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Mr. Stegall

**Final Exam**

*Part One:***Major essay.   4-5 pages**Make an argument that the Dienstag readings on Pessimism, Quixote, and Aphorism should have been our first readings and themes for the semester, rather than the Hadot reading and the Camus quote that I used to unite our readings.  In other words, my first word on the board should have been "Quixotism!" Be sure to offer enough of the content of Dienstag to demonstrate that the Dienstag readings would have been of real help in understanding the notions of the following:

The Hunger artist,

The authentic person,

The silent universe,

Freedom/free will,

Death/time as a foe,

The big 6 thinkers [Kierkegaard, Camus, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Sartre, De Beauvoir].

***In other words, for EACH of these topics and thinkers, state in a separate short paragraph*** how Dienstag would have been a powerful pathway into that idea or thinker.  Finally, take any two of our earlier readings – Abbey, Larkin, Rilke, Tolstoy, Hemingway, etc, and show how Dienstag’s Quixotism would have enhanced the understanding of that reading.

I think Quixote would have been especially important to understanding the hunger artist because Quixote and artist are birds of a feather. Quixote was so dedicated to his quest that he appeared insane to onlookers and some participants of his journey, much like the hunger artist appeared crazy to his audience. This is the rub when it comes to living an authentic life as Quixote and the hunger artist aspire to, because someone truly committed to a cause is easily confused with obsession or mental illness. The passion of authenticity can also be inspiring to others instead of crazy, like Sancho from Quixote’s story. He aspires to be a governor to achieve wealth but is instead inspired by the authentic ways in which Quixote seeks justice. The story of the hunger artist wasn’t quite as openly inspiring to others like Quixote was, but I can’t imagine that some people in the crowd weren’t inspired. I think Dienstag would correctly point out the honor in both characters as being not only a worthy, but highly sought-after trait. Quixote however, understands that at some point you have leave a truly authentic life because it’s not sustainable forever. We will eventually be mentally or more often physically unable to continue to endure the suffering that accompanies a quixotic lifestyle. The life of both the hunger artist and Quixote shouldn’t create a yearning to relive their glory but inspire others to seek their own glory and honor themselves.

The authentic person and a Quixote are one in the same, and I would venture to say authentic and quixotic could be synonyms. Dienstag brought up an idea of Nietzsche’s called The Gay Science, or the pursuit of happiness in terms of a scientific venture. It could be easily said that an authentic person or a Quixote is what Nietzsche would call a gay scientist. Nietzsche tells us that Gay Science is about discovering what you really are and actualizing that potential instead of sleepwalking through life. Quixote wasn’t always Quixote, because he started off as Alonso the Good he was able to wake from his walking slumber and grasp freedom. His adventures as Alonso all lead to him becoming authentic, so you could surmise that Alonso was also a gay scientist although unknowingly. Quixote and Nietzsche would have been an interesting pair to be around since Quixote brought positive pessimism into an actual lifestyle rather than the ideals of Nietzsche. Quixote was always a champion in his mind no matter what battles he may have won or lost because he viewed each day he didn’t die as a victory, which probably would have driven most people to think he was mad. Even today people think you’re crazy for remarking on continuing to live as some sort of victory, since an optimist would see this as such a low bar to judge achievement.

The silent universe requires us to live in two ways; inauthentically consumed by the they, or authentically living free. The best practice I’ve encountered thus far has been positive pessimism because it makes me personally feel free. I try to lead a quixotic life as possible because I’ve always thought of life as enjoying the journey rather than getting to the end. I’ve never understood the focus on the end of life because it all ends with us rotting in the ground, or in my case in jar(cremation). The silent universe gives us no guidance or aspirations for fulfilling our lives, which is why I understand why suicide is always an option for dealing with the universe. I’ve often felt the pull of giving up this life and deafening silence that accompanies it, but I’ve always found more joy in living authentically. The process of remaining active I positive pessimism is made harder in a silent universe but is simultaneously satisfying, well for me it is.

Dienstag and Nietzsche are two peas in a pod regarding personal freedom and social responsibility. Dienstag infers that Quixote’s pessimism is liberating because he harnesses the burden of a linear time structure. Quixote has a zeal to best living at its own game by not letting the weight of the silent universe and his mortality limit his life. He embodies the idea of charging at windmills because he understands that the end of our life is the same for every living creature. Quixote understands that since he will die and the only rebuff he has to this death is to live his life they way he wants, or to be free. He understands that there is nothing futile about living life if you choose the way you live it, but it matters that you live it in a way which makes you happy. Freedom is choice and giving away that choice is akin to not living at all, because if you’re not living freely then you might as well commit suicide. Freedom also requires that you accept your choices as your own rather than disburdening yourself by blaming the they. Otherwise, you’re just engaging in an elaborate self-deception rather than being truly free like Quixote.

Time as a foe is a rather pervasive topic for all thought aspects of understanding how to live in a silent universe and being temporally bound. Time is the bane of all stages of life, like a teenager cursing his youth or an old man cursing his age. Time is the ultimate foe because it feels no pain, no fear, and isn’t bound by time. There is no way to beat it, so its very easy to find creative ways to submit and feel as though they’ve found some sort of gain. The fight to stay active in accepting that death and time are always coming for you is what is something Dienstag termed as the practice of pessimism. I personally have no preconceived notions that my actions will make any difference to the world short of physical actions like moving something. I feel as though this gives me strength by not having hope for unlikely outcomes or failing to meet some arbitrary standard. I expect that by getting a degree I have a better chance of getting a higher paying job, but I don’t expect that I will have a higher paying job. Therefore, I believe that not having an expectation of having a high paying job will give me a more objective view of employment opportunities. Practicing pessimism can also have a side effect of being inspirational to others by staring down death you are balking against the status quo. Sancho was deeply inspired by Quixote’s example, which helped create an astounding political regime.

I think Kierkegaard and Dienstag would have gotten along great because they both have similar views of freedom. Kierkegaard tells us about the ease of clinging to popular views or ideals, like Christianity or whatever the popular ideology is. Becoming Quixote is a hard process that has no clear path or benefits, but the journey is the benefit and often obscured by the danger. To be a Quixote is to blaze your own trail and is fraught with peril, but often is inspiring to others. Seeing someone rally against the ever-marching tide of time can show others that futile pursuits aren’t always about the end goal. The more others imitate the actions of someone living as a Quixote the more quixotic they become themselves.

Camus and Dienstag seemed to share a passion for viewing time as a foe, since there were several times in his writings that the protagonist seemed to resent the flow of time. Camus’s story of Sisyphus is like Quixote, but he assumes Sisyphus is happy where Dienstag describes Quixote as being neither happy or sad. Quixote is merely in a state of perpetual satisfaction because the practice of pessimism leaves a person with no expectations or hopes. Once Sisyphus is condemned to push a rock up a hill over and over he finds himself in a quixotic situation of charging at windmills, or a life of futility. I don’t agree we should assume he is happy because of his pessimistic view which would leave in a passive satisfaction like Quixote. Sisyphus does realize he is free, but he is different from Quixote because he is no longer carrying the burden of time.

Heidegger seemed to play into Dienstag’s theory of a pessimistic lifestyle, but he was focused more on the how people manage to avoid accepting death. I think Heidegger would have focused more on Alonso the Great rather than Quixote because Alonso was part of the Da Sein. Before Quixote adopted a pessimistic ethic, he lived in the they and ingrained himself in the daily facticity of society. Heidegger would be most interested in this transformation because Alonso realizes that by knowing himself and his limits he can know himself. This idea of knowing yourself is something Alonso believes would lead to a superior standard on which a government would rest. The belief also leads him into becoming Quixote, so he may have been onto something.

Dienstag seemed to notice that Cervantes had a proclivity to Nietzschean ideals, but I think Dienstag also would consider himself influenced by Nietzsche. Dienstag considers Quixote a gay scientist, which I personally couldn’t agree more with that assessment. The whole concept of being a gay scientist is learning to understand yourself or to become the person you were truly meant to be. Knowing yourself also means you know your limits or capabilities, so it often baffles Quixote on other people’s reactions to his actions. For Quixote he is just acting within his limits and understands that he isn’t doing anything outside of his normal realm, but others have no idea what their limits are. Quixote inspires others because they misinterpret his confidence as bravery, but Quixote is confused because to him his actions don’t seem brave.

Jean Paul Sartre’s views of personal freedom align with Dienstag’s view of Quixote as an expert of self-knowledge. Sartre believes that society imprints an identity upon us, but if you free yourself then you understand you’ll never be that imprinted identity. Our individual identities will always over write a false identity because we know that the image society gives us is false. Anguish accompanies becoming a Quixote and Sartre would welcome this pain as what he termed an ethical anguish. If you value becoming a Quixote then the suffering is freely decided upon and therefore, ethically sound. The others that were inspired by Quixote had chosen to run from their freedoms, or as Sartre would suggest adopted a determinist attitude about their future.

Simone De Beauvoir would understand Quixote as on a journey into the philosophy of ambiguity, or into the true depths of existentialism. Our inner self is something to be sought over time and not a destination or object to be handed. De Beauvoir is very likeminded to Sartre when she claims that when a person is consumed by for-oneself they are delving into a deeply absurd and desperate place. This place of ambiguous is where real growth occurs because there is no growth from conformity to surroundings. De Beauvoir would argue that conformity is where men die, and Quixote is dying before he becomes Quixote. Alonso the Good is dying and only begins to live when he frees himself the fascist inquisitors of society.

I think reading Dienstag before Edward Abbey’s “The Dead Man at Grandview Point” would have been especially helpful in understanding why the characters were so afraid of being near death. We all find ways to minimize our relationship with time and the trappings of being stuck in such an unrelenting linear struggle. By the time a person begins to understand the nature of reality they are almost immediately aware of not having their new-found reality. Dienstag tells us that everyday we live is a battle won against time, so when Abbey is describing the task of carrying a body bag it forces the characters to confront death. They must carry a marker for a battle lost and realize that they are only one battle away from being in the bag themselves.

*Part Two:* **Minor essay.  1-2 pages**Find at least 5 examples from our semester that illustrate Dienstag's thesis of Aphorism as the method supreme of Existentialism.  For example, I started the semester with the aphorism, that "From the Absurd, nothing follows".   In your view, how sound/unsound is Dienstag’s claim that aphorism reveals the real nature of Existentialism.  Defend your view.

The first example of an aphorism I would select comes from Camus “The Rebel,” which says, “Better to die on one’s feet than to live on one’s knees.” I have always been drawn to this idea my whole life because it’s something I’ve felt deeply throughout my own life. I’ve heard this phrase before I knew who Camus was and it struck me as something so simple, but intrinsically beautiful. Once I heard this phrase I always knew that submitting to others was the ultimate weakness because it strips away your individuality. Without our individuality we might as well be dead already.

The second example I would pick comes from Unamuno who wrote “consciousness is a disease.” I think it’s obvious why this would make a great aphorism, but I concede it may not be apparent to all. If you view life as a blessing or miracles then this aphorism maybe lost on you, but I could imagine someone like Nietzsche would appreciate it. If we could switch off our consciousness and life as being-itself or just acting like an object without any concern for life. A chair has no concern for happiness or no desires to be loved or fall in love, and therefore does not suffer. One of the main markers of a disease is that it makes you suffer in some way, so it’s easy to see with a pessimistic view how Unamuno could consider consciousness to be suffering.

The third example I would pick comes from Nietzsche’s Genealogy of Morals when he wrote “He ejects from himself all his denial of himself.” To understand this one, you might need at least the context of referring to God, but that could also be explained if you said Nietzsche wrote it. This is one of my main reasons for not subscribing to any religion because living by someone else’s rules and ideology seems to me like engaging in a false dichotomy. Believing in God allows for a person to escape their eventually realization of their individual self and stay in the hive mind. The enemy of an establishment like religion is individuality because people will realize that the answers we seek in life aren’t in a church or belief. It’s when people realize that the answers don’t matter because the journey is the answer.

The fourth example I would pick comes from Edward Abbey’s Deadman at Grandview Point, when he writes “Gaze not too long into the abyss, lest the abyss gaze into thee, said Nietzsche. He would, wouldn’t he?” This embedded quote from Nietzsche is something I heard before taking this class and liked, so I was drawn to it when it appeared in Abbeys story. Gazing into the abyss of your life to me is agonizing from living a free life because if you were truly in Da Sein then you would never question your decisions. Staring at life is daunting because the options are life’s way of staring back and trust me life’s stare is much more intense than mine. I think it’s accurate to say that Nietzsche would stare down life, and maybe he would win?

The last example I would pick a quote from Quixote, but not from Quixote himself. Sancho boasted at one point “without a cent I came into this government, and without a cent I go out of it.” I understand this to mean that a person can have a goal that they reach and could either be entirely changed by reaching it or changed by the destination itself. Sancho pursued governorship for wealth and along his journey he met Quixote. Without meeting Quixote, he may have never undergone any change, or you could say pursuing governorship changed him. I like this one because its sort of a play on be careful what you wish for.