essence and their essence is not given. Thus, Sartre does not accept human nature:

We mean that man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward conceives himself. If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature since there is no God to conceive of it. (*Existentialism is a Humanism*, 22)

Humans, as Sartre would say, being-for-itself (*l'être-pour-soi*) have consciousness and are surrounded by other things that do not have consciousness, which is being-in-itself (*l'être-en-soi*). Human beings have self-consciousness and that “consciousness is positional in that it transcends itself to reach an object” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, li). Since consciousness can transcend, “he [Sartre] characterizes human consciousness as a gap at the heart of our being, a nothing” (Warburton, 374). Nothing is possible due to human beings/being-for-itself. Thus, only human beings can experience nothing, because consciousness is always conscious of something (this is the main proposition of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology). Nothing discloses itself only to consciousness. However, consciousness is empty. Human beings fill it with their actions, and get rid of determinism and accepted social norms so that they can reach nothingness. That makes human beings free.

Human beings’ freedom is their existence. The human being is “condemned to be free.” Hence, freedom is not something human beings will enjoy. On the contrary, it makes them feel anxious. “Because the practice of freedom is exceedingly difficult, we are always tempted to claim that our actions were caused rather than freely chosen, and so disclaim responsibility” (West, 145). That, as Sartre says, is bad faith which “is a particular kind of self-deception that involves denying your own freedom” (Warburton, 385).

So, it can be said that there is no objective truth that someone can lean on. Therefore, Sartre opposes psychoanalysis and any other theories that support determinism and causality. Sartre suspends the past and asserts that consciousness leaves itself groundless by bracketing past with phenomenological epoche. By disposing itself from the past consciousness, it will move forward to be free. That means human beings are abandoned. This abandonment is the abandonment of God, but for Sartre God does not exist. Sartre is reminded of Dostoyevsky’s words in *Karamazov Brothers* “If God does not exist everything is permissible.” According to Sartre, “We are left alone and without excuse” and man “is responsible for everything he does” (*Existentialism is a Humanism*, 29). That, as Sartre calls, is a human being’s anguish. He calls it anguish because it is “the

experience of free choice with the weight of responsibility of choosing for humanity” (Warburton, 399).

That means that since there is no objective value, human beings are the source of value. Human beings are an artist that creates values by their choices. Thus, for Sartre, “what art and morality have in common is creation and invention” (Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 46). Human beings are the consequence of their actions and as Sartre says, “man is nothing other than what he makes of himself” (*Existentialism is a Humanism*, 22).

On the other hand, there are things that human beings are not capable of choosing, and Sartre calls it facticity. Your family, country, and the year you were born could be examples of facticity. According to Sartre, not everything is in human beings’ control. Being free to choose does not mean that human beings will get whatever they desire. Sartre calls this despair which “basically means we must limit ourselves to reckoning ourselves with those things that depend on our will, or on the set of probabilities that enable action. Whenever we desire something, there are always elements of probabilities” (*Existentialism is a Humanism*, 34). One of these probabilities is human beings’ relationship with other people or other being-for-itself. Human beings encounter other conscious beings and therefore what they feel is shame. “I am jolted into an awareness of myself as an object viewed by another consciousness: my own freedom escapes me as I become objectified by the look of this other person” (Warburton, 381). This “shame is the shame of oneself before the Other. For Sartre “I need the Other in order to realize fully all the structures of my being” (*Being and Nothingness*, 222). Another thing that human beings cannot change is death. Death is a possibility of human beings’ possibility and for Sartre, it is “one of the existential truths of the human condition” (Cox, 138). It is an aspect of authenticity. Also, it is related to shame and the Other in a sense that “while living we choose the meaning of our actions, at death our actions are interpreted and given meaning by other people: we cease to have any responsibility for them, and other people can make of them what they will” (Warburton, 382).

### 1.3. Essential Concepts of Existentialism

#### 1.3.1. Existence Precedes Essence

For Jean-Paul Sartre, “existence precedes essence” is the main principle of existentialism. This proposition has two different sides of being: existence and essence. Seeing one of these sides before the other is problematic, because

[t]he concept of essence in traditional philosophy derives in large measure from the Platonic notion of unchanging, intelligible “forms” or “ideas” that underlie and bring unity and permanence to perceptual objects. The essence of a thing defines what the thing is, the properties it must exhibit in order to be a thing of that type. (Michelmann, 127)

This proposition, then, was asserted by Sartre to establish an ontological background for existentialism. Although most existentialists have similar ideas with this proposition, none of them formulated their thoughts as Sartre did. Heidegger, for instance, disagrees with this opinion because it, just like in Scholastic thought, sees Being and existence as the same. Heidegger’s main concern or question was, as already stated, the question of the meaning of Being (die Frage nach dem Sinn von Sein). “Heidegger draws a famous and important distinction between beings and Being that is sometimes referred to as the ontico-ontological difference” (Reynolds, 21). “An ontic analysis is concerned with the properties of an object, taking the Being, or ground of those properties, for granted whereas ontological analysis is concerned with the understanding of Being, the understanding of the ground of the various ways a being can appear” (Gordon, 331). For Heidegger, Dasein has priority, so he argues that “the essence of Dasein lies in its existence” (*Being and Time*, 40). Dasein, then, unlike other beings, has ontico-ontological existence; therefore, Dasein has priority or precedence. In addition to that, only Dasein can question the meaning of Being and only being to which the meaning of Being is asked. Even though this reasoning of Heidegger seems existentialist (in Sartrean terms), he still denies labeling his philosophy as existentialism and relating it to existentialism:

Basically, Heidegger argues that this version of existentialism that focuses on human consciousness bears no relation to his own thought, which in *Being and Time*, and more obviously beyond this text, had left such anthropological commitments behind. He also suggests that Sartre's favoured existentialist formula – existence precedes essence – simply reverses Platonism and is therefore still a form of metaphysics rather than a fundamental ontology. (Reynolds, 49)

What Sartre misses is Being. Furthermore, Sartre denies God and therefore he comes up with this premise. On the other hand, other existentialists such as Gabriel Marcel and Merleau-Ponty do not agree with this proposition. Marcel also accepts that philosophical inquiry must begin with human experience, i.e., with concrete lived experience of the individual human subject in the world. (...) However, (unlike Sartre) he does not believe that “existence precedes essence” (Sweetman, 271). On the contrary, Marcel accepts the Christian view of existentialism according to which essence precedes existence. Nevertheless, he still thinks that any philosophical inquiry should start from a subjective point.

Therefore, existence precedes essence must be understood in terms of subjectivity. This premise has two basic meanings: first, existence is what forms the essence and there is no essence before the subject's existence (Sartre); and second, there is an essence, but it can only be understood through a subject (Marcel). Therefore, it can still be said that this premise is the thesis of existentialism. An existentialist can form his idea by opposing and defending this premise. That is, anyone who wishes to follow existentialism must first confront and face this premise. Then, subjects' way of existence and their states of mind and experiences in the world will be the basis for any existentialist.

### 1.3.2. Freedom

Freedom is one of the key concepts for existentialist philosophers. However, it is not a kind of freedom that is “limited to a specific “faculty” of the will; rather, it is a general power of choice and self-determination, evident in a range of behaviors and actions, that lends existence its human character” (Michelmann, 156). Also, it must be noted that “existential freedom refers to the capacity to shape one’s life according to one’s chosen projects and commitments rather than being determined by external factors such as heredity, society, family, or fate” (Michelmann, 156).

Kierkegaard, who is widely considered as the first existentialist philosopher, was the first philosopher who used freedom in terms of existentialism. As stated earlier, his understanding of freedom is negative, just as Sartre’s. According to Kierkegaard, freedom is the primary condition of being an individual. For Kierkegaard, the reason or cause behind existence is God and it is related to faith. However, for Sartre, freedom is to make or form the values and essence of being or existence. Marcel, on the other hand (as in the case of Kierkegaard) takes faith into account and asserts that human existence and freedom are possible with faith.

In a broader sense, it can be said that freedom is the main human condition. Human beings are the totality of possibilities. They exist with their possibilities and they are conscious beings. Although they are surrounded by things that cannot be changed (as Sartre would call the *facticity*), they still can transcend. Human beings act according to no deterministic *prima facies*. They also give meaning to things and try to understand the meaning of Being itself. Unlike things in-itself, they have a value-giving existence which means they are constitutive and can position themselves in the world. This is also related to the aforementioned proposition “existence precedes essence”, because this proposition implies that essence is up to the actions of “being-for-itself”. This “being-for-itself” also sees the possibilities of being and nothingness and it can even deny choosing. Even this action acknowledges the existence of human action. Therefore, as Sartre puts it, “we are condemned to be free.” So, for Sartre, freedom is to decide and to choose and human beings can deny both decision-making and choosing.

There are two human reactions against freedom, with the first being positive freedom and the second being negative freedom. However, being-for-itself can deny its freedom which is called negative freedom. This “strategy of avoiding freedom is referred to variously as ‘fleeing’ from the task of ‘becoming a self’ (Søren Kierkegaard), ‘bad faith’ (Sartre), and ‘inauthenticity’ (Heidegger). In each case, freedom provokes an experience of anxiety, which the individual seeks to overcome” (Michelmann, 157). If there is freedom, there is no more determinism and objective truth. Human beings then are responsible for their actions and their consequences. Freedom also means being responsible for the essence as well, because actions are what constitutes human reality. Thus, after confronted with nothingness, human beings feel the burden of this responsibility. So, when being-for-itself encounters its freedom and responsibility, it feels anxiety.

### **1.3.3. Anxiety, Angst, or Anguish**

The idea of anxiety which stems from freedom was first formulated by Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard distinguished anxiety from fear. Whereas fear has an object, anxiety does not have one. Anxiety results from nothingness and also human freedom. That is why animals do not possess anxiety, because it can only occur in beings with a soul (Kierkegaard, 108). For Kierkegaard anxiety has a positive meaning because through which humans can earn its subjectivity. “Because he is a synthesis, he can be in anxiety; and the more profoundly he is in anxiety, the greater is the man” (Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, 154). According to Kierkegaard, anxiety is the ontological ground of being a human (Manav, 10-12).

Heidegger goes even further and asserts that anxiety appears as Dasein realizes its thrownness and death. So, the reason for anxiety is being in the world and what characterizes it is that it is nowhere, and it is uncertain. For Dasein, not knowing what the cause of anxiety is leads to an uncanny situation. Nevertheless, anxiety still has a positive meaning for Heidegger as well. Since anxiety is Dasein’s way to individualize (*vereinzeln*) and this individualizing will save Dasein from its thrownness, it will make, as potentials of its own being, its inauthenticity and authenticity obvious (Ökten, 238-9).

It is also anxiety that makes Dasein realize that the world into which it is thrown lacks meaning without its existence. Then since Dasein is potentially-for-being (which emphasizes its potentials or possibilities), it will accomplish its potentials in the world as a free being. Dasein's ability to choose and his/her anxiety will let them reach his/her authenticity.

As for Sartre, he states that "In anguish, I apprehend myself at once as totally free and as not being able to derive the meaning of the world except as coming from myself" (*Being and Nothingness*, 40). Similarly, for Sartre anxiety is also related to freedom and human being's future. In terms of Sartre's existentialism, another term or existential concept must be noted: Nausea. Getting rid of any so-called stereotypes and realizing the radical freedom of human beings cause them to feel that life itself does not have a meaning and that the world itself is absurd. This leaves human beings in anxiety or nausea. Thus, human beings feel the burden of existence on their shoulders, and they realize that they are all alone by their existence. Just like in Heidegger's, in Sartre's existentialism, anxiety occurs when being-for-itself realizes its potential and that it is the reason for its future. However, human beings can still deny their anxiety. This denial occurs in aesthetic and ethical stages in Kierkegaard, bad faith in Sartre, and inauthenticity in Heidegger.

#### **1.3.4. Authenticity and Inauthenticity**

The concepts of authenticity (*Eigenlichkeit*) and inauthenticity were formulated by Martin Heidegger and then borrowed by Sartre, too. Heidegger's formulation is a bridge between Kierkegaard's and Sartre's thoughts. "Kierkegaard was the first in the existentialist tradition to insist that authentic selfhood must be wrested away from the average anonymity of social life and "aesthetic" diversions and distractions" (Michelman, 43). Kierkegaard's idea of fleeing or ignoring selfhood influenced Heidegger's opinion of *das Man* (the they) and Sartre's *bad faith*. For these philosophers, authenticity is a process of human beings being aware of their existence and consequences or emotions related to it.

So, understanding and expanding authenticity and inauthenticity make sense in Heidegger's philosophy. For Heidegger, Dasein exists by being aware of its potential and

it is also able to lose *its-self*. What makes Dasein authentic or inauthentic is its *mineness*, because Dasein can name anything as ‘I’ or ‘you’. Dasein can realize this on the ground of being-in-the-world. Dasein is always being in the world with others. However, others prevent authenticity, because Dasein tries to act like them and by doing so it loses awareness of its authenticity. “Nevertheless, in average everydayness, we are as a rule adrift, acting as one of the “herd” or “crowd”—a form of life Heidegger calls “falling” (Verfallen)” (Varga and Guignon, n. pag.). “Heidegger insists that the subject of everyday existence is thus not the individual but *das Man*, an impersonal “one” or “anyone” to which individuals collectively conform” (Michelmann, 44). This is a handicap of human selfhood and is called inauthenticity. However, for Heidegger authenticity does not determine the value of Dasein’s being. What’s more, “authenticity for Heidegger results from a coordinated “owning up” to facticity and a making “one’s own” of the possibilities present in one’s situation” (Michelmann, 44). Dasein’s authenticity begins when Dasein faces and confronts with its ownmost possibility: death.

In the moment when death is grasped not as an abstract possibility that happens to anyone and everyone but as “my death,” my “ownmost (eigenst) possibility,” the everyday world sinks away, leaving me with an acute awareness of myself as a “being of possibility,” that is, a being who is thrown into existence yet remains free to choose itself. (Michelmann, 44-5)

For Sartre, inauthenticity has a different meaning. While his understanding of authenticity is close to Heidegger’s, his understanding of inauthenticity differs from his definition. Sartre’s understanding of inauthenticity (which he calls bad faith) is psychological and ethical. “According to Sartre, authenticity means having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, assuming the responsibility and risks it involves, accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate” (Hayim, 24). For Sartre, human beings can even decide how they feel. Even though it seems paradoxical, authenticity is available through, what Sartre calls, the faith of bad faith. This is sometimes called primitive bad faith, “because it emerges at an early stage in personal development” (Cox, 18). The bad faith is the antithesis of authenticity. In faith of bad

faith, a person is not aware of his bad faith and ignores the fact that all beliefs by their nature are doubtable. For Sartre, then, “without the faith of bad faith, he would be unable to achieve the suspension of disbelief in the performance through which he creates himself” (Cox, 18). However, there are things that human beings do not create and there is the past in which human beings themselves find themselves, which creates alienation.

For Heidegger, this alienation started with modern technology. “With this technological perspective, spiritual goals are no longer meaningful, and mystery has no value. Humans become raw material, merely resources to be used” (Hayim, 6). However, he is not arguing that those modern technologies should be turned away, “rather, he urges that although we affirm technology, we also deny it the right to dominate us to the point that it destroys us as thinking beings” (Hayim, 6). “Entangled being-in-the-world, tempting itself, is at the same time tranquilizing [beruhigend] (...) [However, this temptation] is at the same time alienating” (*Being and Time*, 166). The alienation itself is also Dasein’s inauthenticity and its one of the characteristics of Dasein’s existence and consequence of its falling (*Verfallen*). By being part of *das Man* (the they), in the mode of inauthenticity, Dasein loses itself in everydayness. This is what he calls falling. “Heidegger characterized falling in terms of “idle talk,” “curiosity,” and “ambiguity.” These are ways in which Dasein “loses itself” by conforming its thought and behavior to “what everyone thinks” and “what everyone does” (Michelmann, 148). Since Dasein is thrown into the world, in their thrownness, Dasein means confronting with facticity as well. Dasein “is thrown in such a way that it is there as being-in-the-world. The expression thrownness is meant to suggest the facticity of its being delivered over” (*Being and Time*, 127).

In terms of Sartrean thrownness, Dasein finds itself surrounded with facticity, which is the concrete situation of being-for-itself. Sartre calls this being-in-situation or situatedness. It includes human reality such as physical body and “considered temporally, facticity is the past: my previous choices and those of others, sedimented in the practico-inert” (Hayim, 151). Therefore, being-for-itself always transcends facticity and goes towards the future, because, as Heidegger and Sartre say, Dasein or being-for-itself is an uncompleted project, it is being-towards-the-end (*sein zum Ende*). “Fulfilment exists as

a future promise or fond memory, but never as present reality” (West, 146). As Sartre says, “we are existents who can never catch up with themselves” (Cogswell, n. pag.). Being-for-itself makes itself by its own choices, but “Sartre observes that freedom must encounter some ‘resistance’ to its realization and that the factual givenness of the world provides such resistance” (Michelmann, 303). However, this resistance of situation is “only on the basis of the meaning my project assigns to it” (Michelmann, 303).

Life is absurd and it has no meaning at all. It lacks meaning and contains nothingness. Human or Dasein is the one who gives meaning to its own life. Dasein is thrown into this world and abandoned in this world. Therefore, for Sartre, being-for-itself can overcome this absurdity of life by assigning it a value or meaning. Therefore, it can be said that he is not a nihilist. Thus, Sartre concludes, authentic choice “is lived in the feeling of unjustifiability; and it is this which is expressed by the fact of the absurdity of my choice and consequently of my being” (*Being and Nothingness*, 480). Thanks to consciousness, for being-for-itself, even this absence can be grounding. As Heidegger would put it, “the concept being is itself linked intrinsically to nothingness” (Michelmann, 241). Dasein is the only creature that can realize nothingness and groundlessness. It is also Dasein and its consciousness that understand and grasp the meaninglessness or absurdity of the world. Thus, consciousness is “the origin of nothingness.” Furthermore, consciousness, in general, is defined by Sartre as the power of “nihilation” (néantisation), that is, an ability to modify the world as given in service of the world as imagined or desired” (Michelmann, 242).

For Heidegger, though, the meaning of Being is like a platform where beings appear. So, “the being of the thing reveals itself to me against a horizon of tacit meanings and intentions; taken in the most comprehensive sense, the totality of such horizons is the world itself” (Michelmann, 242). That means everything makes sense through the ground of nothing or not-being. However, nothingness is not an entity, and therefore it is not possible to apprehend it. Thus, Dasein encounters nothingness through anxiety, because nothingness also implies the groundlessness of Dasein. Through this anxiety, Dasein encounters groundlessness, nothingness, and also death which is its ownmost possibility.

### 1.3.5. Death

What interests existentialist philosophers in terms of death is not a physical end of human being, but rather a phenomenon of human existence in terms of its authenticity. It is also a facticity and potential of Dasein and means that existential analysis of death precedes any other analysis of death in the context of physiology, biology, theology, ethnology, etc. “What concerns them is not the natural phenomenon of death or the actual encounter with death but the more important and perennial problem of how one chooses one’s existence in view of, and in spite of, the fact that one must die” (Hayim, 101). In this sense, thinking about death itself is something that only belongs to the consciousness of being (Dasein or being-for-itself). That is what makes human beings authentic.

For Heidegger, death is what makes Dasein authentic and a totality/wholeness (Ganzheit). Dasein’s being is always incomplete (outstanding), which means yet to complete. Therefore, as long as it exists, it will be incomplete. “Something is always still outstanding [aussteht] in Dasein which has not yet become "real" as a potentiality-of-its-being. A constant unfinished quality [Unabgeschlossenheit] thus lies in the essence of the basic constitution of Dasein” (*Being and Time*, 219&220) Through this basic constitution, Dasein is always towards the future, and therefore it is temporal. However, “[t]ime is not something external that Dasein encounters. Rather, Dasein brings time into the world by existing” (Hayim, 101). “If Dasein "exists" in such a way that there is absolutely nothing more outstanding for it, it has also already thus become no-longer-being-there” (*Being and Time*, 220). Then, once Dasein reaches its wholeness, it will not any longer be being-there and being-in-the-world. So, since Dasein can be ahead-of-itself, its being-in-the-world is always towards its ownmost potentiality and it is aware of it. That is what separates Dasein from other beings. For Heidegger, death is not a simple end, but rather the end of potentials, and it is what gives Dasein its existential and temporal character. Therefore, as Heidegger puts it, Dasein is always a being-towards-death.

Since death is Dasein’s ownmost potential, Dasein cannot experience transferring its death to another Dasein. According to Heidegger, Dasein can only see the death of others. However, this is not an authentic experience of death. Also, Dasein’s death is not

(like in the case of other beings) a perish (Verenden) nor is it a physiological or biological “exitus” (as a medical concept) (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 224). On the other hand, it must be noted that Dasein cannot replace or substitute the death of others. It can die for others but that is sacrifice and it means that Dasein dies its own death for the sake of saving another Dasein to live longer. Therefore, for Heidegger, “coming-to-an-end implies a mode of being in which each and every actual Dasein simply cannot be represented by someone else” (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 225).

Is Dasein’s death an end, or will it be completed when it dies? Heidegger’s answer is negative. What Heidegger was trying to do is analyzing death from an existentialist point of view. Thus, for him, death is just a potentiality of Dasein, and he is not interested in any ontic worldly speculation which comes before ontological analysis. Rather he analyzes the death in terms of the world in which Dasein dwells. Thus, for Heidegger, Dasein is not completed when it is dead. Rather it is a process that is being there as long as Dasein is being there. How should it be understood then? Heidegger gives two instances to explain it: rain and road.

The rain stops. It no longer exists. It is no longer objectively present. The road stops. This ending does not cause the road to disappear, but this stopping rather determines the road as this objectively present one. It is no longer objectively present. The road stops. This ending does not cause the road to disappear, but this stopping rather determines the road as this objectively present one. (*Being and Time*, 227)

For Heidegger, death as an ending is none of the modes of ending, nor is it (death as dying) a finish. Rather, according to Heidegger, the ending that we have in view when we speak of death does not signify a being-at-an-end of Dasein, but rather a being-toward-the-end [Sein zum Ende] of this being. Death is a way to be that Dasein takes over as soon as it is. Dasein is old enough to die as soon as it was born. Dasein will face death and death is “impedence” (Bevorstand). However, death does not have impending like beings which are objectively present, at hand or Dasein-with such as a thunderstorm, remodeling a house, or the arrival of a friend (*Being and Time*, 232). Death is a

potentiality of being and Dasein is thrown into this potentiality. “Thrownness into death reveals itself to it more primordially and penetratingly in the attunement of anxiety” (*Being and Time*, 232).

However, the anxiety and “fear of one’s demise” is not the same thing for Heidegger. Anxiety is “the disclosedness of the fact that Dasein exists as thrown being-toward-its-end” (*Being and Time*, 233). In being-towards-death, Dasein is always ahead-of-itself. Dasein dies as long as it exists, and death is constituted by thrownness, existence, and facticity (Ökten, 141). Therefore, death is grounded on the concept of care. “Care (Sorge) manifests itself in human concern (Besorgen) for things and solicitude (Fürsorge) toward others” (Michelman, 89).

In everydayness, Dasein is with other Daseins (das Man) and is aware of others’ deaths. In this awareness or experience, Dasein feels that death will never happen to itself. In everydayness, Dasein ignores the fact that it is going to happen. Das Man (the they) does not allow Dasein to feel anxious, but rather feel fear. This makes Dasein inauthentic which means escaping or ignoring the idea of death and its attitude to being-toward-its-end. “Authentic being-toward-death cannot evade its ownmost, nonrelational possibility or cover it over in this flight and reinterpret it for the common sense of the they” (*Being and Time*, 240). Then, Heidegger gives a summary of authentic, existentially projected being-towards-death:

anticipation reveals to Dasein its lostness in the they-self, and brings it face to face with the possibility to be itself, primarily unsupported by concern that takes care, but to be itself in the passionate anxious freedom toward death, which is free of the illusions of the they, factual, and certain of itself. (*Being and Time*, 245)

As for Sartre, he does not agree with Heidegger’s opinion of which death is a person’s absolute ownmost possibility. Instead, he argues “that death is not among a person’s possibilities at all” (Cox, 139), but “impossibility of possibilities” (Aşkın and Polat, 56). Unlike Heidegger, Sartre thinks that death is absurd and he explains “the absurd character of death” as follows:

It has often been said that we are in the situation of a condemned man among other condemned men who is ignorant of the day of his execution but who sees each day that his fellow prisoners are being executed. This is not wholly exact. We ought rather compare ourselves to a man condemned to death who is bravely preparing himself for the ultimate penalty, who is doing everything possible to make a good showing on the scaffold, and who meanwhile is carried off by a flu epidemic. (*Being and Nothingness*, 533)

For Gabriel Marcel, on the other hand, death is a way for human beings to have ontological importance and meaning. According to him, what causes death to lose its importance as an existential problem is technology. Human beings can overcome the despair caused by death by actions such as love, hope, and faith (Manav, 116). Following Marcel, Sartre also thinks that being-for-itself can be free despite death. Human reality's ability to fly into the future through consciousness' constitutive actions make them ignore death. "Humans exist as flight, as free beings who perpetually move toward new possibilities. Thus, death cannot be a source of meaning for life even if it comes about through suicide" (Hayim, 104). Unlike other beings, they can exceed death, because death is not a possibility for them. Death also represents the destruction of freedom. "Death defeats for-itself's existence as internal relation of denied identity by turning it into a corpse, an inert in-itself with a fixed identity" (Hayim, 104). After all, for Sartre, death is just absurd and does not have any intrinsic meaning:

At death, my entire being collapses into being-for-others. I become a corpse with a history, a mere property possessed by others. At death, my life does not become complete but fixed; its meaning is concealed in the other's consciousness. Death is the ultimate threat to freedom. (Hayim, 105).

To conclude, in the first part of the thesis, the intention was to provide a theoretical framework, concerning the definition of existentialism, by referring to the origins of existentialism. In this part, major existentialist philosophers such as Kierkegaard,

Heidegger have been reviewed. Additionally, ontological phenomenology and Sartre's humanist existentialism have been surveyed. Regarding this survey, the essential concepts of existentialism (freedom, anxiety, authenticity, and death) have also been introduced as an infrastructure to the analysis of Joshua Ferris's novels and will be discussed in the following chapter.



## SECOND CHAPTER

### JOSHUA FERRIS'S LIFE AND WRITING STYLE

In this part of the thesis, Joshua Ferris's background and his literary identity will be discussed in terms of how his biography has influenced his literary works. Next, Joshua Ferris's novels will be analyzed in terms of some main concepts of existential philosophy such as authenticity, nothingness, anxiety, and death. The reason why it is appropriate to mention some aspects related to Joshua Ferris's life is that it directly influences Ferris's authorship and his literary works. For instance, it can be claimed that he was inspired by his advertising background for his first novel, *Then We Came to the End*, the divorces in his family for his second novel, *The Unnamed*, and his relationship with religion for his last novel, *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*. Moreover, his educational and vocational background and his interpretation of novel writing will guide us to comprehend his mission and vision. Furthermore, his education in philosophy and the influence of other existential and postmodern writers on his writing style are two of the main aspects which will be discussed in this part of the thesis.

#### 2.1. Who is Joshua Ferris?

Joshua Ferris is a young contemporary American author, born in Danville, Illinois in 1974. When his parents divorced, he and his mom moved to Key West, Florida where he spent his childhood. His parents had several marriages that resulted in divorce. They "have been married four times each - eight ceremonies with the best of intentions," he states (Wood, n. pag.). The marriages of his mom caused him to be raised in different religions. "With every new stepdad, we [he and his mom] seemed to go through a different denomination. With every new divorce, we [he and his mom] seemed to go back to the Catholic Church" (Bollen, n. pag.). He states that this caused him to end up not believing in any institutional religion.

He started writing approximately at the age of seven when living in Key West. His first works were parodies of Alfred Hitchcock's 'The Birds', which he emphasizes

that it was not 'The Birds,' but 'The Crabs' that influenced him. He realized he wanted to be a writer at thirteen, which is the same age when he read Nabokov but understood none of it. (Richman, n. pag.)

He went to the University of Iowa for college to become an engineer. However, after six months in engineering, he changed his department and obtained his bachelor's degree in English and Philosophy in 1996. "In college (...) [he] started writing stories again — again imitations but with sights set a little higher, or at least more literary: Nabokov, Barthelme" ("An Interview with Joshua Ferris," n. pag.). His education in Iowa contributed a lot to him in terms of writing:

(...), there were professors and writers who were available and open to hearing anything from their students, and they would introduce me to writers who would then show up at some lecture hall and give a reading, so it wasn't just an abstraction, writers weren't just an abstraction, they were flesh and blood human beings who came to town on a tour, who read and spoke to an audience and engaged them. It gave proof to the idea that there could be such things as working writers. So to me it was like falling into the capital of writing itself. Where else could you find out about Steve Erickson and Mark Strand? I mean, maybe in New York, but one certainly doesn't expect it from a Big Ten school in the middle of Iowa. (Atkinson, 127)

His studies in Iowa allowed him to meet various writers. He also started working as an editor when he was a student, with this job helping him to improve his writing skills. He learned the importance of conveying the message to the reader in a clear way. He explains this job, as follows:

I wrote, as an undergrad. And when I got out of school I was making a little scratch translating badly written scientific papers into English. (...) Usually, the students who'd written these papers were incredibly brilliant scientists but often without much

knowledge of English. I would take their writing and improve it, and at the same time, I was taking this complex science and trying to make it communicable. That job conveyed to me very strongly that for every piece of writing, there is a reader, and clarity is important (Lee, n. pag.)

In 1998, after graduating from university and before starting a career as an author, Ferris worked in an advertising company in Chicago where he “wrote ad copy for national brands, which taught [him] a good many things” (“An Interview with Joshua Ferris,” n. pag.). However, he was more interested in writing, and after a short career in advertising he enrolled in the MFA program (Master of Fine Arts) at the University of California, Irvine where he learned writing techniques and how to employ them, completing his degree in 2003.

He published his debut novel *Then We Came to the End* at the age of 33, in 2007. With his first novel, he was nominated for the National Book Award and won the PEN/Hemingway Award. The novel was eventually translated into 25 languages. With his last novel, *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*, he was short-listed for the 2014 Man Booker Prize and won the 2014 Dylan Thomas Prize. Furthermore, he was named one of The New Yorker's "20 Under 40" writers in 2010. Other than *Then We Came to the End* (2007) and *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour* (2014), Ferris is the author of *The Unnamed* (2010), and he has also written various short stories. His first short story “Mrs. Blue” was published in 1999. He also has a story collection named *The Dinner Party: Stories* (2017).

He has been living in Hudson, New York since 2003. He is married to Elizabeth Kennedy, who is also a writer, for about eighteen years and they have a son named Cooper. Consequently, understanding Joshua Ferris’s background can help the readers understand his works since all his novels have traces from his own life.

## **2.2. Ferris’s Writing Style**

Joshua Ferris started his professional writing career with short stories but now enjoys writing novels. In one of the interviews organized by Nashville Public Library, he

states that he does not spend any time writing short fiction anymore because whenever he decides to write short fiction, he gets seduced by the genre of the novel (“Salon@615-Joshua Ferris,” 00:35:41-48). In addition to being an avid writer, he is also an avid reader. When he started reading *Lolita* by Nabokov, he was only 13, which can be considered as an early age to read the classics. He was mostly influenced by authors such as Vladimir Nabokov, Don DeLillo, George Saunders, Thomas Pynchon, Cormac McCarthy, Philip Roth, Dostoevsky, as well as many others. Regarding the authors influencing him, he states: “What writer, when I was between the ages of 13 and 25, didn’t influence me?” (Evers, n. pag.). Moreover, he states that no one at the University of Iowa and UC-Irvine inspired him to become a writer. It was “only other writers [who] inspired [him] to be a writer” (Catan, n. pag.).

Ferris’s writing method is a mechanical one. He knows the technical side of writing and tries to apply writing techniques in his writing. Therefore, he didn’t call himself a writer until he got an MFA diploma, or rather until he mastered the techniques he learned during his program. For him, writing is a long process, he overwrites and then at the end, he focuses on editing what he has written. His daily routine and writing process explains how rigorous he is. He starts writing at 9 in the morning and finishes at 5 in the evening. Even more time is devoted to research for his writing. A major component of his writing process is based on research. For instance, while writing his third novel, he watched YouTube videos about dentists and did some research about religions. The following quotation shows his process of writing:

I did research. I read books. What I found very useful for some of the more visceral details was watching YouTube clips. There are a lot of instructional videos on there for dentists—so you can see how a dental dam is inserted, or sutures and things like that. I went to my dentist and asked some questions. I also knew a dentist who would answer questions. (Bollen, n. pag.)

For him, writing is a secular task that demands a good amount of yeoman’s work and also commitment. It is a daily endeavor that does not have a lot of spiritual dimensions (“On the Move 2011: Joshua Ferris;” 00:04:25-05:05). He emphasizes the importance of

being hardworking and disciplined, even going further, he says he has “absolutely no talent, but a tremendous amount of discipline” (Mudge, n. pag.). His works are products of long hours of hard work. While writing *Then We Came to the End*, he worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day for fourteen weeks. One may even call him an engineer author due to his disciplined writing method and working rate. How he wrote his first novel explains that he dedicates himself to writing in the formation of a novel:

I initially spent about a year and a half on the book before giving it up. Another year and a half of reflection passed before I returned to it, and I did so only after hearing the voice of the collective in my head and not being able to tune it out. Once restarted, the book was finished in about fourteen weeks. So it took three years and fourteen weeks to gather my wits about me and know how to write a book in the first-person plural (“An Interview with Joshua Ferris,” n. pag.)

Another feature of Ferris as a writer is that he improvises on the page. While he is writing, he has no idea about the flow of the plot. He just lets the story flow. As he says, “It just comes down to intuition, to where I want to go. That restlessness is ingrained. I can’t do anything to stop it. The intuition that determines what I’m doing is independent of my own more calculating or canny assessment of what I should be doing” (Bollen, n. pag.). He overwrites, he writes everything that he wants at that moment and, in the end, he does a lot of filtering out of things that he finds insignificant. He throws away a lot. He tries only to put the important materials in the book. (“Salon@615-Joshua Ferris,” 00:38:30-39:24)

Finally, one may define Ferris as an experimental writer. For him, writing is a way of learning. Since he has an MFA degree he is aware of contemporary writing techniques. Therefore, he attempts to use different narrations in his works. For example, he uses the first-person plural in his first novel, the third-person singular in his second novel, and the first-person singular in his third novel. Hence, one may infer that he likes to challenge himself. It is very important for him to never repeat. The next chapter aims to discuss the novels of Joshua Ferris in terms of how he as a contemporary American author uses

themes related to existential philosophy to draw a portrait of contemporary American society.



## THIRD CHAPTER

### ANALYSIS OF JOSHUA FERRIS'S NOVELS IN TERMS OF EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY

#### 3.1. *Then We Came To the End*

##### 3.1.1. Summary

Joshua Ferris's debut novel *Then We Came to the End* is set between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s at an advertising agency, when the dot-com boom implodes, and it tells the story of a group of employees. Most of the action takes place inside the office. Because of the implosion of the dot-com economy, the employees are under the threat of being laid off. At the beginning of the novel, layoffs just began, and they continue throughout the novel. The characters are anxious because of the layoffs but at the same time, they have fun in the office. When they are bored, they spend their time mostly gossiping, going into their co-worker's office, and send an e-mail from their computer addressed to the entire agency, pushing their co-workers down the hall in a swivel chair. That is to say, no one seems to work. The way they spend time reflects a humorous office environment. Although the characters have fun with their co-workers, they are generally unhappy at work. They are always bored. The characters define the hours they spend at work as dull, interminable hours and one of the employees defines the job as dead-end, routinized, enervating, and numbingly dull. The novel employs a collective narrative voice, which is the most important feature of the novel. It reveals the inauthenticity of the characters. The characters in this novel are not aware of their existence and are alienated from their existence. They are lost in daily routines and concerns. This is mostly due to the American capitalistic system and the consequences of capitalism. Thus, this novel is applicable to be analyzed from an existentialist point of view.

### 3.1.2. Analysis

The title of Ferris's debut novel refers to one of the most influential American author Don DeLillo's debut novel, *Americana* (1971). Considering the content of Ferris's novel, one may easily find a connection between Ferris's novel and the first sentence of Don DeLillo's novel: "Then we came to the end of another dull and lurid year" (1). Even this reference shows that Ferris is open to the idea of intertextuality and also the idea of parody (as he was doing when he first started to write parodies of Hitchcock stories). Other than DeLillo, direct references to Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson can also be recognized in the novel. The most important issue that Emerson has been quoted for was individualism. Although he often quotes about individualism, the characters in the novel are not presented to the reader as individuals but rather as a group of people. Ferris uses intertextuality to criticize American capitalism with a sense of humor and shows the existential outcome of capitalism, too. He deals with existential problems and humorously criticizes the system using satire. That is to say, despite all the existential issues in the novel, the novel is not depressive, pessimistic, and sad. One may stereotypically expect that this novel is pessimistic and gloomy since we aim to present a representation of existentialism. On the contrary, quite an amount of reader commentaries suggest that Ferris's novel is humorous.

Most of the scholars who interpret or analyze the novel concentrate on its collective narrative voice and relate it with American capitalism.<sup>1</sup> The first reason for that is Ferris's advertising background and the second is the plot and setting of the story itself. Even though the writers who analyzed Ferris's novels were right in some sense, their analysis will be incomplete without considering existential concepts. The novel is suitable to be examined in terms of other existential concepts. In this study, the analyses of these scholars will be extended and the novel will be analyzed in terms of existential concepts of authenticity, nothingness, and death. Authenticity will be a proper concept to start with,

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<sup>1</sup> Here you can find examples of these analyses by four different scholars. See Varvogli (2019), Ruth (2016), Russell (2018) and Bekhta (2017).

for it is one of the key concepts of existentialism and Joshua Ferris's *Then We Came to the End*.

### 3.1.2.1. Authenticity

As mentioned previously, authenticity and inauthenticity are the main themes of the existentialist philosophy. Authenticity is about self-awareness or self-consciousness. Being authentic is the most primary condition of being an existential individual, and all existential philosophers included this term in their philosophy somehow. However, each of them took authenticity according to their own philosophical approach. That is related to the emphasis of existentialism on subjectivism and freedom. In the case of Joshua Ferris's *Then We Came to the End*, it is also related to capitalistic society, and that is related to Joshua Ferris's personal experiences and occupational background.

Joshua Ferris, as an author who was involved in the advertising and business world in America, which is the heart of capitalism and consumer society, criticizes the modern American consumer and capitalist society. He addresses the existential problems that American capitalism created. In *Then We Came to the End*, considering characters' nine-to-five work and office environment, it can be said that capitalism creates inauthentic individuals. The amount of freedom that people have is equated with how much money they have in a capitalistic system. It causes people to fall into bad faith, which is the denial of freedom. What is more, in a capitalist system, even though people think they are free, it is the system that decides on behalf of individuals what and how they desire. In such a system, people refuse to be free and they accept everything without questioning, so it prevents people from being authentic individuals. Most of the academic articles written about this novel, as mentioned earlier, focus on the concept of "we" and narrative voice. However, one of the intentions of this thesis is to extend these studies by analyzing how the narrative voice brings inauthenticity to the novel from an existential perspective.

Aliki Varvogli, for example, in her "The Death of the Self: Narrative Form, Intertextuality and Autonomy in Joshua Ferris's *Then We Came to the End*" compares some well-known American novels to Ferris's novel and emphasizes the collective narrative voice employed in the novel:

The American literary canon, in particular, has been shaped by strong statements of (mainly white) masculine individuality: “Call me Ishmael,” “My name is Arthur Gordon Pym,” “You don't know about me without you have read a book,” or “I am an American, Chicago born” are all resonant opening lines that assert the primacy of the individual voice in American fiction. (5)

While all these canon novels stated above emphasize individuality, Ferris's debut represents collectiveness. However, Ferris's novel also reveals the conflict between the individual and the group. Varvogli thinks that intertextual references “reveal the novel's wider ambition to explore the notion of subjectivity and the erosion of the self under capitalist structures” (2). So indeed the intertextual references to Ralph Waldo Emerson reveal the authenticity of Tom Mota, the character who quotes Emerson throughout the novel. Taking it to the next level Ruth Maxey in her essay “National Stories and Narrative Voice in the Fiction of Joshua Ferris” argues that the use of “we” represents the nation of the U.S. “(...) the novel's collective stance ensures a timeless, universal quality in common with other recent U.S. “we” narratives and transcends the particular details of Chicago adland in the late 1990s to derive a broader allegorical meaning from this world,” she states (210). Regarding this, it can be said that Ferris's criticism is not limited to the characters. Rather, it serves a bigger purpose and criticizes the notion of individualism, capitalism, and other major components of American ideals.

The story itself is set in an advertising agency in Chicago. It tells the story of a group that seems to be identical to each other. The characters typically work from nine to five just as the system imposes them to do so. The novel reflects the selves subdued by capitalism. In an existentialist sense, this situation is closely related to inauthenticity. The following quotation shows how the capitalist system makes people inauthentic individuals by conditioning themselves to want things that they do not necessarily need:

Using a wide variety of media, we could demonstrate for our fellow Americans their anxieties, desires, insufficiencies, and frustrations — and how to assuage them all. We informed you in six seconds that you needed something you didn't know you

lacked. We made you want anything that anyone willing to pay us wanted you to want. (234)

What is interesting is that the characters work for this system, and admen, as people working for the advertisement industry, know best about how the capitalist system takes freedom away from people and makes everybody the same. In other words, there is an irony of them being the people who are making ads so that people look, think, and feel the same way meanwhile they are also another cog in the machine of capitalism; it is a self-perpetuating cycle for them. No matter how insecure or alienated they feel, the characters are trapped in this capitalist system.

According to Heidegger's theory, as mentioned previously, "Dasein is always being in the world with others. However, others prevent authenticity, because Dasein tries to act like them and by doing so it loses awareness of its authenticity. By being part of das Man (the they), in the mode of inauthenticity, Dasein loses itself in everydayness" (see pg. 25). This is achieved with the collective narrative voice employed in the novel, which is the main feature of the novel. The use of the first-person plural silences the voices of the individual characters and this causes characters to have the same thoughts and even the same feelings, which is a contrast of existentialism in which subjectivity and individualism have great importance.

Other than the use of the first-person plural, the office setting reveals the inauthenticity in the novel. Meghan O'Rourke's interview with Joshua Ferris is entitled "Hell is Other Cubicles," and this title references Sartre's character Garcin's famous statement "hell is other people" in his play *No Exit*. According to Sartre, people define themselves through the eyes of the other. In this situation, they are being-for-others, in Sartre's terms. Here, other cubicles can be considered as "das Man". Being judged by other people is hell itself. The way of judging in Ferris's novel is gossiping. Through gossiping one may find the hidden rules of the society or its own environments taboos and may try to avoid breaching it to stay in the cubicle or, in the Heideggerian sense, "das Man". Thus, they become inauthentic.

Therefore, the characters' selves are lost in the everydayness, even though they sometimes try to find who they are and what they want to do with their lives, in the end,

they find themselves gossiping, pranking their colleagues, or chatting at lunchtime. They don't like their jobs and they are always bored. They are doing the same thing every day. For them, the hours passing at work are dull and interminable. But instead of confronting the situation and taking responsibility for their choices, all they do is escape and not confront the reality that they are not happy with their lives. Existing creates anxiety in people and the characters escape from their existence by keeping themselves busy with trivial things of everyday life:

Yet for all the depression no one ever quit. When someone quit, we couldn't believe it. "I'm becoming a rafting instructor on the Colorado River," they said. "I'm touring college towns with my garage band." We were dumbfounded. It was like they lived on a different planet. Where had they found the derring-do? What would they do about car payments? We got together for going away drinks on their final day and tried to hide our envy while reminding ourselves that we still had the freedom and luxury to shop indiscriminately. (57)

This quotation shows that they choose to conform instead of pursuing their dreams, which are fundamental individual characteristics of human beings. In such a big group of people, just a few could manage to act individually and follow their dreams. The majority get lost in the group at the end of the day, even though they sometimes "had these sudden revelations that employment, the daily nine-to-five, was driving [them] far from [their] better selves" (5).

The characters in the novel are good representatives of inauthentic people. They have fallen into inauthenticity or bad faith, in Sartrean terms. These characters are not happy where they are and sometimes dream about other possibilities in life, but at the end of the day, they don't listen to their inner voices and go with the crowd. The characters in the novel represent *das Man*. They conform to the group. They conform to *das Man* 'what everyone thinks' and 'what everyone does.' This notion of inauthenticity is caused by what Heidegger calls "fallenness" which means the characters, in the Heideggerian

sense, 'don't own up their facticity and a making 'their own' of the possibilities present in their situation' as it can be seen in the following quotation:

If we had to call into question the point, we'd have fallen into an existential crisis that would have quickly led us to question the entire American enterprise. We had to keep telling ourselves to forget about the point and keep our noses down and focus on the fractured and isolated task at hand. (234)

This quotation indicates the fallenness of individuals into everyday life which eliminates thinking and questioning. That is a perfect example of Sartre's bad faith. Sartre would call this "faith of bad faith." They are not aware of their bad faith and they believe that it is the best for their mental health. The characters are afraid of the 'existentialist crisis,' therefore, their strategy is to avoid it at all costs. Also, in another part of the novel, as seen in the quotation below, Ferris shows that they sometimes question their life-style and yet still are stuck in their group and daily lives, even in terms of ethical choices:

We thought moving to India might be better, or going back to nursing school. Doing something with the handicapped or working with our hands. No one ever acted on these impulses, despite their daily, sometimes hourly contractions. Instead, we met in conference rooms to discuss the issues of the day. (3)

As it comes to individuals in the novel, some authentic characters that deny the inauthenticity can still be mentioned. In one of the interviews, to a question about individuals wanting to belong to a group Joshua Ferris's response is as follows: "In *Then We Came to the End*, there were those individuals in the office environment who wanted or had no choice but to become part of the collective "we." And there were those individuals who at all costs didn't want to be part of the "we" (Lee, n. pag.). Tom Mota, Joe Pope, and Carl Gabardian can be considered as the ones who did not want to be in the group.

Joe Pope especially represents an authentic human being throughout the novel. He does not get lost in everydayness. He does not participate in gossip or even lunch. He tells

his colleague, Genevieve, that he refuses to be a part of any group. He thinks that any individual is “better, smarter, more humane than any group” (261). His thought fits well with existentialist thought which emphasizes subjectivity and justifiably the reaction of his colleagues to the fact that he does not like groups is: “Didn’t like groups — well, what did he think he was doing working at an advertising agency? ...And what an odd profession for him, advertising ...” (261).

Another character that can be considered as an authentic individual is Tom Mota. As Allison Russel states, “throughout *Then We Came to the End*, corporate-think, cubicle farms, and mass consumer-targeted businesses reveal themselves as anathema to individualism, which is why the Emerson-spouting Tom Mota is one of the most interesting characters in the novel, and also the most threatening” (Russel, 324). His colleagues believe that he does not belong to the group. Unlike his colleagues, he does not conform to *das Man*. He acts in a way that society cannot understand. He wore three polo shirts on top of each other for a month without hesitation and placed a sushi roll behind Joe Pope’s bookcase. Toward the end of the novel, he appears dressed as a clown and with a paintball gun pointing it to his colleagues. Tom Mota can be considered as the biggest nonconformist in the novel. In the following quotation, it is depicted that Tom Mota does not conform to *das Man*. He does not judge himself through others’ eyes:

Tom tried to explain himself. “I refused to conform,” he said to Joe. “When somebody said something stupid, everybody smiled and simpered and shook their heads. But me, I told them it was stupid. Everyone listened to the same goddamn radio station. Fuck that. I stayed late and went by everybody’s desk and spun the dial. I wore three polos on top of each other for a month, Joe, because I wasn’t being fooled and I wanted people to know it. I learned all that from reading Emerson. To conform is to lose your soul. So I dissented every chance I got and I told them fuck you and eventually, they fired me for it, but I thought, Ralph Waldo Emerson would be proud of Tom Mota.” (342)

As it seems, Tom Mota is a character who is so enthusiastic about following his freedom. He even refers to Emerson, who is considered as the philosopher who aggrandizes an individual's ability to think, by following the Kantian motto: "sapere aude" ("dare to know/think"). In this sense, Tom Mota refers to an idealist and transcendentalist American philosopher whose thoughts are against capitalism and its outcome in which individuals lost their ability to 'dare to think.' "The references to Emerson, which Ferris uses liberally, underscore the importance of the themes of authenticity and the fate of the self under capitalism" (Varvogli, 9). In one of his conversations with Carl, Tom refers to the thoughts of transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman who are opposite of the capitalist system and the office life:

You see, the problem with reading this guy," he continued, "is the same problem you have reading Walt Whitman. You read him at all? Those two fucks wouldn't have lasted two minutes in this place. Somehow they were exempt from office life. It was a different time, back then. And they were geniuses. But when I read them I start to wonder why I have to be here. It almost makes it harder to come in, be honest with you." (86)

All in all, even though the main theme of the novel is the inauthenticity of the characters in the novel, Ferris also depicts some characters who are aware of the inauthenticity of being in a group. He also depicts how these characters question or criticize the way of living in cubicles. From an existentialist point of view, they are also aware of their incompleteness, and nothingness which is a result of American capitalism.

### **3.1.2.2. Nothingness / Incompleteness**

According to Sartre's existential philosophy, human beings can determine their essence because existence precedes essence, and that happens through freedom. He states that people are condemned to be free, and the nothingness of consciousness condemns us to freedom. With nothingness, being-for-itself (in Sartrean term) or Dasein (in Heideggerian term) becomes aware of its own possibilities. Again, according to existentialist philosophy, human beings are the totality of possibilities. In *Being and*

*Nothingness*, Sartre states, “the nature of consciousness simultaneously is to be what it is not and not to be what it is” (70). Human beings are beings who transcend what it is not. They always have the possibility to transcend. They project themselves into future possibilities. Even if they achieve their possibilities, a new possibility is always there as a new project. That’s why Dasein or being-for-itself is never complete. It always strives for completeness. “Human beings are doomed to the frustration of ceaseless striving because once a particular goal has been achieved consciousness inevitably posits further goals or ceases to be a for-itself” (West 146). In *Then We Came to the End*, characters are never content with what they already have, and they are trying to find what is missing in their lives:

THE AUSTERITY MEASURES BEGAN in the lobby with the flowers and bowls of candy. Benny liked to smell the flowers. “I miss the nice flowers,” he said. Then we got an officewide memo taking away our summer days. “I miss my summer days even more than the flowers,” he remarked. At an all-agency meeting the following month, they announced a hiring freeze. Next thing we knew, no one was receiving a bonus. “I couldn’t give a damn about summer days,” he said, “but my bonus now, too?” Finally, layoffs began. “Flowers, summer days, bonuses — fine by me,” said Benny. “Just leave me my job.” (35)

In the quotation above, it can be seen that Benny is never satisfied with what he has like every human being. Throughout the entire novel, the characters are searching for what they want in life and that is to be happy. For example, Tom Mota thinks that he will find the meaning when he starts a landscaping business. In one of his letters to his colleague Carl Garbedian, he suggests starting a landscaping business and says, “it might be exactly what’s missing in your life, Carl — what you lack without knowing you lack it” (307). They think that they will have found it when they fulfill their dreams but there is always something missing in their lives. They have a well-paid job, titles, “unbelievable fortunes”, “cars that could barely fit in [their] driveways”, “a backyard swimming pool,”

and spending “a long weekend in Vegas,” so they have almost everything vital for the fulfillment of the American dream.

From a capitalistic point of view, it can be said that what is called the American dream is not the possibility or project of the characters, but what is presented to them as a project. The American dream will never be fulfilling because it is no longer a plausible dream, it is not an attainable goal because working until you are brain dead or exhausted with life, but wealthy is not fulfilling – people need something more and that is where the materialistic nature of capitalism comes in. People think a new this or that, or a special experience that they can buy will forever change their life. However they can only offer a brief reprieve from the dullness of existing. The American dream is especially being pumped to people through advertisements. What advertisements are presenting is to show how and what to desire to show what you lack or are missing. So, the advertising sector itself pumps incompleteness. Ferris criticizes this conflict by using satire and shows how they lose their ability to find the ‘meaning’ in their daily life.

Therefore, the meaning they are seeking is never present. The characters search for the meaning of their lives throughout their lives. But the tragedy is that they will never be complete. When they achieve everything that they want in life and they think they are complete, a new possibility will be there for them. They struggle to fill the void inside themselves throughout life, there will be always something missing and the void will never be filled. The most fundamental aspects of life such as death are a kind of material they have to advertise. Even death itself does not mean anything to them, other than material to make an advertisement about. As stated previously, “humans become raw material, merely resources to be used” (Gordon, 6). The idea of being-towards-death is far from being a reality for them, just as Heidegger criticizes.

### **3.1.2.3. Death / Anxiety**

As Heidegger states, human beings are always a being-towards-the-death, and being authentic is only possible with an awareness of the fact of death. On the contrary, in *Then We Came to the End*, characters are not aware of the possibility of death. Throughout the entire novel, the reader comes across death; Frank Brizzola’s death, the

murder of Janine Gorjanc's daughter, and Lynn Mason's illness. Lynn Mason, the boss, was diagnosed with breast cancer. In general, the characters' response to death is cynical. They do not take death seriously. They are wagering on their colleague's death, which means they benefit financially from deaths. For example, one of the characters, Benny, won 10 dollars from each of his colleagues for a colleague, Frank Brizzola's death. They gossip about their boss being a cancer patient. They even joke about the picture of their colleagues' murdered daughter. One can relate this to Heidegger's suggestion; "No one else can die for me." No human being can experience death indeed. Their response to death is their way of denial of confrontation with death which is their own possibility, and this is what makes them inauthentic. It can be said that the characters deny death's reality as a coping mechanism. Everydayness distracts them and keeps their mind off of death. In other words, it offers them an escape from wondering how much longer they have.

Besides the character's cynical approach to death, the anxiety of the boss who is a cancer patient, and his closeness to death are depicted in the novel. A whole chapter named "The Thing to Do and the Place to Be" in the midst of the novel is about the night before the operation. The narrative voice changes from the first-person plural to the third person singular in this chapter which helps the reader see the boss, Lynn Mason's inner life. Lynn is faced with death. Death is closer to her than ever before. She thinks about her lover, Martin, and her job all night. Other than these, she thinks and does more than one can do in one night. She questions all her life in one night. "Because fear of death, boy, that has a way of menacing your convictions and making you feel lonely. Death has a way of ruining your plans and sending you on a tailspin on what should be a work night" (224&225). Just as Heidegger said, death is human beings' "ownmost possibility," and when human beings become aware that they are beings toward death, they feel anxiety because death is the end of all possibilities. "Lynn is forced to look at the possibility of death when she's diagnosed with breast cancer, and in turn so is the reader" (An Interview with Joshua Ferris). At midnight she goes to the office and works until the next morning. Working is her comfort zone. She escapes from her existence by working. That is why she could not accept having the surgery for a long time. Again, as stated before, "in everydayness, Dasein ignores the fact that it is going to happen" (see pg. 29). Therefore,

she becomes alienated from herself and becomes inauthentic. This, again, leads us to the concept of authenticity. Therefore, one may claim that the main concept or theme of this novel is the inauthenticity of individuals as a result of American capitalism.



## **3.2. *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour***

### **3.2.1. Summary**

Joshua Ferris, in his postmodern novel, *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*, breaks down metanarratives. He creates a new religion by parodying Judaism. By doing so, he shows the reader that every human being creates their sense of religion and history from their point of view. Ulm, the religion that Joshua Ferris created in the novel, has rituals that do not make any sense as in every religion. There is no evidence about this religion in history, and it contradicts the Bible. However, Ferris questions in the novel how many people are needed to say that a system of belief is a bona fide system. (182)

The main character, Paul O'Rourke, is a successful dentist, making good money. He has a dental practice called O'Rourke Dental on Park Avenue and works with three women, Abby Bower, dental assistant; Betsy Convoy, head hygienist; Connie Plotz, receptionist (or office manager, as written on the website of the practice). Abby is, in Paul's eyes, a silent person who always judges Paul behind her pink paper mask, and she does not speak directly to Paul throughout the novel. Mrs. Convoy is a devout Roman Catholic and a very good hygienist. Connie is Paul's ex-girlfriend and is Jewish. Although Paul is an atheist, the people around him are mostly devout, and Paul has a great interest in religions.

The most important features that define him are: his job, being an atheist, and being a Red Sox fan. His dad made a big impression on him. After his dad shot himself in the head in a bathtub, Paul had trouble falling asleep. He became a Boston Red Sox fan like his dad. Also, he admired his girlfriends' fathers such as Roy Belisle, Bob Santacroce, and Stuart Plotz. He fell in love (or got cunt gripped, in his words) four times in his whole life. He does not remember the first one since he was only 5. Of all his lovers, Catholic Samantha Santacroce and Jewish Connie Plotz and their families are the ones who impressed him the most. When he was nineteen, he had a relationship with Samantha, and her family's devotion to Catholicism impressed him so much that he wanted to be a part of her family. He was thirty-six when he met Connie, and he wanted to be a part of

Connie's Jewish family. What led to him wanting to be a part of Connie's family was the love of the family's faith because he wants to feel a part of something.

At the beginning of the novel, Paul refuses to have a website for his dental practice despite the insistence of Mrs. Convoy. He also does not have a social media account, but halfway into the book, he realizes that a website was created for his practice without his permission, and then a Facebook and Twitter account in his name. On his Facebook page, his religious affiliation was listed as an Ulm by those who created the page. As time progresses, he and his employees realize comments and postings about this religious affiliation made in his name on various websites and social media accounts. He gets in contact with the person whose email address is on the website. The first answer he gets from that person is: "How well do you know yourself?" Over time, he starts to research the Ulms and learns that an Ulm is someone who doubts God. He also met people who are Ulms such as Pete Mercer, the seventeenth-wealthiest person in America, and Grand Arthur, the person who researches and finds the Ulms, and they tell him that he needs to go to Israel to show he believes. As the novel progresses, it is found out that Paul has a lot of similarities with these people. For example, Pete Mercer and Grand Arthur fell in love with girls who have strong family relationships. Mercer fell in love with a Zoroastrian woman and Grand Arthur with rabbi's daughter. Also, they not only fell in love with them, but also with their families. Mercer and Grand Arthur wanted to belong to these devout families, too. After he finds out he is an Ulm, he questions who he is, whether he wants to belong to this religion. At the end of the novel, he goes to Israel to find out his origins and meets Grand Arthur there.

### **3.2.2 Analysis**

#### **3.2.2.1. The Pursuit of Meaning**

According to existential thought, as stated previously, human beings are thrown into a meaningless world. They anguish throughout their lives since life has no meaning and they feel lonely in this world. Once one realizes there is no meaning at all, they can choose and give a meaning to something, so the characters create meaning out of a

meaningless world. They create histories and religions that they can devote themselves to, and search for the meaning of life. That means human beings are in the middle of uncertainty, as Kierkegaard asserted. “For him, uncertainty is the essence of subjective truth. It ‘is a consequence of what is most essential to human life, namely our freedom to choose or decide’ (West, 121 & also see pg. 11). Therefore, human beings must make everything certain. However, it will not make any sense, because there will always be something uncertain. However, existing means to be obliged to decide. In other words, as Friedrich Nietzsche said: human beings are “contorted between two nothingnesses, a question mark, a weary riddle, a riddle for birds of prey” (45). Thus, they are thrown into a meaningless world in which they have to constitute a meaning. They, as Sartre asserts, are being-for-itself, which means a conscious being who struggles with nothingness and meaninglessness.

In *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*, Paul also tries to make his life meaningful. Since he believes God does not exist, he feels abandonment and loneliness. Paul feels a void in himself despite everything he has, and questions his life. He devotes himself to sports, religions, or the families of his girlfriends, and attributes a meaning to them. He is interested in religions and wants to be a part of a religious group to make his life meaningful. He tries to belong to the religion of his girlfriends’ families whenever he has a girlfriend to fulfill his needs. Moreover, when he falls in love (or gets cunt gripped), he wants his girlfriends to be his everything. He defines being cunt gripped as follows: “To be cunt gripped is to believe that I have found everything heretofore lacking in my life” (50). He does everything to belong to Connie’s family such as offering her relatives free dental care for life. As one can see, he tries to avoid his subjectivity (his authenticity), but somehow he cannot give up giving meaning to things.

He tries to fill the void in his life with the women he falls in love with, the Red Sox, and his work. The Red Sox are a team that did not win the American League Championship until 2004. Paul’s devotion to the team waned when they won the championship in 2004. While Paul wants the Red Sox to win the World Series more than anything in the world, yet he is afraid of winning a game at the same time. He is aware that he will have nothing left to be excited about when his team becomes champion.

Towards the end of the novel, his team gains a victory and at the very end of the novel, he bought a Chicago Cubs hat. “The Cubs had not won the World Series in 105 years. That was not only the longest championship drought in major-league baseball; it was the longest such drought of any professional team in American sports” (335). He describes his emotions about buying that hat as follows:

Imagine it! Joining in the preseason to pray for a good year, watching their performance with genuine suspense, and feeling again the crushing heartbreak that only the perennial, tantalizing possibility of true redemption can provoke. My God! The world new again! Something to desperately want! (335&336)

People need a purpose to live a meaningful life. People need things that they can devote their lives to. Also, it can be said that he is trying to achieve objective truth because he does not accept the subjective truth. That means he tries to integrate himself into a grand narrative, as opposed to postmodern thought. His attempt to devote himself to the ready-made sphere of meaning is also a result of capitalism. It seems that Ferris’s main idea is to reach a result that capitalism kills human beings' ability to constitute a meaning. Capitalism tells you what your options are and asks you to choose one of them. This is limited freedom, and it will lead to a forced authenticity. Forcing human beings to choose and being authentic makes them inauthentic. Therefore, one may call this ‘inauthentic authenticity’.

### **3.2.2.2. Authenticity**

The title of the novel is also related to the concept of authenticity. Paul suffers from insomnia. What is meant in the title is that he wants to wake up at the same time everybody wakes up. When he goes to bed, everybody wakes up, and Paul desires to be like everybody. However, he is an authentic being and he cannot be like everybody. Unlike *Then We Came to the End, To Rise Again at a Decent Hour* is written in first-person singular narration, and the main character is well-developed while in the previous novel the characterization is not deep. Just like the narrative voice creates inauthentic

individuals in the first novel, the narrative voice of *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour* creates an authentic, individual character.

He is generally an unhappy and incompatible man not accepting things as it is. Instead, his main feature is doubting and questioning everything. His main question about life is: What is the point of everything? We will all die in the end. For example, he does not understand why people lotion their hands. He watches his girlfriend, Connie, lotion her hands and does not understand the point of lotioning. And his reaction to this is: “But what does that matter when they’re just going to become all liver spotted, bony, thin skinned, and tendony?” (48). If he did not question anything and lotion his hands conforming to the majority, he would be a happier man. However, he lives an existential life.

Despite being an authentic individual, he wants to feel like everyone else, at the same time. He envies the other people being happy and he wants to feel the same. For example, when he said “if there’s no pain, it’s nothing to worry about right now” to his pregnant patient, he was so happy to feel like her, that is like everybody:

Well, how about that, I thought, hearing my own words. If there’s no pain, it’s nothing to worry about right now. You’ve got plenty of time. Worry about it later. Until then, enjoy yourself. You’ve got so much to look forward to. (...) That was how other people thought, I thought. I was having a thought that was identical to other people’s. I was on the inside with this thought. No longer alien to the in, but in the in. I was in the very in. Afraid of losing it, I took up the explorer again, ostensibly to have another look inside my patient’s mouth, but in actual fact to dwell in the in. I wanted to go in even deeper. The people who thought like this, the regular everyday people who walked their dogs and posted their updates and put off going to the dentist, happily allowed the inevitable to just sort of slide right off their backs. (319&320).

He realizes that people are happy because they do not get anxious about death. Instead, they enjoy the moment. That’s why he wants to be a part of Das Man and get rid

of his authenticity. Even though he is aware of capitalism's impositions of becoming a 'normal' human being and he criticizes it, he still wants to be part of it. One reason for that is his being judged by other people around him, especially Abby. Abby is the other for him. Therefore, while "hell is others" for Sartre, "hell is Abby" for Paul. He thinks she always judges him. The other or Das Man makes people fall into inauthenticity. Ferris refers to some names such as the TV series, Friends, Led Zeppelin, Star Wars that "everybody" knows, and when Paul noticed the names of Daughn and Taylor in a celebrity magazine, he realized that he had never heard of them. However, he was thinking that he had to know them and was afraid to be judged for not knowing these celebrities by the other which is Abby:

No doubt she would just judge me for not knowing who Daughn and Taylor were when everyone knew who Daughn and Taylor were. I could just picture her thinking, "He doesn't know Daughn and Taylor? He's so sadly out of touch. He is so sadly old and on his way out and depressing to even think about." No way I was asking Abby. (122)

He wants to feel like a part of society. People around him accuse him of alienating himself from society, and he accepts that he does not get any closer to understanding people. He does not understand the society he lives in and its norms. His motive behind this is that anyone who conforms to the herd, Das Man, seems so content unlike him, hence he envies them. He feels the same for his faith:

I would have liked to believe in God. Now there was something that could have been everything better than anything else. By believing in God, I could succumb to ease and comfort and reassurance. Fearlessness was an option! Eternity was mine! It could all be mine: the awesome pitch of organ pipes, the musings of Anglican bishops. All I had to do was put away my doubts and believe. Whenever I was on the verge of that, I would call myself back from the brink. Keep clarity! I would cry. Hold on to yourself! For the reason the world was so pleasurable, and why I

wanted to extend that pleasure through total submission to God, was my thoughts—my reasoned, stubborn, skeptical thoughts—which always unfortunately made quick work of God. (6)

Ferris hails Lucifer for his rebellious character in the Bible. “Non serviam! cried Lucifer. He didn’t want to eat the faces of little babies. He just didn’t want to serve. If he had served, he would have been just one more among the angels, indistinct, his name hard to recall even among the devout” (7). Just like Lucifer, Paul also does not conform to the rules of God, and he is not like other angels, as Paul is not like everybody. However, also, like Lucifer, he is lonely in hell, i.e. around normal people. He is aware of the meaninglessness of the world, his freedom to choose, and his own-most possibility: his death. Thus, “authentic Dasein is possible only with an intense awareness of the ever-present possibility of death” (West, 112).

### **3.2.2.3. Death / Anxiety**

Death is one of the dominant themes in the novel. Paul, the main character, is an authentic individual who is aware of the possibility of death. He is a being-towards-to-death, so he feels anxiety. He fears the death of his beloved ones after his dad died. That’s why as soon as he buys a puppy, he wants to return it thinking about the dog’s life expectancy. Once he sees the puppy, he immediately starts thinking about the negative side of it, which is death. As Heidegger states, ‘once you are born, you are old enough to die.’ Paul is also aware of the potential end of the dog and himself. The puppy would:

be a dog in no time, and while he would appear to the human eye to remain unchanged for years, every day he’d be getting older, slowly but inexorably approaching death. When he died Connie and I would be bereft, which was, aside from being dead ourselves, the worst of all human things to be. (202)

Only human beings are aware of the possibility of death since they can think about the future. That’s why, only human beings feel anxiety. The dog will not commit suicide due to the meaninglessness of life, for example. Paul faced death at the very beginning of his life: his father’s death. He knows that death is a facticity of life and a border of freedom

for him. He has to think about death all the time and knows the bitter side of being subject to death. He asks: “Do you know how embittering it is to watch something delight in the simple things while you’re consumed by the subject of death?”

Similarly, he does not want to have a kid. He thinks he would not recover from the death of his kid. The kid will remind him of his age and how close he is to die:

But I’d be pretty old by then, past forty for sure, and I’d start thinking less about that son and heir and more about how goddamn old I was, more than halfway to death, while that kid being called to, with his steel-cut bowels, in the flower of health, made happy by trifles, was steadily outliving me. Fuck that, I thought. I’m not having kids if they’re just going to remind me of my dying every living day. (...) I didn’t want to live in perpetual fear. People don’t recover from the death of a child. I knew I wouldn’t. (81&82)

Other than Paul, there is another character, Eddie, who becomes aware of the possibility of death and, as a result, feels anxiety. When Eddie’s dentist, Dr. Rappaport, died, he fell into a depression. He stopped taking care of his teeth and himself since it did not make any sense anymore. Eddie was going to the same dentist for over thirty-seven years and never thought he could die. Eddie understood that if this could happen to his dentist, death was coming for him, too.

## CONCLUSION

Even though existentialism is a philosophy, it always has a place among fictional works. For this reason, most of the representatives of existentialist philosophy such as Soren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus utilized fictional works to convey their thoughts. Even this fact indicates how existentialism applies to the works of literature. In this thesis, the main issue is to show how existentialism's main concerns appear in Joshua Ferris's novels in the context of American culture and literature. As it can be seen, one reason for Ferris to employ existentialism in his novels is that it corresponds to the features of American society; that is to say, their isolation, inauthenticity, and their conformity to extreme consumerism, which are results of capitalism. Therefore, the main goal of this thesis is to investigate and analyze Ferris's novels, in which he observed and exposed existential aspects of American society in depth. In his first novel, *Then We Came to the End*, for instance, Ferris depicts the modern office environment. In the other novel, *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*, on the other hand, he depicts an American who is a baseball fan and a dentist. From the analysis of these novels, the reader can earn a sense of consciousness about existential philosophy and observe how the concerns related to existential thought have been portrayed in contemporary American society.

Therefore, the thesis begins with the theoretical background so that the reader can be familiar with the main concepts of existentialism. This part begins with existence precedes essence, because this is the main proposition of the existential philosophy. However, when analyzing novels, this proposition was not mentioned or employed in-depth for two reasons. First and foremost, this is not a concept, but an idea or statement that provides a philosophical ground for existentialism. Additionally, since the concepts of existential philosophy correlate with each other, they are, in a way, the defining vocabulary of each other. For this reason, one should first understand and accept that essence is prior to existence to understand other concepts, such as: freedom, choice, responsibility, anxiety, authenticity, and death. In short, one may call this proposition the major premise of existential philosophy. The emphasis in this statement is made on

individuality and freedom. When an existentialist states ‘existence precedes essence,’ what they are referring to is human consciousness and freedom. However, this freedom does not have a positive or negative connotation. For example, for Sartre, the fact that human beings have to be free leads to anxiety, and living despite this anxiety is called authenticity. After all, what makes us human and what makes us authentic is our awareness of death, and inauthenticity is either denying this fact or our freedom.

This also explains why the concepts were explained in this order. After all, there is a line that starts from the ‘existence precedes essence’ premise to death. Death is mentioned at the end of the theoretical section because death is at the end of human experience. One may even call it the last experience. However, existence may be seen as the first experience or first action that human beings take. In the same line, one must remember that most of the existential philosophers are inclined to assimilate life to a road or a path. In this path, you have free will or you may deny it. You may even deny the fact that you are on the road to the end, which is death in an existential sense. One may even feel anxiety when they realize that they are on the road. Whether you are aware that you are on the road or not, you are on the road to your death. Even if escape is an option, this is only possible with freedom. Even if you escape death, your escape relies on your freedom.

This allegory seems to apply to Ferris’s second novel, *The Unnamed*, since it is about a man, Tim Farnsworth, who cannot stop walking, and how these walks ruin his life. Yet, in this thesis, this novel is excluded for several reasons. First and foremost, it has some of the existential concepts, but not as successful and inherent as the novels included here. Second, this book does not clearly or properly set existential concepts. The novels included here present existential concepts in real-life scenarios. His first and last novels are about Americans who are not satisfied with their lives despite having everything. Whereas in his first novel, *Then We Came to the End*, the focus is on an inauthentic group of people, in his last novel, *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*, the focus is on an authentic individual who suffers from existential anxiety. Therefore, the main emphasis in the analysis part is on the concept of authenticity. Freedom, authenticity, anxiety, and death are common concepts of both novels. In *Then We Came to the End*,

the characters, considered inauthentic individuals in this thesis, joke about death and are reacting to death as if they will never die. On the other hand, one of the characters diagnosed with cancer, Lynn Mason, suffers from anxiety since she is so close to death. In *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour*, the main character, Paul, is afraid of death and feels anxiety because of death. He is a being-towards-to-death, in Heideggerian terms. Additionally, in this thesis, when authenticity and inauthenticity concepts were enlightened, America as a capitalistic society is also analyzed from an existential perspective. In the analysis section, it was discussed how American capitalism causes inauthenticity. Apart from the concepts stated above, in the first novel, the freedom concept and concerning that incompleteness concept which is the result of freedom, are also analyzed. In the novel, characters are never satisfied with what they have, and they are always in search of what is missing in their lives. This incomplete situation was discussed in terms of the concept of freedom. As for the second novel of this work, the fact that the main character, atheist Paul O'Rourke, having difficulty accepting his place in society makes an effort to make sense of life was discussed in terms of the concept of freedom.

Additionally, some further research can be made on Joshua Ferris's literary identity or his novels. First of all, Joshua Ferris is a living author, and this thesis only covers his works that have been published so far. For this reason, one must note that he is an active author who is still working on other novels. For instance, as he states in his interviews, he is currently working on a new novel, about his father. He also hopes to write a novel about Antarctica in the future. This shows us that he may address some other issues or points that we are yet to be aware of. For example, he may write on recent political or sociological events, such as the Capitol Hill takeover, the Black Lives Matter movement that occurred in the United States, or the Covid-19 Pandemic. He has the potential to come up with a new approach to recent events.

What's more, Joshua Ferris's novels can be read through other perspectives. One may even try to read it through the lense of American Romanticism or more specifically American Transcendentalism by taking the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson or Henry David Thoreau into consideration. For the sake of the argument, one may even try to

compare and contrast Ferris's *The Unnamed* with Thoreau's *Walking* to understand his works. However, in this thesis, this idea is excluded, because it does not reflect the main idea of this thesis, which is to posit Ferris's novels success to observe and depict the gap of meaning in American society in terms of existentialism. However, it must be noted that this gap will be filled again through capitalism. Capitalism produces its products to fill this gap. These products are artificial meanings or senses created for specific purposes.

In this sense, American existentialism is an immediate result of American Capitalism and American pragmatism. Existentialism is true because it corresponds to the reality of American society. As in the case of Ferris's novel, *Then We Came to the End*, the advertisement sector, for instance, fills the existential gap caused by capitalism by appetizing their wish to products they do not need. This idea resembles Karl Marx's opinion about religion too. As Marx said, "Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people" (n. pag.). As religion did it before, now artificial meanings and senses are the opium of the masses in capitalism. Nowadays, social media provides it to the masses. People desperately embrace these artificial meanings, senses, or truth, and they are keen on living an inauthentic life. They are distracted from their existence.

In terms of this thesis, since the United States is the capital of capitalism, and it is the captain of popular culture, every issue which occurs as a result of capitalism there, will occur in the rest of the world, too. At some point, these issues will spread over other societies through dominant popular American culture. This thesis can also be extended including American existentialism in the theoretical part apart from French or German existentialism. For this, the studies of George Cotkin can be researched. In his *Existential America*, he explains the historical background of American existentialism and argues that "The history of existential thinking in America began before Sartre first uttered the word 'existential'" (Cotkin, 6).

Consequently, in this thesis, contemporary American author Joshua Ferris's *Then We Came to the End* and *To Rise Again at a Decent Hour* were analyzed in terms of

existential concepts of philosophers, Soren Kierkegaard, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Martin Heidegger. In the first chapter of the thesis, existentialism was attempted to be defined even though giving a concrete definition is not possible by its nature. Then some relevant information was given about the lives of Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre and their views of existential philosophy, respectively. At the end of the first chapter, five existential concepts, existence precedes essence, freedom, anxiety, authenticity, and death were clarified. In the second part of the thesis, Joshua Ferris's life and his literary identity were discussed. Last of all, but most importantly, in the third chapter, in the light of existential philosophy Ferris's two novels were analyzed, and as a result, American society was analyzed from an existential perspective so that this piece of work, can inspire other academic works and compose a familiarity with the novels of Joshua Ferris for those interested in existential thought.

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## RESUME

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

First Name: Büşra

Last Name: Coşkun

### WORK EXPERIENCE

1. English Instructor – Bezmialem Vakıf University  
(September 2019 – Present)

2. Volunteer for Europa Macht Schule Project – Deutscher Akademischer  
Austauschdienst (DAAD)  
(December 2018 – March 2019)

3. English Instructor – Nişantaşı University  
(October 2016 – June 2017)

### EDUCATION

Degree	Department	University	Year
Master's Degree	American Culture and Literature	Ege University İzmir / Turkey	2017-2021
Erasmus (M. A.)	American Studies	University of Regensburg Regensburg / Germany	2018-2019 Fall Term
Bachelor's Degree	American Culture and Literature	Dokuz Eylül University İzmir / Turkey	2012-2016
Erasmus (B. A.)	English Studies	University of Oradea Oradea / Romania	2014-2015 Spring Term
High School	Foreign Languages	Davutpaşa High School İstanbul / Turkey	2008-2012

## **FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

English (Advanced)

German (Intermediate)

## **CERTIFICATES**

Pedagogical Formation Certificate, Dokuz Eylül University, 2016

Certificate of Honor, Dokuz Eylül University, 2014/2015 Fall Term

