

Existentialism

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Contents

1	The Problem of Other People	3
1.1	Hyperbolic Doubt	3
1.2	The Look	3
1.3	Photography	3
1.4	Solitary Confinement	3
1.5	Hell is Other People	4
2	The Problem of Self-Deception	5
2.1	Freud's Levels of Consciousness	5
2.2	Bad Faith	5
2.3	New and Old Order	5
3	The Definition of Existentialism	6
4	The Problem of Free Will	7
4.1	Free Will and Determinism	7
4.2	Ethical Theory	7
5	Absurdism	7
5.1	The Tenets of Absurdism	7
5.2	Works of the Absurd	9
6	Readings	10

Teacher: Mazzurco

1 The Problem of Other People

1.1 Hyperbolic Doubt

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1.2 The Look

1. Arthur Aron's study emphasizes that intimacy and trust are needed in a relationship, and can be created by stimuli, and the look facilitates this idea of trust, forced by the questions, so that the other person can properly understand about their partner, without a facade₂
 - (a) The goal of a relationship is to form a proper understanding, rather than a two-dimensional image, combining how they see themselves with how you perceive them
 - i. It is also noted that to form a relationship based on this, one has to be looked for, providing the willingness, which is one of the reasons the experiments works, by taking those willing, such that they wouldn't close off
 - (b) It is especially emphasized by the author that the interesting thing is not to look into the eyes of the other, but to be seen
 - (c) In addition, the emphasis on sharing aspects that are liked creates an atmosphere of absorbing without reflection, forced by the situation, but then a confirmation of what the other actually thinks, emphasized further by sharing three things they agree on

1.3 Photography

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1.4 Solitary Confinement

1. The effects of solitary confinement are shown to be hallucinating voices, talking to themselves₁, due to long term lack of human contact, with even automated systems to provide food₁
 - (a) Senses began to become redundant, due to the unchanging light₁ and grey walls₁, making time and sight pointless, with the exception of being able to leave for an hour each day to exercise₁
 - i. There is nothing to think about other than yourself, but no objective standard to observe based on, such that you lose the reason for existence, and lose your ability to define yourself or those around you
 - ii. Thus, people often cling to minute details of the world around₁
 - iii. Desperately working to preserve senses₁, such that on some level, he must believe it is real
 - (b) There is no method of protecting himself or confirming any information, at the mercy of the guards₁, such that he only trusts things he and others can see
 - (c) Lack of the feeling of existence, along with the space itself, due to not being perceived by anyone other than himself₁
 - i. There are no necessary actions, such that there is no reason for existing, and no way of affecting anybody outside of the cell, such that they are fully forgotten₁

- A. This leads to experiments where isolated infants eventually stop eating and starve themselves, and relates to the experiment that humans are evolutionarily strengthened through society, and are not able to survive otherwise
 - ii. Humans rely on others to confirm the existence of phenomenon, such that if nobody else can see something, there is no proof it exists in his eyes
- 2. This is related to the feeling that time moves faster during faster music and slower during slower music, such that time is observed in relation to other factors, rather than objective

1.5 Hell is Other People

1. Before Inez's entrance, Garcin emphasized both the fear of neverending awareness, but also having to live with his own thoughts ^{5.4}
 - (a) Sleeping is a way to escape, as well as blinking, turning off sight of the world ^{5.4}
 - (b) Harsh light that is always present, never letting one forget they have work to do, forced to remain aware ^{5.3}
2. Life without breaks is similar to solitary confinement, without a proper passage of time, nonstop listening to ones own thoughts
 - (a) The removal of mirrors removes the last attempts to percieve other people, and prevents awareness of ones self as an object
 - (b) Lack of eyelids prevents the ability to prevent oneself from being observed, such that only others can observe
3. Inez's main function appears to be to irritate and create dissent to the point of insanity, creating dissent and provoking insecurity of other characters ^{5.22}
 - (a) She is also the only realistic one, willing to confront the reality of being in hell, used by Sartre to show his point of view ^{5.26}
4. The end is the basis of Sartre's idea of existance presiding essence, such that something must exist before it is thought of, rather than theorizing before executing ^{5.25}
 - (a) Sartre argues that "a priori" is not true of humans, and the definition of self is created by ourselves through actions, rather than inherant from birth
 - (b) Garcin dreaming of being a hero doesn't make him a hero, since in his final action, he fled from real danger and became a coward
 - (c) His actions don't back up his words, so while people can make themselves by willpower, it is based on action purely, not words
 - (d) Thus, positive intentions are not valid, and emotional responses prevnting actions is something to be purely overcome
5. Near the end, Garcin and Inez acknowledge that everybody is watching and the idea of a crowd, and their thoughts, breaking the first wall ^{5.26}
 - (a) "Hell is other people" is the idea of fear of being mocked, judged by others for eternity for their actions, as Garcin is for being with Estelle and his cowardice by Inez
 - (b) Garcin is metaphoric for the French, not fighting the Nazi regime, while Inez can be interpreted as the regime not allowing them to live their lives without judgement, or just the resistance critisizing their lack of action

2 The Problem of Self-Deception

2.1 Freud's Levels of Consciousness

1. The Id is the primal part of the brain, containing the basic desires, located in the subconscious mind
2. The Superego is the part of the mind which learns from our environment, within the subconscious mind, taking in rules and morals
3. The Ego is the conscious mind, acting to balance the desires of the Id and the values of the Superego

2.2 Bad Faith

1. Bad faith is a form of self-deception, when we view ourself as an object without responsibility and free will
 - (a) Sartre emphasizes that this is an active action, rather than a state
2. The structure of a lie doesn't make sense, since the liar and the lied to cannot both fool and be fooled when they are the same
3. Freud believed that certain drives are determined to be too dangerous to even be recognized by the ego, rather repressed and redirected in some other form of action
 - (a) This is the reason psychological patients give resistance as it moves closer to the repressed material, as the ego attempts to defend the repression
 - (b) This recreates the paradox of self-deception, as the ego both does not know about the lie, and must keep the lie repressed within the id
4. Sartre countered this by three patterns of bad faith, deferring the moment of decision, molding oneself to society, and becoming an object 7.55
 - (a) Thus, the first pattern is simply ignoring the urgency of the situation, ignoring implications in favor of objectivity, observing only what is present, similar to Estelle 5.9
 - (b) The second pattern is the separation of the object and subject, or the mind and body, passively allowing circumstances around them from society to control themselves
 - (c) The third pattern is taking on a role, such that oneself is the Other/object, but lose a self-image distinct from the role by which the world sees you, fully working on perfecting this role

2.3 New and Old Order

1. The Argives are free, but unaware that they are, based on the perception of the ruler and Zeus as requiring repentance and focus on the leader, forcing them to maintain the image to preserve their power 6.56
 - (a) Gods don't have true power over those who are already free, such that they have to keep people from noticing they are free to preserve order
 - (b) Zeus and Aegestus represent the old order of authority, while Orestes represents the new order of acting without regard for self, to create the traits he believes, the idea of choice reigning
2. By allowing themselves to simply act as Aegestus and Zeus require them to, the Argives themselves are in bad faith, taking on the role given to themselves by society, as part of the

old order, rather than defining their own

3 The Definition of Existentialism

1. This lecture was an apology, or philosophical defense, of existentialism in response to those he felt misunderstood it, even after *Being and Nothingness*_s
2. Existentialism is said to be a philosophy of wallowing and inaction, only able to be done by the wealthy, since solutions are unattainable_s
 - (a) It also can be thought to focus on the unpleasant aspects of human nature and existence, ignoring the positive
 - (b) It focuses purely on subjectivity, isolating the individual, but loses out on community
 - (c) It also has no built-in, divine moral code, such that there is no method of determining if actions are correct or not
3. Existentialism argues against the more pessimistic general notion that people must preserve the status quo and old order, to prevent anarchy, in favor of choice_s
4. Existentialism believes foremost in the idea of existence before essence, that the subjective is needed to analyze human traits_s
 - (a) It rejects the notion that to create an object, the characteristics and method of production must be known before it is created, such that the essence/nature of the object is predetermined
 - (b) While Catholic existentialism exists, atheistic states that without the existence of God, man must define himself, rather than there being human nature, unlike other objects
 - (c) Men define themselves by a series of choices by respect to others, in the process judging the traits of others to give them value, contributing to the definitions of others, due to no objective ideal value
5. If our actions are misread, nothing can be done other than knowing our own actions, bearing in mind that our ideas were a choice behind our action
 - (a) In addition, the idea of murder seems to be in contradiction, such that it would be removing the free will of others
 - (b) It also states that people are compelled to choose the trait they feel is best, not just for themselves, but for humanity as a whole
6. Man is defined to be in “anguish”, or the fear with regard to each decision, due to deciding traits of both themselves and humanity through actions, either appearing anxious, hiding it, or in denial
 - (a) External influences have their accuracy and existence determined through subjective judgment, such that all men must be able to choose the traits, since external sources can be discounted
7. Abandonment is the idea that there is no God, and humanity must accept the consequences, such as the lack of moral codes, rather than state that human moral codes are universal, regardless of God, as if God existed
 - (a) In addition, since there is no human nature, there is no external force to fault, but rather all decisions are explicitly chosen
 - (b) Values and codes are too uncertain and ambiguous in most real life situations to be a guide, such that men must make their own judgments
 - (c) The action of trusting an instinct or alternate source is the action of knowing what result

- is desired, a choice
- (d) Emotional strength is determined by action, such that the emotion can only be seen to be strong enough to justify an action after the action has been taken
- 8. Despair is the idea of relying on probability which affect actions, such that since there is no God, there can be no optimism of bending probability
 - (a)

4 The Problem of Free Will

4.1 Free Will and Determinism

4.2 Ethical Theory

1. Moral illusions are experienced, similar to illusions of the other senses, based on our initial perception of people translating to their actions, showing a moral sense 9
2. The idea of a moralization switch is the idea of a frame of mind that deems actions morally wrong, rather than incorrect 9
3. Deontology, or nonconsequentialism, is duty-based ethics, based on the nature of actions and goals, rather than results, since people cannot control outcomes
 - (a) Kant believed that morality must be categorical (such that it is applied in any situation, rather than theory), beyond individual opinions, opportunities, abilities, and other conditions
 - i. He furthered that lying is one of the worst atrocities, due to the removing or hiding of truth from an individual, written about in “Metaphysical Principles on Virtue”
 - (b) He believed that actions must be intended such that the rule behind it could be a universal law, and treating each action onto another person as an end, rather than a means as the foundation of morality
 - i. It is noted that the action is only an end if applying to another person, or oneself, rather than an object, based on respect for humanity
 - ii. This also creates the idea that all actions must be performed with the desire that all of humanity follows
 - (c) The main flaws are the ideas of the lack of a grey area, and the lack of a method to compare two contradictory actions, when not doing either may be a moral wrong
 - i. This is the result of the murderer question, of providing refuge to someone, at which point a murderer approaches and asks if they have been seen, creating a necessary lie to one
4. Utilitarianism, or consequentialism, based on the idea that only consequences of an act matter, rather than the motives, rules

5 Absurdism

5.1 The Tenets of Absurdism

1. In “The Stranger”, Camus attempts to outline his philosophy, related, but a branch off from Existentialism, called Absurdism, based on the response to nihilism that life is meaningless,

but that humans have an obligation to make something of their life

- (a) This is done by creating their own meaning, although in the long run, there is no meaning in life, such that the creation of meaning is considered necessary for life with consciousness, but absurd
- 2. In “The Myth of Sisyphus”, Camus tries to make the meaning of absurdism more apparent by showing the meaning, by Sisyphus, considered wise but imprisoned to purposelessly rolling a rock up a hill for eternity
 - (a) He is considered to have been punished for refusing to remain in the Underworld, chaining death, escaping back under the pretense of punishing his wife for not burying his body, and for not treating the Gods with the proper respect
 - (b) His enjoyment of life and passion for the world created the punishment of futility, attempting to achieve a task, watching it completed for a second before watching it fail
 - i. This is the absurd victory, endeavoring to achieve a useless task simply to create meaning, knowing that it will fail in the long run, but accepting the victory in the short run
 - (c) The meaning comes from the desire to complete the pointless task, an absurd endeavor, but necessary for humans due to their own consciousness to have a purpose to live, opposing Meursault’s lack of need to live
 - i. It is accepted by absurdism that there will always be a force of chaos/nature against the completion of the task, but true happiness comes from the struggle itself to complete the task, which comes about from the meaning
 - ii. Camus causes the meaning produced “a manual of happiness”, by which happiness is obtained, such that while the outcome is not under their control, their actions are, and meaning must be produced by that
 - iii. Both as a result, have scorn for others (the other people by Meursault, the gods by Sisyphus), based on their idea that they rise above others, because the actions of others cannot effect them or their efforts to achieve their goals
 - (d) In addition, this is the idea of defiant joy, protesting the idea that life is pointless because of death, through the idea of lucid indifference to the concept to death, not caring about the inevitable end, such that there is no incorrect decision to life
 - i. Camus considers the idea of lucid indifference to be tragic when conscious, due to accepting that life will inevitably end in futility
 - ii. Meursault, on the other hand, has lucidity, in that he accepts he will die, but is not indifferent, instead embracing the idea of death
 - iii. Sisyphus though, is different in that he cannot die, being dead already, such that he must be indifferent to his inevitable fate, but not necessarily death, but more the lot to which he is given in life
 - (e) In this piece, similar to “The Stranger”, nature is the force of opposition, the force of chaos and destruction, going against the creation of meaning, and showing the pointlessness of it
 - i. On the other hand, both Meursault and Sisyphus have an obsession with nature, especially water, as an element of happiness or of desire, the former approaching it before the murder, the latter after escaping the Underworld
- 3. Kierkegaard argues that the absurd is necessary for faith, giving up reason temporarily in favor of the belief in some higher ideology, called absurd by him, as well as by Camus in “An Absurd Reasoning”

- (a) He argued that weariness of routine could either fail to create change, or produce an awakening (creation of true consciousness), forcing either the end of life, or a change in lifestyle (the creation of the absurd, from the anxiety (by Sartre's definition) fueled awakening
 - i. The moment of awakening is when people stop awaiting the future, and recognize their own mortality, realizing how much time they have lost already, creating the absurd
 - ii. It could be argued that the teenage years, as well as the midlife crisis, were the two big awakenings
- 4. Similar to Camus idea of futurity, is in Ecclesiastes, "Everything is Meaningless" by King Solomon
 - (a) He holds that all ideas are old, simply being recreated, such that the act of working to progress is a paradox in and of itself
 - i. Knowledge itself is recreated, and then forgotten by future generations, in a circular flow, almost as conservation of knowledge
 - (b) Meaningless itself can be thought to mean futile, but also vapor in the literal form, such that spiritual
 - (c) He also stated that on an individual level, wisdom and knowledge is meaningless, due to death being inevitable in the long run
- 5. Solomon states in "A Time for Everything" that in the long run, God has created everything, such that nothing more can be done or improved
 - (a) Thus, the long run must be ignored, and people must find joy with their toil, and in the pleasures of life themselves
 - (b) Religion itself, as well as any rote, mechanical task, is pointless without true spiritual understanding and enjoyment
- 6. The sun is a recurring motif in both Camus and Solomon, and can be thought to give the advantage to the strong, making it harder to hide and easier to see your enemies, bearing down on the weak at work, while the strong is exempt

5.2 Works of the Absurd

- 1. In the first scene as Estragon and Vladimir are introduced, while the former plays with his boots, the latter with his hat, as a symbol for the physical and metaphysical, or the theoretical and the physical worlds, down-to-earth blue-collar and head-in-the-clouds academic
 - (a) This is noted when they discuss the Bible, such that he observes the maps, rather than the implications and morals of the text
 - (b) It has also been thought that Estragon is the body, Vladimir is the mind, such that they must get along, or have severe problems
- 2. While they wait for Godot, Vladimir wishes for their salvation, willing to wait and give up his rights, to be tied down to Godot, such that with the absurdist critique in Neitsche of the metaphysical, it seems likely he is being fooled
 - (a) Godot, tying them down, is analogous to God, while the characters are analogous to the two thieves, one saved, one fooled, such that it is likely that Vladimir, tricked by Godot, is not saved
 - (b) Shortly after, Lucky and Potto, the former tied down subserviently to the latter, are introduced to them, analogous to their having been tied to Godot

3. When Potto talks especially, there is no true conversation, nothing getting done, such that language is not effective, unable to properly communicate or get a conversation, but rather get sidetracked and distracted constantly
 - (a) Moreso, when Estrogen states he is leaving multiple times, he doesn't actually leave, such that none of the characters follow through on their actions
 - (b) This implies that Godot intended to tie down the reader, unable to get a full thought through, such that they are trapped without reason
4. Later, as Lucky gains the hat, and thus begins to think, while he is still unable to get through thoughts without a series of anecdotes, almost as a parody of philosophers' manner of speaking, he begins to be pained
 - (a) Within the final section, as he begins to ramble as a result, there are recurring motifs of skulls, stones, "fading", and other death symbols, depressed as he speaks, due to the strain of mental labor
 - i. When he is given the bags back on the other hand, he returns to normal, displaying the idea of the physical labor being a substitute for metaphysical labor of contemplation, depressing and harming the mind
 - (b) His initial argument against the existence of God, if surplus analogies and words are removed, begins to form a proper argument at first, though it gets less coherent as he continues
 - (c) It is also fairly reminiscent of poetry in terms of the sentence structure

6 Readings

1. "The Concrete Abyss" by Lisa Guenther
2. "To Fall in Love with Anyone, Do This" by Mandy Len Catron
3. "Action Philosopher #133 - Rene Descartes" by Fred Van Lente
4. "NY Rethinks Solitary Confinement" by NYT Editorial Board; Feb 20th, 2014
5. "No Exit" by Jean-Paul Sartre, Stored PDF
6. "The Flies" by Jean-Paul Sartre, Stored PDF
7. "Being and Nothingness" by Jean-Paul Sartre, Stored PDF
8. "Existentialism Is a Humanism" by Jean-Paul Sartre
9. "The Moral Instinct" by Steven Pinker, NYT; Jan 13th, 2008
10. "The Stranger" by Albert Camus
11. "The Myth of Sisyphus" by Albert Camus
12. "Waiting for Godot" by Samuel Beckett