

INTRODUCTION TO EXISTENTIALISM

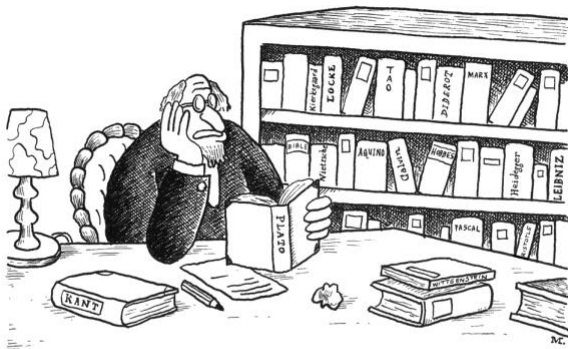
Dr. Daniel Tutt
Email: tutt@gwu.edu

PHIL 1193
CRN: 92858

Course Description:

Existentialism is a movement in philosophy typically associated with a group of 20th century French philosophers who made the name popular. The name “existentialism” tends to evoke images of philosophers sitting around at cafés drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, pontificating morosely about despair and angst. But existentialism should not be understood as an armchair philosophy disengaged from the world, when in fact it was born during one of the most fraught political situations of the 20th century: the Nazi occupation of France. Many of the ideas that existentialist philosophers emphasize—individual freedom, ethical commitments to others, resistance, alienation within society etc.—are deeply informed by this experience with resisting fascism. Indeed, one of the most powerful aspects of existentialism, unlike many other forms of professional philosophy, is that it explores the practical dimension of human life and seeks to probe topics that too often go ignored by philosophers.

In this course we aim to move beyond the clichés and popular understandings of existentialism to examine it on its own terms, as a philosophical system commenting on everything from the nature of reality, to the emotions, to our ethical commitments to others and society. Our aim is to deconstruct key arguments in this body of work. We will engage existentialist philosophy with the idea that one cannot critique a philosophical system without first trying it on, as it were. So be prepared to become an existentialist. You are invited to open yourself up to adopting the philosophical perspectives developed in the texts we investigate throughout the course.



-There has to be more to life than to occupy oneself
with its meaning!

We will read seminal existentialist philosophers Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir as well as the philosophical precursors to their thought such as Kierkegaard and Hegel. We will look at the legacy of existentialism in other areas of thought such as race and politics. For example, we will read excerpts of the *Autobiography of Frederick Douglass* with an existentialist lens. After gaining a firmer understanding of existentialism we will examine our contemporary social situation

and apply the perspectives we have learned to facing the challenges of 21st century living, from social media, labor and exploitation, to what Byung-Chul Han names the “performance society.” We will ask whether the existentialist perspectives are still relevant today, and if not, why. We will consider more contemporary existentialist perspectives such as Sara Ahmed’s work and Clément Rosset’s masterful book *The Real and its Double*, which looks at questions of fate, freedom and truth. Finally, we will conclude by putting existentialism on trial by reading some of the most important critiques of

existentialist thought.

Here are the thematic areas we will investigate throughout the course:

1. Meaning, Wisdom and the Absurd
2. Existentialist Precursors: Pascal, Kierkegaard, Hegel
3. Phenomenology and Consciousness: Being and Nothingness
4. Living with Others: Identity, Community and Otherness
5. The Present Age: The Performance Society
6. Moods and Emotions: Anxiety, Shame, Happiness
7. The Real and its Double
8. Race, Power, Resistance
9. Existentialism on Trial

Course Vision:

In this course you will learn many of the fundamental concepts to philosophy and become familiar with some of the foundational texts in existentialism. You will see what professional research in philosophy looks like, and develop skills for reading analysis, argument evaluation, and both written and oral communication. But those goals are, to my mind, the least important. The most important goal is to become a more reflective, engaged, and self-aware individual. I hope that you finish the class noticeably more existentially self-aware and sensitive to how philosophy applies to your life and the world. Ideally, you will become better able to articulate that sensitivity, and more practiced in existential reflective habits of mind.

Course Aims and Objectives:

This course satisfies the Critical or Creative Analysis criterion as part of the analytical approach required by the General Education Curriculum of the University. Critical Thinking involves: analyzing and evaluating abstract information; understanding and analyzing scholarly literature and argument, particularly with respect to theoretical orientation and sources of support; and formulating logical arguments based on that analysis.

1. Analyzing and evaluating abstract information

Students will compare, analyze and critically evaluate different theoretical frameworks for understanding concepts such as freedom, authenticity and responsibility. Many of our texts will examine these themes through highly abstract and systematic philosophical concepts. The course will make use of literature and film in order both to illustrate and critique those theories.

2. Understanding and analyzing scholarly literature and argument, particularly with respect to theoretical orientation and sources of support.

Students are required to demonstrate their understanding of complex and interrelated concepts across a range of difficult and sophisticated texts. They should demonstrate an ability to identify, assess and compare competing interpretations of central themes and concepts. Our texts present a number of deep and nuanced disagreements. Students will be required to demonstrate in class discussion and through written work their comprehension of these differences and disagreements.

Students will be required to exercise two different sorts of critical and interpretive skills: first, to show how abstract and theoretical concepts fit and help to explain important elements of literature, film, history and the contemporary social world. Second, to show conversely how these elements can be used to develop, sharpen and test those same abstract philosophical concepts.

3. Formulating logical arguments based on that analysis.

Students are required to construct original logical arguments of their own, informed by our texts, class discussions, online interactions, and some basic secondary literature.

GRADING AND ASSESSMENT

Grades will be assigned based on the following 5 criteria:

1. Reflection papers (3 total): 40%
2. Class attendance: 10%
3. Group work and group presentation: 20%
4. Mid-term exam: 15%
5. Final exam: 15%

Total hours in class: 33.75

Total hours outside of class: approximately 40

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Required Books

Students must purchase the four required books for the course. All other readings will be provided electronically on PDF and stored on Blackboard.

Clément Rosset
<i>The Real and its Double</i>
ISBN: 0857420348
Publisher: Seagull Books
Byung-Chul Han
<i>The Burnout Society</i>

ISBN: 978-0804795098
Publisher: Stanford Briefs
Jean-Paul Sartre
<i>Being and Nothingness</i>
ISBN: 978-0671867805
Publisher: Washington Square Press
Robert G. Olson
<i>An Introduction to Existentialism</i>
ISBN: 978-0486200552
Publisher: Dover Publications

Reading Expectations

All readings including the specific page numbers to read in preparation for each class are listed below in the course schedule. The readings are difficult and as a result of that difficulty, students are encouraged to bring their confusion to class and group discussions. Students are also expected to take notes on what they read and to read directly from the book (you can read secondary literature or summaries if that is helpful). You will be expected to come to class prepared to discuss the readings for that specific day.

*If at any point you are struggling with the readings you are expected to raise that with the professor and set up a meeting time during office hours.

*I may periodically add readings that are not listed in the day-by-day class schedule below in the event we need more perspective or focus on a particular theme or issue.

Participation

Participation will be an important part of this course. By the second week of the course you will be working in assigned groups in nearly every class, to help each other with class assignments, proofing each other's work, and discussing the materials together. There are no set amount of participation points to earn during the semester, but there is a minimum for full participation marks. You will earn participation points by actively participating in group exercises, answering or posing questions during lecture, submitting questions or responses to the discussion boards, being selected in group activities, and so on.

You can lose points, too. For instance, I will not start the semester with a laptop policy. I do not like to limit laptops because so many of our readings are in .pdf form. However, if I notice that you are on your laptop or other device looking at something other than material for the course (doing email, Facebook, web browsing, etc.) I will mark points *off* your participation grade. Likewise, if you come to class unprepared, show that you have not studied the day's reading, do not actively participate in group activities, etc. you might lose a point for that day. As a baseline, if you do nothing more than come to class every

day adequately prepared to discuss the material, have little presence on the discussion boards, and are not selected for any class-wide presentations, you will receive a B or B+ in participation. If you are absent you will not receive participation points for that day, and so will need to make those up at some other time to receive full marks.

Attendance

You are allowed up to *three* unexcused absences. If you are absent on a day when you are supposed to share material with your group, you are responsible for getting that to them somehow. It will be up to group members if they are will and/or able to provide feedback at some time outside of class. Every unexcused absence after your third will result in a *percentage and a half* off of your final mark for the course.

Writing Assignments

1) Bad Faith and Authenticity - Write a personal reflection in which you examine a source of bad faith in your life and how you overcame it. Sartre suggests that bad faith is not necessarily overcome by good faith, but by authenticity. Do you agree with Sartre's analysis of faith in general? Reflect on how one overcomes bad faith according to Sartre and whether you agree with his analysis, why or why not.

Prepare a short statement – submit a brief statement of the issue you will analyze, along with a short paragraph describing the nature of the problem and how you plan to approach it to your group members for feedback at least one week before the paper is due. Group members are expected to provide feedback to one another on the short statement before they write their main paper.

Paper – Up to four pages, Times New Roman, Double Spaced, 12-point font.

Paper due Friday 9/27 by 6 pm.

2) The Present Age and Existentialism – Write a paper in which you examine the proper way to think about one's public existence. Should you, as Kierkegaard seems to say, turn away from the public in order to cultivate inwardness? Or should you, like Sartre says, try to take responsibility for your being-for-others and make it your truth? How does Byung-Chul Han's idea of the "performance society" change your views on existentialism, if at all? For example, do you see similarity in the performance society with Kierkegaard's idea of the aesthetic? What would a more authentic community or public sphere be like? Etc.

Prepare a short statement – submit a brief statement of the issue you will analyze, along with a short paragraph describing the nature of the problem and how you plan to approach it to your group members for feedback at least one week before the paper is due. Group members are expected to provide feedback to one another on the short statement before they write their main paper.

Paper – Up to four pages, Times New Roman, Double Spaced, 12 point font

Paper due Friday 11/1 by 6 pm.

3) Fate, Truth and the Primary Scene – write a personal reflection paper on your understanding of the idea of a primary scene and how, as Rosset argues, all truth is oracular in structure. Is there a primary scene that determines your life? In what way do you negotiate with this primary scene and how do you understand it? You are also welcome to examine the idea of a primary scene in an example that is less personal if you do not feel comfortable going into details about your personal life. For example, discuss Frederick Douglass' primary scene and how this might have determined his fate.

Prepare a short statement – submit a brief statement of the issue you will analyze, along with a short paragraph describing the nature of the problem and how you plan to approach it to your group members for feedback at least one week before the paper is due. Group members are expected to provide feedback to one another on the short statement before they write their main paper.

Paper – Up to four pages, Times New Roman, Double Spaced, 12 point font

Paper due Friday 11/29 by 6 pm.

4) Existential Feeling – Group Project: You will work in your small groups on this project. Decide on an existential mood, attitude, or feeling that you believe illuminates a core or intriguing aspect of the human condition. You will either deliver a presentation or compose a video to share with the class about this feeling, etc. You might examine this website ([The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows](#)) for inspiration. Try to come up with a creative way to communicate and evoke the concept in question.

Existential Feeling Statement – Brainstorm in your groups and decide on the existential feeling you will address for your project. Be sure that it is a compelling and serious—even if humorous—feeling. Part of your mark for this assignment will be whether you have chosen something realistic and compelling. Submit a brief description and explanation of the feeling.

Precis: Write a three to four-page precis of the philosophical concepts and arguments used to explicate your existential feeling. Explain how your presentation raises the feeling, and how it illustrates and/or examines the philosophical issues involved. Due by FRIDAY of week you present. The entire group submits one paper.

Presentation/Video: Prepare a presentation of no more than 5 minutes. Be prepared to answer questions afterwards for another 5 minutes.

Group presentations will take place in-class on 10/30 and 11/4

5) Mid-term and final exams: The mid-term and final exam will be in-class in essay format. Each exam will contain 3 – 4 questions that raise questions and themes we have discussed and studied throughout the course. Students are encouraged to cite their understanding of the readings, lectures and class discussions in their essays. Exams will not be open book, but students will be able to print out their notes on the readings and use their notes (up to four pages of notes are permitted). Students will be graded based on how well they convey their understanding of the material addressed in class including the readings, lectures and discussions.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Date	Title	Author	Location & Pages	Assignments	Theme
M: 8/26	Course Introduction	N/A	Provided in Blackboard	Read “Existentialism and Popular Wisdom”	Introduction
W: 8/28	“Existentialism and Popular Wisdom” + “The Myth of Sisyphus”	Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus	Provided in Blackboard	Form groups	Meaning, Wisdom and the Absurd
M: 9/2	No Class				Meaning, Wisdom and the Absurd
W: 9/4	“The Wager” + “The Human Condition” (Chapter II in Olson)	Blaise Pascal & Olson	Provided in Blackboard & Olson chapter II		Existentialist Precursors: Pascal
M: 9/9	“Fear and Trembling” + “Philosophical Fragments”	Søren Kierkegaard	Provided in Blackboard		Existentialist Precursors: Kierkegaard
W: 9/11	Hegel’s Master Slave Dialectic	Georg W.F. Hegel	Provided in Blackboard		Existentialist Precursors: Hegel
M: 9/16	“The Dialectic of the In-Itself and For-Itself”	Jean-Paul Sartre	<i>Being and Nothingness</i> Pgs. 56-85		Phenomenology and Consciousness: Being and Nothingness
W: 9/18	“Bad Faith”	Jean-Paul Sartre	<i>Being and Nothingness</i> Pgs. 86-118		Phenomenology: Being and Nothingness

M: 9/23	“Bad Faith” + “Authenticity” (Chapter V in Olson)	Jean-Paul Sartre & Olson	<i>Being and Nothingness</i> Pgs. 86-118 & <i>Introduction to Existentialism</i> 134 - 161		Living with Others—Identity
W: 9/25	The Look	Jean-Paul Sartre	<i>Being and Nothingness</i> Pgs. 340 – 380		Living with Others—Otherness
M: 9/30	The Look + “The Other” (Chapter VI in Olson)	Jean-Paul Sartre & Olson	<i>Being and Nothingness</i> 340 – 380 & <i>Introduction to Existentialism</i> Pgs. 162 – 191	Paper #1 Due Friday “Bad Faith and Authenticity”	Living with Others—Otherness
W: 10/2	<i>Woman as Other</i>	Simone de Beauvoir	Provided in Blackboard		Living with Others—Otherness
M: 10/7	“The Herd” + “The Present Age”	Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard	Provided in Blackboard		The Present Age: Background
W: 10/9	“It’s All Over” + <i>The Burnout Society</i>	Justin Smith and Byung-Chul Han	Read PDF of “It’s All Over” and introduction + first section of <i>Burnout Society</i>		The Present Age: The Performance Society
M: 10/14	<i>The Burnout Society</i>	Byung-Chul Han	Continue reading <i>Burnout Society</i>	Mid-Term Exam in Class	The Present Age: The Performance Society
W: 10/16	<i>The Burnout Society</i>	Byung-Chul Han	Finish <i>Burnout Society</i>		The Present Age: The Performance Society
M: 10/21	No class fall break				Moods and Emotions: Anxiety

W: 10/23	“Everyday Being-With” + “The Basic State of Mind of Anxiety”	Martin Heidegger	Provided in Blackboard		Moods and Emotions: Anxiety
M: 10/28	“Existentialism and the Emotions”	Jean-Paul Sartre	Provided in Blackboard	Paper #2 Due Friday: “Existentialism and the Present Age”	Moods and Emotions: Shame
W: 10/30	“Happiness Objects”	Sara Ahmed	Provided in Blackboard	In Class Group Presentations: “Existential Feeling Project”	Moods and Emotions: Happiness
M: 11/4	<i>The Real and its Double</i>	Clément Rosset	Read introduction and Chapter 1	In Class Group Presentations: “Existential Feeling Project”	The Real and its Double
W: 11/6	<i>The Real and its Double</i>	Clément Rosset and Sophocles	Read Chapter 2 + Sophocles’ <i>Oedipus</i> play excerpts PDF		The Real and its Double
M: 11/11	<i>The Real and its Double</i>	Clément Rosset and Socrates	Read Chapter 3 + Sophocles’ <i>Oedipus</i> excerpts PDF		The Real and its Double
W: 11/13	<i>The Real and its Double</i>	Clément Rosset	Finish Chapter 3 + Conclusion		The Real and its Double
M: 11/18	<i>Autobiography of Frederick Douglass</i> + “Aunt Hester’s Scream”	Frederick Douglass and Fred Moten	Provided in Blackboard		Race, Power, Resistance
W: 11/20	“Phenomenological Whiteness”	Sara Ahmed	Provided in Blackboard		Race, Power, Resistance
M: 11/25	“Through the Hellish Zone of Nonbeing” + “The Lived Experience of the Black Man”	Lewis Gordon and Frantz Fanon	Provided in Blackboard		Race, Power, Resistance
W: 11/27	<i>Anti-Semite and Jew</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre	Provided in Blackboard	Paper #3 Due Friday: “Fate, Truth and the	Race, Power, Resistance

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				Primary Scene”	
M: 12/1	<i>The Jargon of Authenticity</i>	Theodore Adorno	Provided in Blackboard		Existentialism on Trial
W: 12/4	“A Marxist Critique of Existentialism”	György Lukács	Provided in Blackboard		Existentialism on Trial
M: 12/9	<i>Introduction to Critique of Dialectical Reason</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre	Provided in Blackboard	Final Exam Wednesday, December 18, 2019 5:20pm- 7:20pm DUQUES 251	Existentialism on Trial

Introduction to Existentialism

Lecture Notes August 26 – September 23rd

Professor Daniel Tutt

Fall 2019

Day One (Aug 26)

Section Theme: Meaning, Wisdom and the Absurd

Notes on Simone de Beauvoir's essay: *Existentialism and Popular Wisdom*

One of the key ideas of existentialism is that "we are condemned to freedom." The idea here is not that we can overcome our situation: a bourgeois is a bourgeois a proletariat is a proletariat (for example) but regardless of our social roles or situations, each individual has the freedom to rebel or to succumb to their lot.

This means that we are free, but our freedom in no way relieves us from *having to make ourselves free*. We determine ourselves existentially by an attitude. If we do not assume our freedom it becomes another thing, it becomes a determinism.

This is why for many existentialists, as Simone de Beauvoir writes, "Man is the unique and sovereign master of his destiny *if only he wants to be*. This is what existentialism affirms, and certainly this is an optimism."

Existentialism is different than the popular wisdom in that for the popular wisdom, "Man is a mechanism for whom self-interest and lust are the essential motivations. His feelings are reduced to a more or less subtle play of forces."

de Beauvoir thus argues that existentialism places a higher onus on the individual to take responsibility for their freedom. The general social wisdom, on the contrary, affirms that individuals should be permitted to follow their self-interest and feelings. Existentialism, as de Beauvoir argues, calls upon the individual to face a more fundamental relationship to their freedom.

Existentialism, she argues, "does not intend to disclose to man the hidden suffering of his condition either, but only wants to help him assume this condition that is impossible for him to ignore."

She also argues that popular wisdom is found in "giving misfortune the least hold possible, which leads to an ethics of mediocrity. "The quiet life is the happy life." The idea here is similar to the sort of anonymous being that Heidegger and Sartre talk about. In other words, society encourages us not be noticed, and not try to embrace too much. As she states, "He who grasps at too much loses all."

The idea she is getting at is that society argues we should content ourselves with a respectable mediocrity: not too much, not too little. Let tranquilly cultivate our garden. All ambition is dangerous, even moral ambition. She writes, "Let's not try to be a hero or a saint but only what is called a respectable man. Virtue is finding the appropriate mean; he who tries to be an angel ends up making a fool of himself."

Question to consider:

1. Is this a realistic portrait of society today? Is this allowance of mediocrity in fact the case? We will see later in Han's notion of the "performance society" this framework of permissible mediocrity may not be the case. What do you think?

What then does it mean to be an existentialist according to de Beauvoir?

Here is an important point towards the end of de Beauvoir's essay: "The question will seem strange to any philosopher. Neither Kant nor Hegel ever asked himself what one would gain by being Kantian or Hegelian. They said what they thought was the truth, nothing more."

Day 2 (Aug 28)

Notes on Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Camus is an absurdist and one of the basic ideas of absurdism is that philosophy cannot apprehend the world try as it might. Another way to say this is that reason, calculation and other forms of formalizing experience cannot account for life. This is why as we look at Sartre's phenomenology in the future, even this sort of structured account of reality will be unhelpful for Camus.

He writes:

"This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world" (7).

How is the absurd produced? The longing for clarity in man and the irrational and unreasonable nature of the world.

"From the moment absurdity is recognized it becomes a passion the most harrowing of all" (8).

Philosophy is therefore found in what? Camus says it is found in humiliation. This is very important; philosophers will give different accounts of the primary affect that founds wisdom. For Sartre it is anguish, for Camus it is humiliation.

On suicide as an introduction to the idea of the absurd:

At the heart of this essay is a contemplation on suicide. Suicide raises the question as to whether there is a logic to the point of death? At the end of the chain of life we are faced with

the question of whether suicide or recovery should be in order? Committing suicide is what settles the absurd. Thus, the question of suicide is really more of a prompt that draws one into the absurd. Suicide and contemplating suicide is a prime example of how we are drawn into the absurd!

Absurdity determines my relationship with my life. From the moment absurdity is recognized it becomes a passion – a passion for ignorance. What is the relationship between absurdity and ignorance?

For Camus, the absurd becomes God. But the absurd, which is the metaphysical state of the conscious man, does not lead to God (7). Camus writes, “Perhaps this notion will become clearer if I risk this shocking statement: the absurd is sin without God. The absurd is not a fact but a state – the state of sin – it is a state that does not lead to God as Kierkegaard imagined” (14).

Questions to consider:

1. In class we discussed the theme of how the absurd arises as a contingency that we can't master. In some sense, this means that the absurd hits us when we are confronted with life's contingencies. What are some examples of how contingencies enter into your life and short-circuit reason and our innate interest in keeping the contingent under control?
2. What do you feel like when the absurd hits you? How do you recoil from it? Camus says that abjection is the affect of the absurd. How do you sense abjection and not flee from it? Think about fleeing from abjection in a common sense. When you ask a friend who is agitated what's wrong and they say “nothing” – they may be hiding a deeper feeling of abjection. Absurdism is asking that we take account of those sorts of feelings!

Absurdism and dialectics:

Camus writes that “Absurdity comes around from a comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality, between an action and the world that transcends it” (10).

The absurd is thus a divorce – it lies in what is produced in this confrontation which is an asymmetry. Absurdism is thus an anti-dialectical philosophy in that it affirms a fundamental paradox and contradiction that is not resolvable. Dialectics is a form of thinking that seeks a surpassing of contradictions towards a new synthesis or *sublation*. We will explore this more when we look at Hegel's master slave dialectic.

Camus and absurdism differ from the existentialists in that their reason is negated and escapes in a dialectic with the irrational. The absurd on the other hand “the divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together” (17).

Freedom and the absurd:

Knowing that man is free means nothing for Camus. Knowing whether man is free or not is knowing whether she/he/they can have a master. Thus, for Camus, coming into a relation to the absurd or feeling the absurd restores freedom of action but it closes down transcendental or reason-based forms of freedom.

Camus writes: "If I accept that my freedom has no meaning except in relation to its limited fate, then I must say that what counts is not the best living but the most living" (21).

Three principles are opened from the absurd:

1. Revolt
2. Passion
3. Freedom

If the myth of Sisyphus is tragic that is because he is conscious of his being in the absurd and has accepted it. He/she/they has accepted their fate in an almost determined way. They have come to peace with paradox and contradiction and found a way to persist and be happy. Finally, as Camus ends his essay, "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" (24).

Question to consider:

1. Does embracing paradox and contradiction imply accepting certain social arrangements? Camus, for example, gave up his revolutionary ideals from his youth as his philosophy of absurdism matured. What are the merits and shortcomings of this philosophical orientation?

Day 3, 4 and 5 (Sept 4, 9 and 11)

Section Theme: Existentialist Precursors: Socrates, Pascal, Kierkegaard and Hegel

In this section of the course we examine some key existentialist precursors including one of the founders of western philosophy Socrates, as well as religious precursor philosophers Pascal and Kierkegaard as well as Hegel. None of these philosophers called themselves an existentialist because the name of this philosophical movement had not yet been founded in their time. It was founded in the 20th century. However, there are very important motifs and themes from their work that has had a major influence on existentialism. In what follows, I identify these key themes from their thought.

Background on Socrates:

Socrates is considered one of the founders of philosophy in the western tradition and he practiced a dialogical form of lived philosophy in his community of ancient Athens. His method, known later as the "Socratic method" was to interrogate citizens of Athenian society on the areas they hold to be most dear. So, he would interrogate a poet about what makes their idea of beauty or aesthetics in poetry true? Or he would interrogate a politician about how they arrive at the true point of justice. What Socrates found time and again in these exchanges is

that the people he was interrogating in fact had no firm or clear idea of the basis of truth they were supporting.

These exchanges with his fellow citizens developed a reputation and following for Socrates including one of his students and colleagues Plato. Plato would base much of this idea off of Socrates's street philosophizing.

What Socrates was living out was a decree from the Oracle at Delphi who told him that he is the wisest man in Athens, and he is wisest because he knows that he knows nothing. For Socrates, his examinations of other citizens are simply his way of living out what the oracle had instructed him to do.

However, for the governors of Athens, Socrates and his influence on the youth proved too much. He was brought to trial and as you read in the Apology, or the witness of his trial by Plato, the accusation against him was as follows: "Socrates is an evil-doer, and a curious person, who searches into things under the earth and in heaven, and he makes the worse appear the better cause; and he teaches the aforesaid doctrines to others" (2).

Socrates is accused of corrupting the youth and disobeying the Gods of the state. His retort is to affirm that he never disobeyed the Gods but merely lived out his oracular calling by following the oracle's prophecy. Socrates' trial appears to end in either a death sentence or a permanent exile from Athens. He rejects both options and argues that death would either result in a permanent nothingness in which case why fear it, or it would result in another form of existence in which case he could continue his method of examination with others.

Socrates chooses death and famously notes that the "unexamined life is not worth living."

Socrates's relation to existentialism + notes on Kierkegaard's "Philosophical Fragments"

Socrates is important for existentialism in many ways. For Kierkegaard, as we read in his "Philosophical Fragments," Socrates stands out as the example of what a teacher is at their very best. Socrates is a great teacher because in his examinations the other discovers their own untruth only by themselves. Kierkegaard says, "the untruth, then, is not merely outside the truth but is polemical against the truth, which is expressed by saying that he himself has forfeited and is forfeiting the condition."

The teacher is what Kierkegaard calls "untruth" or "the God himself who acting as the occasion, prompts the learner to be reminded that he is untruth and is that through his own fault."

Thus, the Socratic method of philosophy is equivalent to midwifery, Socrates helps people give birth to themselves. Kierkegaard also writes that a teacher helps one become "born again" and thus owes no human being anything but owes that divine teacher everything.

What Kierkegaard is saying here is that Socrates helps people become acquainted to philosophy because he points out the split in their assumed knowledge and a higher form of knowledge (the nothing) – this split in knowledge can be thought about as a split in truth as a higher plane and knowledge as based in the senses. This is why for Socrates and for Plato truth is always a break from the senses or the empirical.

The Socratic figure (in general) is thus what Kierkegaard calls an “ironist” in that he practiced absolute negativity in his teaching. Absolute negativity is another name for the constant questioning that brings knowledge to a zero point where it can no longer account for truth. This means that Socrates helps people enter into a subjective state of becoming towards a higher form of truth.

Socrates is an existentialist precursor because he brings his fellow citizens into a subjective relationship to the truth. The Socratic method is premised on the idea that the given knowledge, norms and values have lost their validity entirely; they have become an imperfect form that is a hindrance everywhere. Thus, the task of the philosopher is to provoke this realization in others and to question given wisdom, values and knowledge.

Something to consider:

1. Socrates is closely aligned with existentialism because he associates truth and truth-seeking with a subjective split. In other words, his method, as we saw above, provokes a split in our subjectivity; his method thus destabilizes our presuppositions about the world. In many ways, this means that Socrates brings us out of the “in-itself” as Sartre discusses, i.e. Socrates is a philosopher of negation. Keep Socrates in mind as we read in Rosset’s *The Real and its Double*, he will argue that the very nature of reality is oracular.

Notes on Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*

In many ways, the best way to read this essay is to think of it as a wider discussion on what individuality means. Kierkegaard is a religious existentialist and the essay is taking Abraham’s command from God to sacrifice his son Isaac as the highest paradigm of individuality, what he calls the “Knight of Faith.” Another name here for the ideal type of individual for Kierkegaard is “the singular individual.”

Kierkegaard writes:

“The singular individual, sensately and psychically qualified in immediacy, is the individual who has his telos in the universal, and it is his ethical task continually to express himself in this, to annul his singularity in order to become the universal.” (104).

Kierkegaard wants to say that the singular individual is higher than the universal truth itself. Again, he is focusing truth on the importance of the subjective affirmation of the universal. Abraham’s willingness to follow God’s command enables him to suspend the universal in his very subjectivity, this means that Abraham enters into an infinite resignation.

“He resigned everything infinitely, and then he grasped everything again by virtue of the absurd. He is continually making the movement of infinity, but he does it with such precision and assurance that he continually gets finitude out of it, and no one ever suspects any-thing else.” (92)

Thus, what I gain in infinite resignation is my eternal consciousness. The name that Kierkegaard gives to this subsumption into the universal is the “ethical.” Abraham goes beyond the ethical into what Kierkegaard calls faith.

The Knight of Faith is thus a different and superior form of being than the other model of infinite resignation from Greek antiquity, what Kierkegaard calls the “tragic hero.” The tragic hero is still within the ethical whereas Abraham is in the realm of “faith.” For the tragic hero there is a teleological suspension of the ethical, whereas Abraham transgressed the ethical and had a higher telos (or connection to the universal) outside it, in relation to his subjective act of suspending the ethical.

What is the higher end (*telos*) that motivated Abraham’s act? Kierkegaard writes:

“Here the necessity of a new category for the understanding of Abraham becomes apparent. Paganism does not know such a relationship to the di-vine. The tragic hero does not enter into any private relationship to the divine, but the ethical is the divine, and thus the paradox therein can be mediated in the universal” (94).

Questions to consider:

1. Here again we see that the Knight of Faith, in a way similar to Camus’s absurdism, is based on an embrace of paradox at the core. Because the universal cannot be mediated, Kierkegaard is denying dialectics in favor of embracing a form of subjective affirmation and higher choice.
2. Do you think that this religious form of individuality in Kierkegaard’s the Knight of Faith relates to you personally? Are there forms of decision in your life, such as a social or political cause, or maybe religion itself, that might orient you towards the realm of faith? Or do you think that Kierkegaard’s idea of faith can be thought of in a non-religious way?

Notes on Blaise Pascal’s “The Wager”

The importance of this essay for existentialism is the emphasis it places on the necessity to decide in the face of the irrational and the collapse of reason. Similar to how Camus points out with his idea of the absurd, Pascal will argue that when it comes to believing in God and being a Christian (although you can extend that to other forms of belief in God) requires a wager on a fundamental mystery or point of unknowability.

Pascal says, "God is, or He is not." But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here. There is an infinite chaos which separates us. A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. The question is: what will you wager? According to reason, you can do neither the one thing nor the other; according to reason, you can defend neither of the propositions.

Thus, Pascal says:

"You must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. Which will you choose then? Let us see. Since you must choose, let us see which interests you least. You have two things to lose, the true and the good; and two things to stake, your reason and your will, your knowledge and your happiness; and your nature has two things to shun, error and misery. Your reason is no more shocked in choosing one rather than the other, since you must of necessity choose."

For Pascal, philosophy was undergoing a movement of rationalism where truth was largely becoming more objective and tied beyond mere empirical or sense perception. A mechanical view of the universe and the human body was becoming more and more *en vogue*. Pascal thus held that truth was ordered in the following three ways:



In general, the Enlightenment was a movement of philosophical influence on society throughout Europe in the late 16th to 17th centuries culminating in the French revolution. The Enlightenment was premised on the following ideas:

- Human reason possesses a unique source of individual freedom.

- Society is progressing to a better state due to this reason providing greater freedom for people.
- Emphasis on tolerance of religious difference and new definition of the rights of man.

The Enlightenment had various strands of political agendas:

Moderate Liberal Branch:

Enlightenment is available to a few that possess the proper training or mastery/education.

. Kant, Locke, Rousseau

Radical Branch:

Enlightenment is available to all because reason is available to all.

. Spinoza, Mary Wollstonecraft, Diderot

Conservative Branch:

Enlightenment must be limited and tradition must be put in its place.

. Burke, Hamilton

Pascal is an early Enlightenment philosopher and he paves the way as an important precursor to existentialism because he wrote his philosophy to shape a particular class within society with his ideas of truth. This is a theme we see in Kierkegaard, Socrates, and even Sartre. Pascal wanted to bring the class of educated elites, artists, writers and others who began to become disenchanted with religion into a new way of experiencing religious truth that did not rely on the rationalism of his time. His essay is largely an effort to those who serve God and those who seek him despite the fact they do not know God.

Question to consider:

1. How does Kierkegaard's idea of infinite resignation and Pascal's wager relate? What actually happens when one wagers or when one enters the highest form of existence what Kierkegaard calls "the ethical"? Both authors place a major emphasis on the subjective decision. Think about the role of decision in your own belief decision. Are decisions indeed that catalytic for self-realization?

Notes on Hegel's Master Slave Dialectic:

This excerpt from Hegel's wider work *The Phenomenology of Spirit* is very important in the history of philosophy. The master slave dialectic has influenced a number of political philosophies and it provides a way to think about the grand arc of history and the way that consciousness seeks recognition from others and how ultimately the master ends up in a position in which their own freedom goes unrealized.

For our purposes we should start by noting what Hegel says about consciousness. He says that an individual's consciousness is made up of:

1. A package of cells, a senseless package of things and sense perception – the in-itself.

2. This self-consciousness comes to know itself through the other – this is what Hegel calls the “for-itself”
3. This individual can be recognized by an other and enter into a recognition relation with the other – this is what Hegel calls the “for-other”

Consciousness is the pure I, i.e. it is sensory perception. The master slave relation is the moment in which consciousness removes itself from itself and realizes it is partially dominated by the existence of an other consciousness. In other words, consciousness, in order to recognize itself, must pass through an other consciousness.

Hegel writes that “self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another.” Consciousness thus hangs in its very being on the recognition by the other.

There is not an individual and an other rather there is a consciousness that must integrate the recognition of the other in its very being. Again, self-consciousness is born only in so far as an other recognizes it.

Let us now look at the various movements of the master slave dialectic as Hegel develops it:

- When self-consciousness is faced with another self-consciousness it comes out of itself. First, it loses itself and second it surpasses the other and sees its own self.
- At this moment self-consciousness has what Hegel names an “ambiguous otherness” that brings about a return into itself.
- Hegel says that the two self-consciousness’s must engage in a life and death struggle *in order to raise their certainty of being for-themselves to truth*, both in the case of the other and in their own case. He writes:

“It is only through one’s life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in the expanse of life, but rather that there is nothing present in it that could not be regarded as a vanishing moment.”

- Just as each stakes life, each also stakes death. The trial by death does away with the truth that was supposed to issue from it. It does not develop certainty of self because the negation was of being and not of consciousness and negation of consciousness is one in which the two self-consciousness’s learn that life is as essential to it as pure self-consciousness.
- At this point the lord and bondsman are realized. The lord is consciousness for-itself but it is bound up with a consciousness that is not his. This relates himself to a consciousness that is independent. What Hegel is saying here is that consciousness longs for independence. The lord takes the dependent aspect of the thing and has pure

enjoyment of it. But importantly this thing remainder that is produced by the slave's labor is not something the lord fully has an autonomous relation to. Hegel wants to say that this excess thing produced by the slave is a way to understand how the lord will remain in unhappy consciousness because what is produced is not in any way by his/her own independence.

- In the master slave dialectic, the lord receives his recognition through another consciousness and that other consciousness is something unessential; both by its working on the thing and by its dependence on a specific existence.
- The outcome: recognition is unequal. The lord is not certain of being-for-self and the certainty he was after is not an independent consciousness. The lord's truth is unessential consciousness.
- Who possesses the independent consciousness? Hegel says the slave does. The moment of pure being-for-self is explicit in the bondsman but for the lord it is an object. For the slave, fear of the master is the beginning of wisdom.

I want to draw attention to the way in which the master and the slave relation produces a third term which is the thing itself – the thing of consciousness.

The master and the slave differ in relation to the thing. One commentator has put it this way: "Compelled to defer his immediate satisfaction from his own desire, for the desire of the other, the slave will in the end be the inventor of culture because he is the inventor of a desire that is dispatched from the formation of the thing. The slave is the one who sublimates the thing to create culture."

The master and slave enter into a life and death conflict, this is an identity conflict which places the two in a struggle that goes beyond biological life, it is a struggle where Hegel says:

"One is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is the lord, the latter is the bondsman."

The master recognizes self-consciousness at the expense of life accepting the risk of death. The slave is in a state of pure desire, the master in a state of enjoyment without desirous creativity.

Questions to consider:

1. We can see that Hegel's dialectic is seeking a ground of freedom that evolves over time. By his idea of *sublation* or preservation of the old in the new movement, the dialectic is an unfolding of freedom over time. We also see that Hegel's idea of consciousness is very powerful. Consciousness longs for a certainty and independence and is scandalized by an other consciousness. Can you think of some social and or political examples of

how the master slave dialectic is at play? What about the evolution of American popular music (rock, jazz, etc.) from the hymns and chants of enslaved Africans?

2. Do you agree with Hegel's idea that the master will ultimately suffer from the unequal exchange? Are there forms of domination that may go on indefinitely, i.e. are there master slave dialectics that simply are not dialectical and remain fixed?
3. How might we start to think of the difference between the dialectic (more broadly construed) and the existentialist and absurdist insistence on embracing paradox, mystery and ambiguity?

Day 6, 7 and 8

September 16, 18 and 23

Section 3: Phenomenology and Consciousness: *Being and Nothingness*

Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) is probably the most cited and the most important philosophical work of existentialism. It is a text that put existentialism on the map and popularized the movement. We will spend the most time with this primary text compared to any other primary text. Although we will not read the entire text our goal is to dive into some key sections: Bad Faith, The Look and some of his sections on other themes.

Sartre's view on consciousness: intentionality

For Sartre, there is a pre-reflective consciousness, in other words in order to count one must be conscious of counting. Every consciousness thus entails a consciousness of existence.

Like Hegel argues, consciousness is a being for whom being is in question insofar as this implies a being other than itself. Consciousness is determined by intentionality, that is, it is determined by what it is of, by what it intends.

Notes on "The Origin of Negation" (page 33 – 56)

We are questioning beings and in our questioning we are faced with non-being—between the questioner and questioned there lies a third term: the nothing. Being is and outside of that it will only allow a classical negation.

How does one establish judgment on the being-in-itself? I only come to understand something in its being by understanding its status as non-being. For example, if I see a broken clock I only know that it is broken because I know what a working clock does.

Sartre asks: what is the humans' relation to nothingness? He argues that non-being is not the opposite of being as Hegel claimed; it is its contradiction (47).

He warns that we must be careful not to posit nothingness as a pre-abys before being as Heidegger does. Here is an important quote in this regard:

“Reversing Spinoza we could say that every negation is determination. This means that being is prior to nothingness and provides the ground for it. Non-being exists only on the surface of being” (49).

For Heidegger there is a pre-ontological comprehension of being. As such, for Heidegger we have anguish when we face nothingness as a phenomenon. But Sartre will argue that nothingness arises in a different way. He argues that it arises by a mental act. Being is a plenum of existence in which man has the unique role of bringing the nothing into existence. Anguish is the primary affect for Sartre, similar to how humiliation is primary for Camus. In anguish we discover the double nihilation of the nothing; that the world has established itself in nothingness in order to apprehend that contingency (51).

Two regions of being: the in-itself and the for-itself

There are two regions of being that Sartre homes in on in the text. It is important that we get a grasp of how they interact so that we can understand the basis of his idea of freedom.

The first region is what Sartre calls the in-itself. The in-itself is pure being; it is inert and exists only by virtue of being surpassed by the for-itself. So the in-itself is a region Sartre will associate with the logic of identity; of $A=A$.

The for-itself is always in a process of becoming. The essence of the for-Itself is to always be in a process of becoming, it is the power to secrete the nothingness. So that there may be being, the for-itself must exert its lack of being in order for there to be being. It would thus be self-contradictory to merge the for-Itself with the in-Itself – akin to the mystic longing for merging with the absolute. The two cannot coincide.

This is why there is a vicious circle between the two and why an exit from this circle becomes the central task of freedom. So there is a dialectical tension between the in-itself and the for-itself and when we look at bad faith we find an example of how this dialectic stalls out.

Notes on Bad Faith (pages 86 – 112)

Bad faith is when we flee from anguish in order to cover up the nothingness that we are. Sartre says that in bad faith we are “anguish-in-order-to-flee-anguish” within the unity of a single consciousness.

Sartre asks, what are the conditions of being in order that one has bad faith? Bad faith is a human reality, “which is what it is not, and which is not what it is” (100). We should note that this is the condition of the in-itself; to exist in a state that is out of sync with itself, or out of sync with the nothing that determines it.

He argues that existentialism offers a more robust way to think bad faith than psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis relies on a theory of bad faith based on principles derived from the unconscious

and certain regions that dictate man's attitudes, namely the ego, id and the superego. We don't have to understand these concepts in detail. Most importantly, however, we should note that Sartre argues the idea of the censor (ego) is false because it delegates a sphere of human action and behavior that is out of man's control (the unconscious). He writes:

"I am my own psychic phenomena insofar as I establish them in their conscious reality..." "but I am not them when I interpret that my motive for doing so is determined by an external principle of repression such as the Oedipus complex..." (95)

His critique and denial of the unconscious is so strong that he even argues that psychosis is in fact conscious and founded in a choice at least at the level of consciousness.

To return to bad faith, Sartre asks, if man is obligated to be what he is then in bad faith what is being imitated is the being of what it is to be what one is. Bad faith is thus a form of falsehood that is different from lying. It is a form of falsehood that turns consciousness not outward but inward.

What is lying? Lying is concerned with the transcendent (with knowledge of things in the world) not with consciousness itself. A lie is thus cynical consciousness because the liar knows full well what it is conscious of. The lie does not put into question the inner structure of consciousness whereas bad faith does.

Bad faith vs. sincerity:

Sartre says that good faith is faith in its immediacy whereas bad faith is awareness on that faith – bad faith is *faith in faith*.

Sincerity and good faith are both belief in-itself. They are thus inadequate. Bad faith takes refuge in not believing what it believes. Good faith flees into being from not believing what one believes.

In sincerity, to be what I am is to be the in-itself (identity) but what are we if our being is constantly demanded to be who we are? So sincerity is inadequate for Sartre because it re-affirms the circle of the in-itself by only relying on the inert status of the in-itself.

An example of how sincerity is inadequate is shared in his example of the homosexual's friend who claims that his way to escape his situation is to simply affirm who he is. For Sartre this is inadequate because in addition to affirming that the homosexual should also engage his project in a more robust way; i.e. he must take responsibility for the avoidance of anguish at the heart of his situation.

Examples of bad faith:

Sartre gives some problematic and controversial examples of bad faith that include a woman on a date, the waiter and a homosexual.

1. Sartre shares an example of a young woman on a date that avoids her anguish. She has disarmed the actions of her companion by reducing them only to the in-itself. This is an example of bad faith that distorts the relation between the other's for-itself. The woman on the date does not cultivate an independent for-itself but relies on her partner's for-itself. So the woman on the date is experiencing a facticity that is not hers but the others.
2. The waiter in the café is playing the game of being the waiter in the café. He is playing the in-itself too closely. According to Sartre, I am a waiter not in the mode of being-in-itself, but in the mode of being what I am not. The waiter thus assumes his role purely within the in-itself and forecloses any touch with the transcendence of the for-itself. He does not cultivate a distance from the role he is supposed to play.
3. The example of the homosexual is sort of like the opposite of the waiter. He does not assume his thing status. He does not assume who he is for the other. The homosexual considers not-being in terms of not being in-itself, he denies the in-itself which is to say that he denies being as an inert thing, as an inkwell. Sartre says that he has a sincere friend who says his situation can be resolved by owning up to his identity and actions despite the pain it might bring about. But the homosexual refuses this sincere path and instead flees his situation in order not to be a thing.

The essential problem of bad faith is a problem of belief! Sartre suggests but does not develop a theory of authenticity in wherein one can overcome bad faith by making a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted.

What is faith after all? The problem with bad faith is that it is faith. Faith involves the adherence of being to its object when the object is not given or is given indistinctly. Since all consciousness is consciousness of being conscious, believing must itself be consciousness of believing.

Bad faith rejects evidence; it refuses to be persuaded – bad faith relishes in the notion that all faith is impossible. For example, Sartre writes, “my inability to believe that I am courageous will not discourage me since every belief involves not quite believing. I shall define this impossible belief as my belief”. The knowledge that one is a coward threatens to destroy one's belief. Bad faith seeks to flee what it cannot flee, to flee what it is. It then reveals an inner disintegration that bad faith takes one at its core.

Questions to consider:

1. The three examples of bad faith all seem very dated. What is the role of social norms and values in these examples?
2. Do you think that one can escape bad faith and enter authenticity? What might that look like?
3. Do you think that Sartre is right about faith in general? Must we therefore abandon faith totally?

Notes on Sartre's "The Look" (pages 340 – 380)

For Sartre, the other is the one who is not me and the one who I am not. This relation to the other is what Sartre calls “ontological,” i.e. when I say I am not Paul it is the same as saying the table is not the chair.

Sartre says that the look of the other is an “internal negation.” The look touches me at the level of my unreflective consciousness, i.e. it exposes my engagement in the world as non-thetic; that is, as completely absorbed in what I am doing.

When I am looked at this exposes a distance that removes me from my in-itself and non-thetic engagement in the world. Sartre writes:

“I am a pure consciousness of things and things, caught up in the circuit of my selfness, offer to me their potentialities as the proof of my non-thetic consciousness (of) my own possibilities” (347).

The look also provokes affective responses of shame or pride. Sartre writes:

“It is through shame or pride which reveals to me the Other’s look and myself at the end of that look. It is the shame or pride which makes me live, not know the situation of being looked at” (350).

Shame is shame of self, it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a given object (350).

The other provokes my nothingness because their freedom determines my being. It is by my very shame that I claim freedom of another.

Thus, **SHAME PROVOKES THE IN-ITSELF**. The look provokes a sense of my nature that escapes me and is unknowable as such. My nature, by virtue of the look, is therefore an attribute of the being I am for the Other (352).

What relations can I be in with shame? My shame is a confession and I use bad faith to hide it. But bad faith is also a confession because it attempts to flee from being which I am. I perceive the other as free according to Sartre... the other therefore presents the for-itself (Freedom) to my project.

By my shame I claim as mine the freedom of the other. I wish in shame that the other confer on me a being that I recognize (351).

The other’s look makes me no longer a master of the situation.

- Fear, unlike shame, is the feeling of being in danger before the other’s freedom.
- Pride and shame is the feeling of being what one is but over there for the other.

- Shame is what confers on the other an indubitable presence. “It is never eyes that look at us it is the Other-as-subject” (369).
- In short there are two immediate attitudes provoked by the look:
 - In shame I recognize the Other as the subject through whom I get my object-ness.
 - Pride is acting in my capacity of an object I then attempt to make use of my inert object state to send a return shock to the other that express admiration or love.

This is all based on a wider claim that the existence of freedom and consciousness precedes and conditions the self’s conditions in the world (363). This means that I cannot be my own nothingness; there must be an object that presents me to my own nothingness. But the other is not the meaning of this objectivity I undergo by the look, the other is the transcending point of it.

WHY IS THE LOOK SIGNIFICANT?

The look demonstrates, for Sartre, *how the self gains thematic awareness of one’s own body*, forming a public and self-conscious sense of how the body appears to others and, furthermore, it illustrates affective and social aspects of embodied.

Sartre argues that in order to fully realize all the structures of one's being, the self requires the existence of others, as some modes of consciousness (in particular reflective self-consciousness) can only be realized from the point of view of the other.

Importantly, Sartre references Hegel in this section on the look. He writes:

“While I attempt to free myself from the hold of the Other, the Other is trying to free himself from mine; while I seek to enslave the Other, the Other seeks to enslave me ... Conflict is the original meaning of being for-others”

The essence of relations between consciousness’s – in other words developing a self-certainty of one’s body is not based on a harmonious “Mitsein” with others, it is based in a conflict with the other’s consciousness. Conflict at the level of consciousness brings about “reflective self-consciousness.

There are thus three levels to the Look:

1. The other is present. Actually being looked at and seen by another person (epistemological case).

When the look is considered in this literal manner as a feature of an intersubjective encounter, it is the means through which I can garner some information about myself and the nature of my acts. The look in this case is instructive in the formation of my seen body: through being seen by the other, I realize certain features of my body and self.

Sartre argues that until I am objectified in this manner by the Look of the other, I do not have reflective self-awareness of the nature of my acts.

2. The other is imagined or absent (the Other). Seeing oneself as though through the eyes of another.

There are also self-evaluative looks that are not reliant on the actual presence of the other.

Sartre writes: 'By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in a position of passing judgment on myself as an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other'.

The Other is also taken up more generally as undifferentiated. "Look is not about being literally seen by another person, but rather, it is about seeing oneself from a distance, as though through the eyes of another. Certain events - footsteps, rustling bushes, moving curtains - can invoke the feeling of being under the watch of the Other, but these events are by no means necessary for judicative self awareness."

Sartre argues that the Other 'is present to me everywhere', thus when I realize that there is no one in the hallway, 'far from disappearing with my first alarm, the Other is present everywhere, below me, above me, in the neighboring rooms, and I continue to feel profoundly my being-for-others'.

3. The look is symbolic for an awakening of reflective self-consciousness. Self-awareness and self-reflection are made possible by the 'appearance' of the Other and maintained by the continued 'presence' of the Other.

The look demonstrates that 'I can know myself only through the mediation of the other'. It is through the Other's Look that I discover my body and awaken the capacity for reflective self-consciousness.

The awakening of reflective self-consciousness is a singular event: I do not need to keep encountering others and being subjected to the look (in the literal or imagined examples described above) in order to maintain self-awareness and the ability for self-reflection.

So the third level of awareness is one in which the self adjusts to the look, comes to determine itself as dependent but not in a prideful relation to the other. Shame is an important affect to the look because it is in shame that I attempt to carve out a freer sense of self that leads to self-reflective consciousness.

Questions to Consider:

1. Notice that in his discussion of the look the other plays a vital role in presenting the for-itself and in provoking the self to decide on the nothingness. Pride is bad faith for Sartre

because it does not free the self to decide on the nothingness. This is another way to think about bad faith. It is also an interesting way to understand why shame is a necessary affect of freedom because in shame I am presented to myself almost nakedly but also as reliant on an otherness that I have to manage, confront or deal with. How do you practically carve out a form of freedom from others in your life? Do you agree with Sartre that the other is not involved with your own relation to the nothingness? His argument is very interesting.

2. The body is discovered in the look in a way that is reflective because in the look one realizes that they are dependent on the other and they are presented to a freedom that was not present to their situation prior to the look. We should think of this not as a one-off look that provokes reflective self-consciousness, but as a composite dialectic over time. In other words we are continually gaining a deeper sense of our bodies, our reliance on others and our capacities for self-reflection are always growing.

Notes on *Woman as Other* by Simone de Beauvoir

She opens the essay with the provocative question: if today femininity no longer exists, then it never existed. Does the word *woman*, then, have no specific content? Beauvoir argues that it does have specific content.

But the dominant culture has put forward myths of femininity such as the “eternal feminine,” “the black soul”, the “Jewish character”, and these myths should not lead us to deny that Jews, black people, and women don’t exist today – this denial does not represent a liberation for those concerned, but rather a flight from reality that promotes bad faith.

Woman is an essence, she declares. But woman is an essence that is *socially constructed*, so we have to deal with it.

How women determine freedom is also based on the model of conflict that she and Sartre inherit from Hegel. The world has set up a situation in which man is the Subject, he is the Absolute – woman is the Other. There is thus a “master slave dialectic” of gender relations.

Crucial quote on dialectic and consciousness:

“Lévi-Strauss, at the end of a profound work on the various forms of primitive societies, reaches the following conclusion: ‘Passage from the state of Nature to the state of Culture is marked by man’s ability to view biological relations as a series of contrasts; duality, alternation, opposition, and symmetry, whether under definite or vague forms, constitute not so much phenomena to be explained as fundamental and immediately given data of social reality.’ These phenomena would be incomprehensible if in fact human society were simply a *Mitsein* or fellowship based on solidarity and friendliness. Things become clear, on the contrary, if, following Hegel, we find in consciousness itself a fundamental hostility towards every other consciousness; the subject can be posed

only in being opposed – he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the other, the inessential, the object.”

Beauvoir argues that man throws the woman into the in-itself.

“Every subject plays his part as such specifically through exploits or projects that serve as a mode of transcendence; he achieves liberty only through a continual reaching out towards other liberties. There is no justification for present existence other than its expansion into an indefinitely open future. Every time transcendence falls back into immanence, stagnation, there is a degradation of existence into the ‘*en-sois*’ – the brutish life of subjection to given conditions – and of liberty into constraint and contingency.”

Questions to consider:

1. Beauvoir argues that women’s liberation is tied up with a similar dialectic of struggle that both Hegel and Sartre discuss. What sort of projects for women’s liberation might her framework inspire? Is her form of feminism based on canceling men and replacing their mastery? Or is it something different?
2. How does one re-take the essence of one’s identity, how does one go about re-defining the essence of one’s identity that has been pre-defined by social customs, norms or power? What might be some examples of that?

10/9 and 10/14 Class notes:

Readings:

Byung-Chul Han’s *The Burnout Society*

BURNOUT SOCIETY:

Han’s short book is developing a theory of our present age in a way that is similar to Kierkegaard’s essay “The Present Age” that we read a few weeks ago. In the prior age of modernity, what Han calls the “bacteriological or viral age,” infections and pandemics were very common. There was therefore a set of techniques in law, medicine, security and other fields of social life that sought to protect the self from the other.

But in our present society Han argues that it is no longer pathogens but neurons that are activated. Otherness has been conquered and thus to understand social conflict we should look to the way in which positivity, not negativity determines social relations and the constitution of the self. He argues that today:

- Mental illnesses are largely neurological disorders, namely depression and hyperactivity. These illnesses follow from the dominance of positivity in our society, not from the

foreign or the other which triggered negativity in prior social arrangements. In the prior era the neurotic self was prominent, and neurosis generally has to do with the presence of the other within one's psychic life.

- In general, Han argues that the present society creates depressives and losers it does not create madmen and criminals.
- Han says that we cannot account for the sorts of illnesses of yesteryear which were neurotic symptoms based on immunological paradigms—burnout syndrome and depression are illnesses produced from an over-production of positivity, not negativity.
- The old paradigm of society was one in which the self was developed on an immunological basis. He says that now otherness has reached the level of a “virus” – but this is not a virus that will necessarily compromise the system of society but is one in which we co-habitat with this otherness. It is a weak otherness. Think about this in terms of cultural relations with others; are there really such strong differences across cultures that lead to social violence? Han seems to suggest that differences at the cultural level are far less pronounced than we often think they are.
- In fact, social violence today is not caused by violence over difference but is caused by a violence over the Same. This is a different sort of violence than that of the hostility to the other or foreigner that was prominent in earlier times.
- In prior social arrangements, the Other was present and Otherness had to be treated, managed, or even removed. Han argues that today's society, what he names the “performance society” has internalized this otherness, i.e. it has solved otherness (in some sense).
- We now have difference that replaces otherness. What does that mean? Difference, or otherness, no longer infects us, it no longer provokes the foreign; it does not provoke the same sort of anguish that the other provoked in previous social arrangements.
- The performance society does not place the role of duty front and center. In the prior social arrangement work and labor had a teleology bound up with them. Work and labor demanded a sacrifice based on duty and therefore suffering was meant to have a delivery at the end of the day.
- But in today's performance society, there are no longer social demands of duty to sacrifice, there are rather injunctions towards pleasure, personal freedom and inclination. This is what Han means by the performance society having ridden itself of otherness. By otherness, it has rid itself of the commanding other—or the superego demand is no longer what it was.

Chapter 2: “BEYOND DISCIPLINARY SOCIETY:

In the second chapter Han is responding here to an essay called “Postscript on the Societies of Control” by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze which I have provided in Blackboard. Han is now providing a periodization of his idea of the performance society. He is locating a point at which the performance society emerges in distinction to the “control societies” that dominated from the last 1800s up to the 1970s. As we saw above, this new social model, the “performance society,” there is a diminishment of authority.

In general, his argument about the performance society should be read as an intensification of a series of complex social factors I read it as arising in the early 1970s with globalization of capitalist markets. This process has accelerated up to our present day and this globalization has no made the world flat and eradicated difference – we treat otherness as difference, not as true otherness as we did prior to globalization.

In the control society model (from the 1800s – 1970s) social authority was based on the imperative of the should – you must act out of duty to your family, work etc. whereas now the social other is diminished and the injunction of the social other is based on **can**, and this goes to reinforce the **should** in a more internalized way. In other words, the social authority today says “yes, you can!” and this means that we internalize the command, and we may reach the “should” but it is up to us to reach it.

Something to consider: Han is saying we live in a time that is low in negativity. Keep in mind that negativity and negation was very central to Sartre’s philosophy. Why was that the case? How does Sartre’s philosophy match up to this new social condition Han is describing?

IS THE PERFORMANCE SOCIETY A THREAT TO EXISTENTIALISM?

One of Nietzsche’s ideas is that one must “become who you are.” In general, there is a huge emphasis in existentialist literature from Nietzsche, Kierkegaard all the way up to Sartre, on the singular individual and cultivating the interior life of the individual. Think of Kierkegaard’s “Knight of Faith” and the incredible interiority that Knight of Faith is based around. The question is: what does it mean to stoke a life of the interior when the life of the interior is no longer a rare thing to cultivate but is in fact tied up with the very power structure of the society we live in?

The performance society tells us that nothing is impossible and thus emphasizes achievement as the panacea of developing social meaning. But it’s not even meaning that is the promise, it’s something else. It’s unclear what the desired end of performance actually is.

Remember de Beauvoir’s argument in “Existentialism and Popular Wisdom,” where she said that existentialism encourages individuals to lead a life of singularity and not of mundaneness. Her point was that the general culture and social demand during her time in the mid 20th century was not the same as the performance society demands today which encourage everyone to be infinite possibilities.

In what ways does the performance society demand the same sort of singularity that existentialist philosophers advocated? It is almost as if the performance society has realized the problem of what Nietzsche called “herd mentality” and creates a demand to live beyond the herd.

Han wants to think singularity and authenticity in a way that resists the performance society demands to become your full self and to be radically unique etc. The depressed person falls out of step with these demands to love impossibility and become yourself. This means that the depressed person today is—in a paradoxical way—a person who resists the performance society injunction!

Realizing one’s singularity or interiority is actually made more difficult because in the performance society, people lack sovereignty to stake a ground of distinction from themselves to others. So Han will develop some ways to resist by cultivating techniques to slow down, come in touch with others and shrug off the demands of the performance society.

Profound Boredom:

What does Han say about boredom? He argues that in the performance society we have an inability to enter into boredom because of constant activity. We also cannot experience boredom because we have a diminishment of contemplation.

We cannot focus on things as they are. Depression and boredom are thus outlaw positions to inhabit in the performance society. The text is now moving towards some more practical ideas for how to resist the performance society.

How to resist the performance society: action vs. contemplation

Against the idea of cultivating a life centered on action first and foremost, which is what the performance society is all about, Han argues that we must think of a life centered on contemplation first and foremost. This is an old topic in philosophy: *vita activa* vs. *vita contemplativa*. Han advocates that we think of ways to maximize the contemplative life in our present society.

Han also makes a much wider point about religion and meaning in the performance society. He argues that the transcendent dimension has become fully absorbed with “bare life” itself. The closest we get to the sacred is self-care – yoga, exercise etc. this was foreseen by Nietzsche when he remarked that after the death of God, health will arise to a divine status.

The problem with *vita activa*, or a focus on the active life, as the philosopher Hannah Arendt theorized it, is that following action first means that one gives sway to an apparatus which has already seized habits. Han says that “it is an illusion that being more active means being more free.”

Han is not saying action is bad and we should all be contemplative monks. He is saying that we need to restore the ground of sovereign self-creation by entering states of boredom and contemplation before we can even think about real action in the world. Thoughtless action is destined to conform to the shallow demands of the performance society.

Tiredness:

What does tiredness connect us to? Han says there are two forms of tiredness, there is “I tiredness” and “we-tiredness.” In we tiredness, we are tired together, in an ethereal tiredness that holds us all together.

- I-tiredness is world less – does not relate to the other
- We-tiredness is abundant in the world – **it is related to the other**

We-tiredness, like boredom, is a strategy for retaking some ground of otherness and communal solidarity in the face of the desolate I tiredness of the burnout society.

Han argues that in the performance society we enter into non-mediated Experience where we lack a ground of contemplative reflection. This creates a general Experience that promotes narcissism – an entering into pure activity. Han instead advocates for the cultivation of mediated experiences, that is to consume art, news, social media etc. in such a way that we reject the constant unmediated flow of Experience.

Han theorizes two forms of resistance to the performance society. And he thinks resistance in terms of potency, or the potential to act or not to act. There is an affirmative and a negative form of potency.

- “Not to” – negative potency
- “Yes we can” – positive potency – this is the demand that animates the performance society!

The Sabbath day of rest in Judaism is a day “not-to”—it is thus a classic example of the sort of resistance Han is advocating. What does the not-to allow? When I say “I prefer not to” I am performing a double no because I am admitting that I could have chosen to, but I make that positive possibility present in my response and I simultaneously negate it by affirming my will/agency in preferring not to.

Han is interested in this negative form of potency as resistance because it opens up a space of play, a space where a rejection of the performance society demand to constant activity can be denied and a new space opened for non-active activity.

Something to consider:

- In Sartre's comments on ways to cultivate a life of authenticity he also emphasizes the power of play. Had you ever thought about play as a form of resistance as Han does? What might that look like?
- Towards the end of the text Han is seeking concrete ideas for how to restore the ground of otherness by emphasizing contemplation, boredom, negative potency and experiences.

10/23: Heidegger on Anxiety

Heidegger says that we are thrown into anxiety by virtue of the world and the feeling we get is one of "being nowhere and nothing" – this means that anxiety shows how frivolous entities truly are. Anxiety thus opens up the ontological split and exposes that entities in the world have a deeper connection to being than appears.

Heidegger has the idea that "dasein" or existence in the world is how we relate to the being of an entity – when we put things in the world in question we are raising the dasein of things. That which dasein comports itself is what Heidegger calls "existenz". This is because dasein always understands itself as a possibility of being – to be or not to be.

Dasein is threefold: 1) ontic (finite) and 2) ontological (open, infinite) 3) and dasein hovers over the possibility of all ontico-ontological possibilities.

HOW DO WE COVER OVER OUR ANXIETY? We use chatter in conversation or when we say "it was nothing" we reach that anxiety ontically.

Heidegger says that being in the world is that which in the face of which is anxiety (232). So Heidegger actually sees anxiety as something that can bring about a calm – it is the affect that is the most reflective and which splits being in the world in two, revealing the problematic way in which being hangs on things.

So in anxiety the world is disclosed. But anxiety throws dasein away from what it needs to authentically realize its being in the world – anxiety takes us out of the world as much as it indicates to us that there is a world. Importantly, being dwells in the world.

Similar to Sartre, anxiety individualizes dasein. It provokes a state-of-mind that helps us to realize how we are in the world. One feels the uncanny *unheimlich* in anxiety – i.e. one feels not at home because they are presented to the "nothing and nowhere." In anxiety.

As Simon Critchley says:

"But the existential resonance of anxiety is much more than methodological. The first thing to grasp is that anxiety does not mean ceaselessly fretting or fitfully worrying about something or other. On the contrary, Heidegger says that anxiety is a rare and subtle mood and in one place

he even compares it a feeling of calm or peace. It is in anxiety that the free, authentic self first comes into existence.”

Heidegger says that anxiety promotes individuality in the sense that it alienates us from “the they” or common speech and language—it introduces us to a deeper level of being in the world, not common discourse etc.

Sometimes we become addicted to the city we live in precisely because it allows our dasein to feel unmoored to feel not at home. Think of Washington, DC. Many of you are not from here and many of you have to come to peace with the fact that you are not at home. For Heidegger the anxiety this produces is such that you learn about a deeper level of being in the process.

Where do you flee when you have anxiety? Into social media? How do you recover from anxiety? What sort of entities do you invest in in the fall of anxiety? How do you recover your dasein?

Heidegger says we can flee into the uncanny. What about the other here? Can we flee into the other? Is the uncanny the other?

Heidegger's difference with Christianity is that the self's conversion is not undergone with reference to God, but only in relation to death.

Sartre on the Emotions from “Sketch for a Theory of the Emotions” 10/28 – 10/30

For Sartre, experiences such as fear, sadness, and joy transforms both our consciousness and our experience of the world—the instrumental, deterministic world disappears and, in its place, a magical world is ushered in.

Emotions, Sartre writes, “are . . . reducible to the constitution of a magic world, by making use of our bodies as instruments of incantation” (STE 47; cf. 57). On the other hand, during certain other emotional episodes such as horror, terror, or wonder, we apprehend the world magically from the very beginning.

FEAR:

Sartre says that fear is a consciousness whose aim is to negate something in the external world by means of magical behavior, and will go so far as to annihilate itself in order to annihilate the object also”

FORLORNESS:

Forlornness implies that we ourselves choose our being. Forlornness and anguish thus go together.

As for despair, the term has a very simple meaning. It means that we shall confine ourselves to reckoning only with what depends upon our will, or on the ensemble of probabilities which make our action possible.

- Note the importance placed on probabilities.

Sartre writes:

“The moment the possibilities I am considering are not rigorously involved by my action, I ought to disengage myself from them, because no God, no scheme, can adapt the world and its possibilities to my will.”

But how is the value of a feeling determined? What gives someone’s feelings for his mother value? Precisely the fact that he remained with her. I may say that I like so-and-so well enough to sacrifice a certain amount of money for him, but I may say so only if I've done it. I may say "I love my mother well enough to remain with her" if I have remained with her. The only way to determine the value of this affection is, *precisely, to perform an act which confirms and defines it. But, since I require this affection to justify my act, I find myself caught in a vicious circle.*”

In other words, the feeling is formed by the acts one performs; so, I cannot refer to it in order to act upon it. Which means that I can neither seek within myself the true condition which will impel me to act, nor apply to a system of ethics for concepts which will permit me to act.

For Sartre, “man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life.”

Moreover,

“To say that we invent values means nothing else but this: life has no meaning a priori. Before you come alive, life is nothing; it's up to you to give it a meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning that you choose. In that way, you see, there is a possibility of creating a human community.”

SARTRE ON DESIRE:

“The desire of being in its abstract purity is the truth of the concrete fundamental desire, but it does not exist by virtue of reality. Thus the fundamental project, the person, the free realization of human truth is everywhere in all desires (save for those exceptions treated in the preceding chapter, concerning, for example, "indifferents"). It is never apprehended except through desires-as we can apprehend space only through bodies which shape it for us, though space is a specific reality and not a concept.”

“Moreover we know that nihilation is lack of being and cannot be otherwise. *Freedom is precisely the being which makes itself a lack of being.* But since desire, as we have established,

is identical with lack of being, freedom can arise only as being which makes itself a desire of being; that is, as the project-for-itself of being in-itself-for itself. Here we have arrived at an abstract structure which can by no means be considered as the nature or essence of freedom. Freedom is existence, and in its existence precedes essence. The upsurge of freedom is immediate and concrete and is not to be distinguished from its choice; that is, from the person himself. But the structure under consideration can be called the truth of freedom; that is, it is the human meaning of freedom.”

- This definition of desire is crucial because it shows that desire is that which tethers with freedom, it does not have a positive object per se, but is founded in the negative movement of a lack of being. Think back to “the look” and how the other presents the for-itself into consciousness. That presentation is the opening of desire that we tether with in all situations!

Sartre on the emotions:

Sartre writes:

“We can now conceive what an emotion is. It is a transformation, of the world. When the paths before us become too difficult, or when we cannot see our way, we can no longer put up with such an exacting and difficult world. All ways are barred and nevertheless we must act. So then we try to change the world; that is, to live it as though the relations between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes but by magic.”

Sartre notes that “emotional conduct is not on the same plane as other kinds of behavior; it is not effectual. Its aim is not really to act upon the object as it is, by the interpolation of particular means. Emotional behavior seeks by itself, and without modifying the structure of the object, to confer another quality upon it, a lesser existence or a lesser presence (or a greater existence, etc.). In a word, during emotion, it is the body which, directed by the consciousness, changes its relationship with the world so that the world should change its qualities. If emotion is play-acting, the play is one that we believe in.” (64 – 65).

- Thus, emotion always has an element of belief attached to it. We remember in our reading bad faith that belief is a problematic concept for Sartre because it dwells outside of reality and takes the self away from the ground of determined freedom.

Fear: Active and Passive

Sartre notes two types of fear:

In active fear, he writes:

“We do not take flight to reach shelter: we flee because we are unable to annihilate ourselves in unconsciousness. Flight is fainting away in action; it is magical behavior which negates the

dangerous object with one's whole body, by reversing the vectoral structure of the space we live in and suddenly creating a potential direction on the other side. It is a way of forgetting, of negating the danger. It is in precisely the same way that an untrained boxer flings himself at his adversary with his eyes shut: he wants to suppress the existence of the other's fists; by refusing to see them he symbolically eliminates their efficacy."

In active fear it is consciousness whose aim is to negate something in the external world by means of magical behavior and will go so far as to annihilate itself in order to annihilate the object also.

Passive fear, on the contrary is a complete shutting down of the freedom of consciousness to respond to the object that is inducing fear. It would be fainting in the face of a beast attacking me.

On passive sadness:

Sartre says that in sadness, "the entire universe is bleak, and it is precisely in order to protect our-selves from its frightful, illimitable monotony that we make some place or other into a 'shelter'. That is the one differentiating factor in the absolute monotony of the world: a bleak wall, a little darkness to screen us from that bleak immensity."

On active sadness:

On active sadness, "the emotion of sadness is a magical play-acting of impotence: the patient is like one of those domestic servants who, having admitted burglars to their master's house, get them to bind them hand and foot, as a clear demonstration that they could not have prevented the theft."

"It might be said, perhaps, that the painful sense of liberty of which the patient wants to rid himself is necessarily of a reflective nature. But this we do not believe; and one has only to watch oneself to see what really happens. It is the object which presents itself as demanding to be freely created; the confession which presents itself as the deed which both ought to and can be done."

On Joy:

Sartre seems to be quite skeptical of joy due to its reliance on an object.

"Joy is magical behavior which tries, by incantation, to realize the possession of the desired object as an instantaneous totality. This behavior is accompanied by certainty that possession will be realized sooner or later, but it seeks to anticipate that possession. The various activities expressive of joy, as well as the muscular hypertonicity and the slight vascular dilatation, are animated and transcended by an intention which envisages the world through them."

“Many other fears are possible, many other kinds of sadness. We are only affirming that they are all reducible to the constitution of a magic world, the making use of our bodies as instruments of incantation.”

We can also have false emotions:

“In the various cases of false emotion that I have just mentioned, the behavior is not sustained by anything, it exists alone and is voluntary: but the situation is real and is thought to require such behavior. Moreover, through such behavior we magically 'will' certain qualities upon real objects: but those qualities are false.”

Real emotion is accompanied by belief:

“Clearly to understand the emotional process as it proceeds from consciousness, we must remember the dual nature of the body, which on the one hand is an object in the world and on the other is immediately lived by the consciousness. Only then can we grasp what is essential - that emotion is a phenomenon of belief. Consciousness does not limit itself to the projection of affective meanings upon the world around it; it lives the new world it has thereby constituted - lives it directly, commits itself to it, and suffers from the qualities that the concomitant behavior assigned to it” (77 – 78).

“This means that, all ways out being barred, the consciousness leaps into the magical world of emotion, plunges wholly into it by debasing itself. It becomes a different consciousness confronting a different world - a world which it constitutes with its own most intimate quality, with that presence to itself, utterly non-distant, of its point of view upon the world. *A consciousness becoming emotional is like a consciousness dropping asleep.* The one, like the other, slips into another world and transforms the body as a synthetic whole so as to be able to live and to perceive this other world through it” (78).

There are two ways that consciousness relates to emotions:

1. The consciousness has nothetic consciousness of self as abasing itself to escape the pressures of the world: it has only a positional consciousness of the degradation of the world, which has passed over to the magical plane. Still, a nonthetic consciousness of itself remains. It is to the degree that it does so, and to that degree only, that we can say of an emotion that it is not sincere. It is riot at all surprising, therefore, that the final aim of an emotion is not posited by an act of consciousness in the midst of the emotion itself. Its finality is not for all that unconscious, but it is used up in the constituting object” (79 – 80).
2. It is captive to itself in this sense - that it does not dominate the belief that it is doing its utmost to live, and this precisely because it is living that belief and is absorbed in living it. It must not be imagined that consciousness is spontaneous in the sense that it is always free to deny a thing and to affirm it at one and the same moment. Such a spontaneity would be self-contradictory. It is of the essence of consciousness to

transcend itself, and it is therefore impossible for it to with-draw within itself and to doubt whether it is outside in the object. It knows itself only in the world. And doubt, of its very nature, can be nothing but the 'constitution of an existential quality of the object; the (doubtful, or the reflective activity of reduction.

Here is an important quote:

“All emotions have this in common, that they evoke the appearance of the same world, cruel, terrible, bleak, joyful, etc., but in which the relations of things to consciousness are always and exclusively magical. We have to speak of a world of emotion as one speaks of a world of dreams or of worlds of madness.” (81).

Why are emotions magical?

Sartre writes:

“The magical, as Alain says, is 'the mind crawling among things'; that is, an irrational synthesis of spontaneity and passivity. It is an inert activity, a consciousness rendered passive. But it is precisely in that form that we appear to others, and this, not because of our position in relation to them, nor in consequence of our passions, but by essential necessity. Indeed, consciousness can only be a transcendent object by undergoing the modification of passivity. Thus the meaning of a face is, first of all, that of the consciousness (not a sign of the consciousness) but of a consciousness that is altered, degraded which precisely is passivity” (85).

On the Horrible:

“The horrible can appear only in a world which is such that all the things existing in it are magical by nature, and the only defenses against them are magical. This is what we experience often enough in the universe of dreams, where doors, locks and walls are no protection against the threats of robbers or wild animals for they are all grasped in one and the same act of horror” (89).

In horror there it is unclear whether consciousness invents and responds to horror by the presence of an object or whether the world already presents a horrific picture. Here are the two options:

1. Consciousness tries to combat these dangers or to modify these objects at no distance and without means, by some absolute, massive modification of the world. This aspect of the world is an entirely coherent one; this is the magical world. Emotion may be called a sudden fall of consciousness into magic; or, if you will, emotion arises when the world of the utilizable vanishes abruptly and the world of magic is the return of consciousness to the magical attitude, one of the great attitudes which are essential to it, with the appearance of the correlative world -the magical world. Emotion is not an accident, it is

a mode of our conscious existence, one of the ways in which consciousness understands (i.e. Heidegger's sense of *Verstehen*) its Being-in-the-World

2. The world may appear before it as an organized complex of utilizable things, such that, if one wants to produce a predetermined effect, one must act upon the determinate elements of that complex. As one does so, each 'utensil' refers one to other utensils and to the totality of utensils; there is no absolute action, no radical change that one can introduce immediately into this world. We have to modify one particular utensil, and this by means of another which refers in its turn to yet another, and so on to infinity. But the world may also confront us at one non-utilizable whole; that is, as only modifiable without intermediation and by great masses.

10/30 Class:

"Happiness Objects" by Sara Ahmed

Ahmed writes:

"If happiness is what we wish for, if happiness is necessarily our wish, it does not mean we know what we wish for in wishing for happiness."

This means that happiness does not have an object *per se*.

Ahmed is a self-declared "Killjoy Feminist" and she is tracking a feminist history of happiness, i.e. an alternative history of happiness by suspending the belief that happiness is a good thing.

What you describe as happy a situation that you wish to defend. Happiness translates its wish into a politics, a wishful politics, a politics that **demands that others live according to a wish**.

There is not one way to happiness. There is instead contingency, the way we are touched with things as they come into the world. This focus on the contingency of objects is a method Ahmed has adopted called "Queer Phenomenology" – a method designed to question the social value objects of happiness are supposed to provide to us.

One way to define happiness is that which happens to you – happenstance, chance, luck!

We have to remember that feelings do not necessarily originate in subjects but are also socially developed.

We also have unattributed happiness which is not clear what the object is. But often once we do know what the object of happiness is, we end up losing it. Happiness can be lost by virtue of its recognition.

Objects become *happiness means*, that is they become *instruments for the end of happiness*. Happiness is an end.

What is the problem with relying on a theory of objects to ground happiness? Ahmed writes:

“The very possibility of being pointed toward happiness suggests that objects can be associated with affects before they are even encountered. An object can point toward happiness without necessarily having affected us in a good way.”

But an object is understood retrospectively as the cause of feeling. This then converts into an anticipatory causality – objects cause us to feel something not even tied to our experience.

The philosopher Rousseau in his pamphlet on education *Emile*, revolutionized the focus of happiness on virtue – developing the idea that being good leads to happiness. A revolution in how happiness is considered.

We have object feeling where we share the same object that we feel with others but fellow feeling is that we share the experiences of others.

“This is how the promissory logics of happiness do more than make promises: to follow the paths of happiness is to inherit the elimination of the hap.” – they keep open luck and chance!

The example of the bride on the wedding day: we learn that it is possible not to inhabit fully one’s own happiness, or even to be alienated from one’s happiness, if one is made uneasy by the labor of making oneself feel a certain way.

An affect alien: when the objects break down! When they don’t deliver on their promises!

The feminist is an affect alien estranged by happiness.

of one’s disappearance. So much sadness revealed in the very need to be busy! So much grief expressed in the need not to be overwhelmed by grief! It is hard labor just to recognize sadness and disappointment when you are living a life that is meant to be happy but simply is not, which is meant to be full but feels empty. It is difficult to give up an idea of one’s life when one lives a life according to that idea.

Her wider project is well encapsulated by this quote:

“I want to think of consciousness of the *un* in *unhappy* as consciousness of being not. Consciousness of being *not* or *un* can be consciousness of being already estranged from

happiness, of lacking the qualities or attributes required for a happy state of existence. To be not happy is to be not in the eyes of others, in the world of whiteness, which is the world as it coheres around right bodies, or the white bodies.”

THE REAL AND ITS DOUBLE

***The Real and its Double* by Clément Rosset**

Lectures Notes for Classes on 11/4, 11/6, 11/11, 11/13

The Real and its Double is a highly accessible short book on the philosophy of reality. It probes the big questions: what is real? What is the nature of the self? What is the nature of truth?

Rosset starts off the first section by making an argument that the nature of reality is oracular, as in it follows the structure of an oracle.

He shares several examples of oracles across cultures, one Persian, one Greek and another European. He says, “there is an obvious structural similarity between the three stories: in all three, the prediction is fulfilled by the very act that strives to avert its fulfillment” (8 – 9).

In “Basil and the Vizier,” the oracle is proven by trying to avoid its fulfillment, in this case the fulfillment is that the son of the Vizier will die from a lion attack. By locking his son away, the oracle is fulfilled. Similarly, in *Oedipus* by Sophocles, it is by leaving for Corinth that Oedipus fulfills his oracle. By running away from his truth, his truth is fulfilled!

The event of the realization of the oracle took place, but its occurrence thwarted the expectation of the same event. One event literally thwarts the expected event—the thwarted event merges and overshadows the expected event. Rosset asks that there is something real that we can’t see or handle in this split in the real.

In other words, we escape a prediction by fulfilling it by mistake. The real event takes the place of an event that was *more expected and more plausible* (12 – 13). The trick of destiny is that she goes straight towards her goal.

The event that happens forces us to reject the other event that preceded it, the one that was predicted by the oracle. What is deceptive is the fact that the event has taken place. But the event that has happened has not replaced the other event, the other event is effectively nothing.

The problem is in the way the meaning of the two events play out.

Rosset says:

“By happening, the predicted event renders null and void the prediction of a possible double. In coming to existence, it eliminates its double; and it is the disappearance of this pale ghost.”

And...

“We do this to ourselves in that any expectation presents a structure of a duplicate – where there is a copy and an original. “one predicts without expecting its concrete realization and so what happens will always have amazement” (19).

“It is the real event that seems itself to be the double of the ‘other event’. It is, as a result, the real event that is, ultimately, the ‘other’: the other is this real, or the double of another real that may be said to be the real itself but which always eludes us and of which we shall never be able to say or know anything” (19).

Thus, the true real is elsewhere – it vanishes at the moment in which the coming-to-be-real occurs. The true original remains and what happens in the double is the bad real.

Where does the true real reside? What determines it? In the case of the three stories the true real is a parricide, a murder, or a fundamental aggressiveness—these situate the real.

Because reality is determined in this oracular structure, actual events that happen to us take on an unreal status, they are in some sense idiotic.

This leads Rosset to put forward the argument that: ALL REALITY has the structure of an oracle. “It is the fate of everything that exists to deny by its very existence any form of different reality” (21).

Every event therefore implies the other of its double and every existence (once the event has an existence) is a crime for killing off its double (21).

Rosset therefore defines destiny as the surprising and unpredictable events that happen to us. One can always be sure of being surprised and not expecting what happens. This is destiny.

All that is left at the end is that A comes to merge with A just as Oedipus merges with himself at the end of *Oedipus Rex*.

Chaos of meaninglessness wins out in contact with the real!

What this oracular structure means is that we as humans rely on another world to manage the real world we inhabit. Another world is called upon to account for this world. The oracular doubling of the event leads to the doubling of the real itself – this is what Rosset calls the “metaphysical illusion.”

Chapter 2: The Metaphysical Illusion

Rosset is now looking at the question of immediate reality – is it possible to live in the pure immediacy of reality, in pure sense perception? He says that it's not possible and that philosophers from Plato to Hegel has created a doubled world of perception in order to handle the immediate real. This doubling of the immediate real takes place because the immediate is inaccessible – one must therefore copy – but copy what?

The first impression copies nothing. Who lives in the immediate present? Only spiritually realized beings live completely in the present. Think of Buddhist monks that train for years and years to live in the present. But even meditation is itself not capable of capturing the immediate.

The immediate is only right for the Gods, says Rosset. What is the implication here? Human reality is not in sync with the present.

WHY IS THE REAL A PROBLEM?

If a double is necessary to approach the real, then what is so strong about the real, i.e. immediacy? Is the real too traumatic? Is it too disquieting? What does this say about us as humans that we can't live in immediacy? It says that we can't capture the present and we therefore need a double of it.

This is also why it is important to have a slight detachment from reality. But what reality? Do the Buddhists want to derive a detachment from the REAL that we create as a double, what is often called "representation," or do they want to create a detachment from immediacy? Here, Rosset is arguing that the immediate is the more vital real, so in that sense Buddhists are trying to break from the double – non-dualism is very important in Buddhism.

But the form of distance from immediacy he is talking about is different from the Buddhist form of detachment because in his view the double is a general psychological structure. Déjà vu is one such example of this necessary distancing or doubling. There is a denial of the present in any and all perception. The argument goes like this:

1. All perception of the present is based on a denial of the present.
2. We are duped by the singularity of the present, we are duped by the radical uniqueness of immediate reality itself.
3. The double leaves the unique behind as nothing. The uniqueness of reality implies both humiliation and a form of singularity that cuts very deep.
 - a. When we create a double we are yearning for more complication of reality – it is not to be pretentious – this is a common accusation waged towards people that are aspiring intellectuals – but Rosset comments, very nicely, that in fact the longing for complication is done to push away the real.
4. The double of the immediate real is what Rosset calls "metaphysical illusion" – it is a necessary illusion rooted in an anxiety – an uncertainty that one is what one is. That we are radically unique makes us anxious!

5. Philosophers also duplicate the present and make the present the central issue – I think we have this in Sartre’s idea of the in-itself and for-itself of consciousness once it undergoes the look.

Rosset says that *Déjà vu* is relegating the present to the past, it’s what makes the double appear.

- Philosophy, since Plato, erases the real (the present) and replaces it with the past of the future.
- We set the immediate aside and refer to it from another world.

What is the relationship between the spiritual aspect of this living in the present, living in the moment and philosophy—when philosophy provides a representation of the present but shelters the present from us?

LINK TO PERFORMANCE SOCIETY

Think about this in terms of the performance society – the incapacity to live in the present is one of the main issues at play. Think about how this doubling is done through social media and other forms of technological addictions.

Rosset argues that for Hegel there are three levels to illusion:

1. The immediate sensible
2. The supersensible
3. The mediation between the supersensible and the sensible.

Hegel names the third level the “upside down world.” The great ruse is that things are *as they are*, so that for Hegel’s dialectic, consciousness can’t understand immediate reality unless it has posited a supersensible double of it.

If things are as they are—this seems to imply that we are duped somehow. What are we duped by precisely? Rosset says that we are duped by the fact that things are raw and singular as they happen.

ON THE SPECTRUM:

Part of the reason why people on the spectrum are interesting or even why depressives are interesting for Han is precisely the fact that they speak reality, or in the case of depressives, they feel it. Perhaps depressives can’t make doubles.

The real is so **vivid it wounds!**

Chapter 3: The Psychological Illusion

In the final chapter Rosset argues that uniqueness has a fragility because “the uniqueness of the thing which constitutes its essence never has any participation in being” – so being is in what? Rosset says that being is found in negativity, in the nothing.

The duplication of Cratylus in Plato is the self itself – it is the unique self that is duplicated. This means that the self is not an object – it is a human being that is duplicated. This necessary splitting of the self is a central motif in literature and in mental health, schizophrenia etc.

An example of the dual self is found in painters. They rarely achieve the feat of drawing a very successful self-portrait.

Otto Rank, a psychoanalyst disciple of Freud argues that the double or doppelganger is a way to foist a theory of immortality on oneself. Thus, the anxiety is the subjects non-existence.

Rosset disagrees with Otto Rank that the double lies in mortality or immortality – he rather argues that the double lies in existence itself! This is what makes Rosset an existentialist.

Page 56 Rosset says: “much more than his imminent death, the source of the subject’s anxiety is his non-reality, his non-existence” (56). What the subject comes to doubt is this life itself in the double!

It is the double, or what Rosset calls the ghost that possesses the reality, not I. Therefore THE REAL IS ON THE OTHER’S SIDE! The reality of the self which is most real is found in the ghost or the double one makes of themselves.

If indeed I is an other, it is in killing the double that one kills oneself.

The vampire:

“The fate of the vampire, whose image—even inverted—is not reflected in mirrors, here symbolizes the fate of everyone: the fate of not being able to experience one’s existence with the aid of a real doubling of the unique, and hence of existing only problematically” (58).

The person haunted by a double lacks a double – the painter abandons the self-portrait, ultimately one cannot successfully complete it. Vermeer’s self-portrait was done of himself from behind. See the *Painter in his Studio*.

This is the narcissistic wound: we need the attention/reinforcement from others as a result of this problematic existence—by virtue of the failure of any true doubling!

MERGING OF SELF WITH SELF:

For Rosset it is the merging of self with self that overcomes the double that brings joy about (60 – 61).

There are two paths available to becoming who one is:

1. Accept things are they are.
2. Reject the merging of the original self with the double self and go back over them with redoubled intensity, TO HASTEN THE EVENT – this is the oracular structure of Oedipus.

CALLOUT CULTURE AND THE DOUBLE

Think about Rosset and callout culture. Is cancel culture calling out one's double? What happens when I callout the illusion in the other that they are not what they claim they are? Often, Rosset says this means that one is falling sway to the same lack they themselves are suffering from – i.e. you often express a desire to identify a failure of the unique in the other.

ON STUPIDITY:

It is in trying to be someone else that one becomes who they are in the same way that one seeks the security to run away from their fate that they end up enacting it.

Stupidity in content: attachment to derisory themes.

Stupidity in form:

1. First degree: Heredity and cultural settings pursue derisory themes.
2. Second degree: seeking to run away from stupidity – one has chosen an intelligent attitude – this is reflective bad faith!

There is an incurable stupidity here. Stupidity establishes itself by trying to avoid stupidity. There is thus a necessary doltishness to wisdom. One must accept one's stupidity. But what is it that we are accepting in stupidity?

- THE DOUBLE: It becomes itself from trying to be someone else. This is the fate of the double!

THE ABANDONMENT OF THE DOUBLE AND RETURN TO SELF

The Vermeer self-portrait is useful to think about when considering a model of self that Rosset is interested in – one that is one with the elements, that has put the ego behind.

Abandonment of self gives rise to bliss – why? Because the painter has painted his own absence – he has painted his own absence – his own nothingness. He has abandoned the ghost – or has he abandoned existence? In some sense he has embraced existence itself and abandoned the substantial part – the ghost.

To be narcissistic is to prefer not the self but the double. It is not necessarily to love oneself, it is to love one's double!

In Romantic literature the double has to remain – if he disappears then the hero's very being disappears.

The anxiety of having a double is also apparent in bureaucratic discourse. Existential anxiety is once again, not about death, it is about existence as such – what sanctions and guarantees existence? A PIECE OF PAPER.

I need a double to attest to my being. Think about this in terms of the Sartrean in-itself – I need an other (the double) to attest to my in-itself.

But the truth of the self in the face of this double is that found in paper: namely in the papers that determine who we are in the eyes of the state. Our birth certificates, our degrees, our social accomplishments.

Think about Googling yourself – Googling oneself becomes an assurance that you exist in some sense! While the double only lives online, the double has to be tracked down because the proof of that double (the paper) is the real proof that you actually exist.

Or think about reading an email that you sent twice back to yourself after sending it.

The big idea is this: ONE CANNOT ESTABLISH ONE'S EXISTENCE ALONE.

RACE, POWER AND RESISTANCE

NOTES November 18

Autobiography of Frederick Douglass and "Aunt Hester's Scream" by Fred Moten

Fred Moten is one of the most important living black intellectuals. He is a thinker in the tradition called the Black Radical Tradition. This tradition has a long history going back to the alternative Enlightenment ushered in by the Haitian Slave Revolt of 1804. The Black Radical Tradition has an interesting connection to existentialism in the writings of thinkers such as Frantz Fanon, Lewis Gordon, Fred Moten and others. But in general, it is its own tradition with its own trajectories of thought.

The Black Radical Tradition is a very unique school of thought. One of the questions that animates their work is the true question of the meaning of liberation and emancipation. What happens after you are given formal freedom? Let's say slavery is lifted. Ok. Cool. But what happens after that? What lingers? What forms of oppression remain? These are some of the questions that Moten is grappling with in his essay on the objects that resists.

Moten is reading Frederick Douglass's *Autobiography* but he is reading it from the perspective of Sadiya Hartman's influential scholar who wrote a book called *Scenes of Subjection* about the post-Emancipation of slavery in the United States.

Moten begins his essay by saying that says the history of blackness is a testament to the fact that objects can and do resist. He argues that the subject (self) is possessed—deformed—by the object it possesses.

He argues, similar to Rosset that there is a real scene that determines the self. He asks: what is the role of sound or music at the scene of objection? We can think of this as the primal scene. What is Douglass's primal scene? It is when he witnesses his primary caretaker, his Aunt Hester being whipped by her slave owner and hearing her scream. Douglass had to turn away from it in horror and he notes that it was the event that first truly made him realize his condition, that he is a slave.

Moten says there is a play between looking and being looked at – there is a double!

The role of subjection: there is a two-fold movement of entering into states of subjectivity – one of subjection and one of subjugation. So here for Moten the double is the fact that in each instance we are subjected and subjugated – the difference is that we submit and we resist to our condition.

Douglass says, “I was born at the moment of the violent act of slavery” – remember he notes at the beginning that a slave does not have a birth certificate. No piece of paper! How does that relate to Rosset?

Moten asks the following:

“How does one give expression to these outrages without exacerbating the indifference to suffering that is the consequence of the benumbing spectacle or con-tend with the narcissistic identification that obliterates the other or the prurience that too often is the response to such displays?”

Douglass represses his primal scene of subjection but in his repressing it he also fills it with desire, identification and castration.

What do you do to your primal scene of subjection? Moten says that we transpose all that is unspeakable to later ritualized and soulfully mundane and quotidian performances.

Now comes the big and interesting claim Moten makes: he says that the subjection of the slave is similar to the fate of all commodities:

“Our use value does not belong to us as objects. What does belong to us as objects, however, is our value, where value equals exchange value. In other words, the exchange value comes before exchange for a slave – the slaves worth in social terms is not a worth they themselves intrinsically possess. This is the same fate of all commodities in capitalism.

WHAT IS EXCHANGE VALUE VS. USE VALUE?

Moten is referencing the general formula of capital in Marx's writings, specifically his three-volume work *Capital: A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. The first form of capital is the circulation of commodities.

There is a distinction economists make between money and capital. Capital is the surplus of profit derived from the exchange of commodities. In capitalism it is necessary that a surplus be developed in exchange. If there weren't surpluses then capitalism would be about use values, i.e. simply about practical fulfillments of wants and needs. But capitalism is about maximizing exchange value, not use values.

First form of commodity: C-M-C – selling in order to buy – this remains a use-value in that the commodity is spent – it falls into consumption.

Second form of commodity: M-C-M- buying in order to sell – the money is not spent, it is advanced. This latter form is capital or is what makes capital – this is exchange value.

It is the surplus value that expands itself and turns it into capital that is the vital core to capitalism.

Now, because the surplus is added to the new money Marx says that commodities each become an end in and of themselves, disconnected from the realm of fulfilling use-values.

How does this relate to the subjectivity of the slave? Think about what it means to be a subject of pure non-intrinsic value – a subject purely of exchange value. According to Moten the spectacular and the mundane interact in Douglass. The spectacular is the surplus itself.

He notes: “the real event of the commodity's speech, itself broken by their irreducible materiality—the broken and irreducible maternity—of the commodity's scream” (12).

The possibility of a sign to link to the universal is impossible, there is thus something about the exchange value of a commodity which is tied into the impossible object, the same impossible object Moten discusses in the history of the black radical tradition.

Here is the clearest argument about what Moten is saying about the commodity and the subjectivity of the slave:

“The truth about the value of the commodity is tied precisely to the impossibility of its speaking, for if the commodity could speak it would have intrinsic value, it would be infused with a certain spirit, a certain value not given from the outside, and would, therefore, contradict the thesis on value—that it is not intrinsic—that Marx assigns it” (13).

The resistance is the scream and this resistance “cuts and augments the primal.” Blackness is found in the performance – the object’s resistance is a rupture to the hermeneutic and to the familial (14).

Moten notes a motif of great importance. The idea of “impossible motherhood” in the history of black subjectivity.

The African-American male has been touched, therefore, by the *mother*, handled by her in ways that he cannot escape, and in ways that the white American male is allowed to temporize by a fatherly reprieve. This human and historical development—the text that has been inscribed on the benighted heart of the continent—takes us to the center of an inexorable difference in the depths of American women’s community: the African-American woman, the *mother*, the daughter, becomes historically the powerful and shadowy evocation of a cultural synthesis long evaporated—the law of the Mother—only and precisely because legal enslavement removed the African-American male not so much from sight as from *mimetic* view as a partner in the prevailing social fiction of the Father’s name, the Father’s law.

Therefore, the female, in this order of things, breaks in upon the imagination with a forcefulness that marks both a denial and an “illegitimacy.” Because of this peculiar American denial, the black American male embodies the *only* American community of males which has had the specific occasion to learn *who* the female is within itself, the infant child who bears the life against the could-be fateful gamble, against the odds of pulverization and murder, including her own. It is the heritage of the *mother* that the African-American male must regain as an aspect of his own personhood—the “power” of “yes” to the “female” within.¹⁴

Resistance to slavery is maternal as much as it is material. Moten says:

“The individual, enslaved laborer is characterized as use-value that, in the Weld of capitalist production, is equivalent to no-value, which is to say operative outside of exchange” (17).

“invagination of the ontological totality whose preservation, according to Robinson, inspires a tradition whose birth is characterized by an ancient pre-maturity.”

NOTES November 20, 2019

Sarah Ahmed:

“Phenomenology of Whiteness”

Ahmed states that “in this paper I want to consider whiteness as a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience, and how this disappearance makes whiteness ‘worldly’.”

Phenomenology helps us to show how whiteness is an effect of racialization, which in turn shapes what it is that bodies ‘can do’.

The world unfolds from a “here” – it unfolds from a point of familiarity. There is a here that sets the background against which an object can appear.

Already in Fanon’s work, he noted how for a black person to gain an orientation, their entire orientation is provided by the white man. This is what Ahmed calls “the historical-racial schema.” The corporeal schema of a free body was replaced by the “racial epidermal schema.” Race is what interrupts the corporeal schema of a body at home with itself. The racial schema is like Sartre’s in-itself but different in that it is a question whether the for-itself, the field of the other can ever truly provoke the sort of freedom that Sartre assumes. This is Fanon’s chief argument against Sartre’s dialectic.

MARX:

If ever there was a maxim of Marxism it is this statement he makes:

“Human beings make their own history, but they do not make it arbitrarily in conditions chosen by themselves, but in conditions always already given and inherited from the past.”

Race is like this quote indicates, “we inherit the reachability of some objects” says Ahmed – RACE IS THEREFORE WHAT IS IN REACH.

Race is a relation to objects. It is an orientation that puts certain objects in reach and others not in reach. Whiteness places things in a certain way.

Habits – whiteness is what is routine, unconscious and a habit.

The habitual body does not get in the way of an action: it is behind the action. Ahmed says that white bodies do not have to face their whiteness – they are merely background. Black bodies always have to face their color/difference. She writes:

“It is not just that there is a desire for whiteness that leads to white bodies getting in. Rather whiteness is what the institution is orientated ‘around’, so that even bodies that might not appear white still have to inhabit whiteness, if they are to get ‘in’.”

Comfort is what provides a background – the body is not tactile; it does not have to navigate itself in that way. White bodies are comfortable as they inhabit a point from which we see.

The habitual body is not a problem for action – the body is behind the action. Whiteness is invisible because white bodies do not have to face what is in the background.

There are thus institutional spaces of whiteness. A space that creates a point of familiarity demands that all other bodies adhere to its orientation!

What is the affect of whiteness: COMFORT AND EASE.

Spaces of whiteness keep the in-itself in place 😊 it is hard to enter into the background in-itself in spaces of whiteness.

But whiteness is not reducible to white skin. What happens when a body that is out of place enters the picture? We experience disorientation.

Bodies move up when their whiteness is not in dispute. The behind and the up is how hierarchies get reproduced. To deny the background is to deny race, to be apolitical.

Negativity/Being not

Ahmed wants to argue that when a body that loses its chair or feels negated is to feel at the body level what you can do.

Importantly, Ahmed is defining the body in terms of capacities. An existentialist freedom argument that relies on Husserlian intentionality.

Thus, to be black it to become an object. This means that the effects of the bodies of others diminishes your own capacity.

You see the task of Heidegger to find a place out of home is extended here and so you have a natural affinity with this sort of critical race theory and being out of place. She ends the essay with this point:

“What does it mean if we assume that critiques have to leave room for resistance, as room-making devices? This desire to make room is understandable – if the work of critique does not show that its object can be undone, or promise to undo its object, then what is the point of that critique? But this desire can also become an object for us to investigate. The desire for signs of resistance can also be a form for resistance to hearing about racism. If we want to know how things can be different too quickly, then we might not hear anything at all” (165).

Nov 25 Lecture Notes:
Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Fanon argues that philosophers have ignored the lived experience in their work on reality, truth etc. He writes, “In the white world the image of a black man’s body is solely negating” (90).

Blackness presents an image in the third person. This creates a dialectic between one’s body and the world, what Fanon calls a “body schema” is swapped for an epidermal schema. He writes, “since the other would not recognize me, the only answer was to make myself known as a black man” (95).

Although the lived experience has been maligned by philosophers, Fanon says, “emotion is negro as reason is Greek. What forms of solidarity is the black man capable of when he is not capable of having a relation of proper autonomous coexistence with the white world? Fanon says, “Between the world and me there was a relation of coexistence” (107).

Fanon seems to cast doubt on the very idea of recognition. He argues that the “posing white as the standard for a dialectic of recognition renders the plight for black humanity a stillborn one with only one solution for the black— become white.”

At issue—what does it mean to become human?

In *Through the Hellish Zone of Non-Being*, an essay about Fanon, the author Gordon notes that “experience is insufficient for a gauge on reality.”

Taking the famous Cartesian phrase which forms a beginning point of philosophy, “I think, therefore I am” – Fanon adds: “AM WHAT?” The “am” is an appearance and a form of emergence. So what Fanon is saying here is that the very ground of the in-itself (being) is deprived for the black man.

This is why he speaks of a zone of non-being as primary. If he were to re-write Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* he says it would be *Infinity and Nothingness* – in other words, being is in such profound question that the entire dialectic of Sartre between in-itself and for-itself must be re-thought completely.

The centrality of the non-being means that to appear at all means to over appear. Thus, to appear means to become a disaster. This leads to what Fanon calls “melancholic existence: -- the black person is living but at a loss.

EXISTENTIALISM ON TRIAL

Lecture Notes for 12/1, 12/4 and 12/9

Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity* and Lukacs’ “Marxist Critique of Existentialism” and Sartre’s late work *Critique of Dialectical Reason*

Lukacs’s critique of existentialism:

Lukacs notes that for Sartre, his philosophy of existentialism was meant to present a third way beyond materialism and idealism.

In general, the difference between materialism and idealism is that in materialism the starting point for philosophy is found not in the individual or the individual’s mind but is found in sociality, thus, to speak of truth or reality, materialism posits that the web of social relations determine truth at any given time. Idealism argues that truth is primarily found in the mind of the individual, it posits that consciousness is not found outside the individual. We will say more about this difference later.

Lukacs argues that the social alienation of the time that existentialism came about:

“There arose the logical myth of a world (in splendid accord with the attitude of bourgeois intellectuals) independent of consciousness, although its structure and characteristics are said to be determined by the individual consciousness.”

Critique of Sartre:

“It is therefore no accident that when Sartre tests the relation of man to his fellow man he recognizes only the following relations as ontologically essential, that is, as elements of reality in itself: love, speech, masochism, indifference, longing, hate, and sadism. (Even the order of the categories is Sartre’s.) Anything beyond this in *Miteinandersein*, the categories of collective life together, of working together, of fighting in a common cause, is for Sartre, as we have seen, a category of consciousness (psychological) and not a really existent category (ontological).”

For Lukacs, Sartre’s philosophy becomes a reflection of bourgeois pessimism: the pessimism that results from the idea of being “condemned to freedom” and “hell is other people” leads to the pessimism of trust in other people and in emphasizing modes of solidarity with others such as in the revolutionary party, for example.

Lukacs is critiquing intentionality as relying on the cultivation of an inner sphere of authentic attitude which leads to fetishism. Why?

“Fetishism signifies, in brief, that the relations among human beings which function by means of objects are reflected in human consciousness immediately as things, because of the structure of capitalist economy. They become objects or things, fetishes in which men crystallize their social relationships, as savages do their relationships to nature; and for savages the laws of natural relations are just as impenetrable as the laws of the capitalist system of economy are to the men of the world of today.”

The problem here is that social experience is sidelined or obscured by intentionality’s focus on immediate experience and the mental attitude.

Lukacs is periodizing existentialism within a Marxist historical understanding. He argues that the treatment Sartre gives to the individual, this radically free sense etc. is a response to the “fetishized ego” which had lost its essence and this is where the tragic dimension comes into play. This is why a thinker like Camus who was a champion of paradox and tragedy, according to Lukacs, would be a reflection of the bourgeois class. What is bourgeois pessimism? It is the idea that changing society has intrinsic limits and it’s not worth pushing for a revolutionary position because society in its current arrangement already fulfills the maximum conditions for flourishing or happiness etc.

If you are interested look into Lukacs’s work on the role of tragedy in the bourgeois aesthetic, he notes how the ruling class tends to adopt tragic worldviews to close down of the possibility for social change.

Why does Sartre discuss the nothingness? Lukacs argues that it is best to look at the role of profound abjection and social violence brought on by the First World War that brings a focus on the nothing to the fore in western thought. He argues that existentialism produces an irrational theory of the subject.

“Taking eternal death as goal makes man’s existing social situation a matter of such indifference that it might as well remain capitalistic. The assertion of death as absolute fate and sole destination has the same significance for today’s counterrevolution as formerly the consolation of the hereafter had. This keen observation casts light too on the reason why the popularity of existentialism is growing not only among snobs but also among reactionary writers.”

Michael Heinrich: *Introduction to Capital*

This is a very accessible introduction to Marxism and capitalism. Heinrich says for Marx, it was not the thought processes of individuals but their social relations that determine their agency. This is why Marx is a materialist and not an idealist.

Marx does not arrive at the theory that exchange economies are such that the agents are aware of what they are doing when they engage in exchange, the point Marx makes is that they are not aware of what they are doing when they exchange. This is what is called “commodity fetishism” – the idea is that exchange amongst commodities conceals the truth of production

and the socially necessary labor time that goes into the creation of commodities. Fetishism here is not to be understood as an enjoyment derived from exchange but as a cover for something – the fetish is a concealment which is a necessary feature of commodity exchange when exchange value is paramount.

It is in the act of exchange that the producer is able to retroactively gauge how individual labor time extends to socially necessary labor time. Value is bestowed in the act of exchange. But as we saw above, value only becomes valuable in an exchange.

Marxism seeks to provide a critique of capitalist society, to reveal its hidden ideological underpinnings and to reveal the way it produces exploitation, alienation and oppression. Marxism aims to break down the theoretical field (meaning the self-evident views and spontaneously arising notions of our common sense in the world) to which the categories of political economy owe their apparent plausibility; to bring out the absurdity of political economy (35).

Watch this clip to get an idea of what Marxist critique is about ☺

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jl8AMRbqY6w>

I think this clip from the class film “They Live” shows a nice example of what Marxism is all about.

WORLDVIEW MARXISM:

Heinrich develops a very important, perhaps the most important concept in his introduction and that is the idea of worldview Marxism. This is the idea that classes develop distinct worldviews that separate them from other classes. The bourgeoisie as the dominant class develops a worldview in which culture is produced. The proletariat develop a worldview formed around their exploitation and oppression.

Marxist thinkers used to argue that the distinct worldview of the proletariat became the source for the development of a shared ground of struggle and solidarity. It was also the case that this distinctive worldview was developed by the fact of one’s relation to labor and exploitation.

But as I mentioned in class, the relation between worldview formation and labor has mutated in the shift to global finance capitalism starting in the mid 1960s. This shift has de-tethered labor from capital and capital no longer requires a base of labor to further its value making.

This means that one way to understand finance capitalism is when money makes money off of money not off of labor. In many ways we have labor relations but in today’s time but labor has much less power as it did during the peak of worldview Marxism, from the early 1800s to the mid-1970s.

Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*

Adorno is providing a critique of German existentialism, mainly Heidegger. He says that existentialism develops a number of concepts that function like a jargon. The jargon develops an “aura” about it.

Aura is a quality that is like a surplus – it is an extra surplus meaning. The words became an aura: the perpetual charge against reification is re-produced by the existentialists themselves because of this treatment of language.

The jargon includes words like “existential”, “decision”, for Sartre bad faith and “nothingness” would be examples to be inauthentic is to be someone not acquainted with the jargon.

The jargon makes the contradiction between truth and thought become self-conscious and therefore assigns it to its own chatter.

The jargon builds confidence in the person because it assumes that authenticity is derived from the jargon itself. But for Sartre this is different because for Sartre authenticity is determined by mental attitudes and action. So, Adorno is not providing a critique of Sartre.

The jargon gives the masses patterns for human freedom, patterns which are efforts to actually reinforce the division of labor—Adorno says on page 13 – “the use of jargon signifies an in-group.”

The effect here is that the formal gesture of autonomy replaces the task of achieving autonomy. Like Lukacs, Adorno is not convinced that existentialism goes far enough to emphasize the building of social bonds amongst people.

All of that is to say that existentialism creates an aesthetic instead of a praxis or a politics of liberation. Existentialism becomes idealist, not a third way, because it places the individual at the locus of freedom, not the group. .

What does Adorno perceive is wrong with the faith unto being that Christian existentialists such as Kierkegaard emphasize? This faith left unchecked a faith in German nationalism.

WHAT DEVELOPS ANGUISH? Like Lukacs is saying above about the focus on the nothing, anguish is formed from modern material circumstances, and so the existentialists aren’t quite aware of the material conditions in which their repertoire of concepts actually come from. The threat of perpetual unemployment is where the theme of homelessness comes into play for Heidegger. You will remember that he was an advocate for cultivating a comfort with angst and that angst is a universal affect that throws us to the reality that we are all homeless.

The theme of homelessness and shelter was used such that existential philosophy was invoked to provide a shelter – “even those with poor material means are left off the hook when they enter the jargon”

For Heidegger the need of the time was true residences. Man must “make for himself his own residence.” But this idea of homelessness neglects the legitimate fact that most people’s social existence is on the verge of homelessness from unemployment.

What is the alternative philosophy to existentialism for Adorno? It is the project of critique premised on a hard rejection of the way in which language is always a reflection of society – it is a different form of reflection that starts with a critical appraisal of this fact. For Adorno, a materialist, the project of critique of power and exploitation should be set as the primary goal of philosophy, not the re-affirmation of individual freedom in a way that the existentialists are doing.

12/9 Class

On Sartre’s Marxist turn in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*

In his work *Search for a Method* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* Sartre begins to shift his focus from the locus of the individual as the key site, to a focus on the group. As Catalano in his summary of the Critique writes:

“The Christian points to original sin, the traditional Marxist to economic laws, and others to such explanations as the violence of our evolutionary history. But, for Sartre, the cause of our large-scale “falling from grace” is due to the way human praxes have slowly altered our environment so that conflict is part of the world 's objective structure.”

What is praxis? Praxis is a Marxist concept that refers to the idea of collective agency – a praxis is also the way in which thought and action connect. Theory and practice bring about a praxis. For a Marxist a praxis must always be supported by critique and critique must always be supported by efforts that are collective in form, set to change existing conditions.

Catalano notes that for Sartre, “Consciousness is not “a mental activity.” Sartre rejects all forms of dualism. There is only matter in the world, although, because of consciousness, there are various states of matter, including consciousness itself. Catalano writes:

“Idealism can appear in one of two forms. First, the usual forms of idealism attempt to dissolve all that is real and unique into subjectivity the human contribution is all-important, and the world is viewed as a projection of human consciousness. Second, subjectivity can be reduced to objectivity. This seeming realism is also actually an idealism; the consciousness that supposedly contemplates this completely objective world would have to be a pure mind with no intrinsic relation to matter.

Sartre on the contrary claims that “the real exists independently of Subjective interpretations, and yet he also insists that epistemology must model itself after the truth of microphysics, namely, that the observer is intimately bound with the act of observation.”

So, while Sartre turns to Marxism in his later work, he keeps his focus on consciousness that he developed in *Being and Nothingness*. As Sartre states in *Search for a Method*:

“For is there is ever a dialectical reason it is established in human praxis, to men in a given society at a particular moment of its development” (33). The dialectic he is talking about here is a law that creates several collectivities, several societies, and one history.

The task of dialectical reason is for thought to discover its own necessity in the material object as well as itself insofar as it is a material being – the necessity of its object (36). Sartre writes:

“On the level of ontology, the dialectic appears as the only type of relation which individuals, situated and constituted in a certain way, and on account of their very constitution, can establish among themselves” (37).

The active power of holding together a totality (if it is a created thing such as a symphony or a book) is a totality that is a being which is present in each of the parts. This is what leads Sartre to develop his notion of the “practico inert.” Inert totalities are ensembles that lack the capacity for dialectical change. These are collectives produced from things such as the culture industry

The idea here is the dialectical reason only happens at certain regions of being and not in others. Sartre is not starting his philosophy with the relations or with the modes of production as many Marxists do – he starts with the individual himself and examines his/her bonds with various social ensembles. The dialectic emerges at the point of analyses in which an ensemble can be identified as a “totality” that is, as a coherent ensemble.

As a Marxist Sartre claims that the human is not free in all situations as the Stoics claimed. All men are slaves insofar as their activity develops in the practico-inert field as this is always conditioned by scarcity. In other words, Sartre is now looking at the way in which practico-inert situations create conditions in which humans are slaves.

Sartre writes in the *Critique*:

“Praxis alone, as it appears between the inert (and abstract) multiplicity of number and the (equally abstract) passive exteriority of the physico-chemical world, is, in its dialectical freedom, the real and permanent foundation (in human history up to the present) of all the inhuman sentences which men have passed on men through worked matter” (333).

Sartre develops the idea of the “fused group” as the antithesis of the practico inert and he will study examples of fused groups in different historical situations such as the French Revolution and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.