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Mr. Stegall

Test Two

*Part One:*

1. Camus: Using “The Rebel,” present Camus’ story of Rebellion, the no which is a yes.   Present all the key ‘steps’ of this theory.  Offer an assessment.

The idea of rebellion starts with the simple act of saying no. Camus uses an example of a slave saying no to his master, and by doing so he draws a line in the sand. This line is where he says no to going past this new limit and not allowing his master’s will to infringe on the rights of others, namely the slaves. The slave gains a sense of allegiance to himself and places a value upon his own dignity and implicitly gains an internal set of rights. Previously the slave engaged in a silent despair in which he lost his own self worth and allowed him self to be devalued by giving the impression of acceptance. By refusing the slave has found his dignity and his voice, because every act after that initial act becomes easier. The slave has gained a new awareness of freedom and can choose to engage in this relationship or not. The problem for the slave master starts to develop for the seeds of freedom have been planted in the mind of his slave and will only flourish. The slave will soon seek to be respected rather than subjugated to the humiliating tasks of his master, which will only grow with his individualism. The growing individualism will lead to, what Camus calls, an “All or Nothing” mentality. The slave will value ideal of his rights over his actual life and will believe these rights will should apply to all men. That idea will eventually proliferate into a full-on slave rebellion, and the slaves will risk everything to achieve their views of a natural freedom.

2.   Heidegger:  In Plato's Crito, Socrates imagines that the Laws of Athens become personified and speak to him, as he considering violating their rules.

               "*We raised you and taught you, Socrates, and we permit any adult to leave*

*the city, who is unsatisfied with the laws of Athens...you should obey*

*us*".

Imagine that Heidegger could use a time machine to transport into Socrates' prison cell, and reply to the Laws of Athens, using Heidegger's concept of The They.  Construct a Heideggerian reply to the claims of the Laws of Athens.  Be sure to note the many-layeredness of the They.

  The laws begin their arguments by telling Heidegger that his escape would destroy the entire state by essentially nullifying the laws. He would respond by explaining that the laws are merely a by-product of “the others” and not of any real consequence. Since a society lives near one another its individuals will gradually lose their sense of individuality and only think of themselves as a part of the group. The lack of distance also creates a sense of mandatory subservience to others, which can inherently become problematic. The laws would then appeal to a sense of acceptance of the states judgement no matter the actual truth value. I can’t imagine Heidegger wouldn’t at least scoff before responding with his concept of disburdening. With any large society structure, it becomes increasingly easier to place the blame upon the establishment or what you would usually hear is “they.” The laws would then appeal to something Heidegger refers to as initially by appealing to a sense that the laws provided the framework in which allowed him to flourish. Heidegger sees this as the way a social construct can circumvent the natural way in which people reach a sense of self-actualization and become an even deeper part of the establishment. This leads into another Heideggerian idea of living in the they as becoming tempting because of the tranquility it provides. It’s easy to get caught up in the mundane nature of society and only concern yourself with idle chatter or other groundless activities. The laws also try to paint themselves in a familial sense as if they cared as parent would. This is another way in which society tries to tempt you by showing that the they are a purely caring social construct in which to flourish. It could also be interpreted as a solution for the internal angst in which we all live by showing it the missing piece a person would need to feel whole. I think he would close out his arguments by tying each specific concept as system in which an establishment could use to essentially brain wash almost any poor soul in to a position like Socrates, but I feel as though Socrates would merely tell Heidegger that he accepts this fate. Heidegger is uniquely suited to rebuke such an entity during a debate like this, and I wish I could witness an event like this.

3.   Sartre: Here is a laundry list of Sartrean terms: Being-in-itself, being-for-itself, facticity, transcendence, bad faith, sincerity.  Write a brief essay on what Sartre calls “The problem of sincerity”, making use of all 6 of these terms within your answer.  Try to explain each term in your own words.  Apply Sartre’s conclusion to your own life.  Explain how your essay brushes against the Sartrean theme that “Human critters are a useless passion”.

The problem with sincerity is the concept of being-for-itself mixing with the pull of transcendence in our society. This inner battle is something I recently struggled with after my son was born, and I tried my hardest to hold fast to the mother of my child. I promised her that I would stay the same much in the way an object would, but it isn’t possible to engage in being-for-itself and being-in-itself. So, when I told her that I would always remain in my previous self I told her the greatest lie I would ever tell. I didn’t do so out of malice, but out of love and the true belief that I could harness the facticity of that promise. I slowly began to transcend the transcendence of our relationship while I grew as a father, but she was basing her judgements out of bad faith towards me. She used her previous experiences and assumptions to formulate her idea of my facticity meanwhile, I was undergoing a deeply personal experience. Fatherhood is something that I didn’t expect to happen or didn’t understand what would happen, because I thought I would be able to continue being-in-itself. When I made that promise I was committing the greatest act of deception I would every commit, all be it ignorantly. I didn’t know then that it was impossible for me to remain unchanged or to not attempt to transcend my situation and reclaim my sense of being-for-itself. The journey of fatherhood is deeply reflective because your child will initially only be able to make judgements about you in bad faith. How do I reconcile this? How do I find a way to make a bad faith judgement a more reflective judgement? This lead me to return to the beginning of this topic by realizing that one day my son will also transcend his adolescent relationship with the world and only then can he truly make a judgement not in bad faith. I couldn’t remain the same and to make a long story short this caused a split, which I deeply regret and feel extraordinarily freed by. A person can never be sincere about anything because being-for-itself is a constant adaptation to discovery of freedoms. Heidegger suggests that the more someone distances themselves from society the more freedom they can discover, and I think Sartre borrowed that concept a bit when he conceptualized transcendence. I think being passionate about people is only a waste of time if you expect people to remain being-in-itself rather than expecting an ever-changing stream of humanity.

4.   De Beauvoir: How does De Beauvoir offer a robust ethical agenda, a humanist agenda, for you and me, in her “The Ethics of Ambiguity” essay, “A Very Easy Death” and “The Second Sex”.  Be specific, referring to her writings that we’ve covered.   Yet, be sure to note WHY it is that these projects differ from ‘ethical codes’ or ‘religious codes’ to live by.

In “The Ethics of Ambiguity” De Beauvoir asserts that everyone is inherently free because we are self-aware. A person must be able to transcend their own facticity with the surrounding world to be able grasp this freedom however. While the freedom maybe inherent but it is not obvious to everyone. A person must chase this freedom because fleeing into an aesthetic lifestyle may seem appealing it is ultimately a waste of time. The freedom is how you achieve your goals and to not throw yourself completely at that freedom is to be deliberately caged by society. This could lead into a state of resignation which in some ways is worse than death because you become a phantom of what you wanted to be. Living free requires a person to accept that only they can manifest destiny rather than relying on the will of a God to guide them or deliver them. We each must realize that if we allow our selves to be resigned into a state of waiting for someone else to achieve our dreams we might as well be dead. In “The Second Sex” she really digs into women for letting themselves be fooled into defining themselves as simply not men. By attaching themselves to men in this way men will always be a metric of comparison, thus making them always seem inferior. She astutely highlights that idea of separation by gender is a superfluous distinction among people because we are all human beings and should be only considered in such a manner to achieve harmony. This is something difficult to consider in a religious setting because women are only seen for their womb, and not so much their intrinsic value as a human. She really notes the ethical problems in societies where women are defined by men because men can not imagine women without themselves because a person can not imagine something without imagining without their own facticity. Therefore, women are always seen as sex objects to men because that is their primary relationship to men. Men have traditionally been the architects of society and designed the roles in women in this way, but I disagree with De Beauvoir here on referring to men as the oppressors. At one point that was true, but I believe men are now caught in this cycle because many people want to be part of the they. The they are structured around the subjugation of women then it wouldn’t be possible for men to truly understand the roles they were playing. This would be the ethical rub of sexism and to understand the deep under tones is far more difficult than most would imagine. Lastly in “A Very Easy Death” De Beauvoir tackles the issue of dying in a world of modern medicine. The process by which a person expires has been largely removed from mainstream society and is often very secretive. To some degree this is because of the humiliating nature of dying, and I don’t mean just being unable to care for yourself. For some the power of the they are so strong that they couldn’t handle the gaze of the public eye upon them is such a weak state. Thousands of people die in every city of every nation on every continent and in most of them you would have no idea. The process of dying is a scary reminder for some that we all shall perish one day and breaks the immersion in the they, so it’s been hidden away. This also makes it scarier because you have no exposure until it’s someone you love or yourself, and you have no way to prepare for it. This also makes it easier to be explained away while your exposure is low by religion and allows them to plant the seeds of an afterlife. When someone passes away its very natural to want something better for them, so when someone gives you an option of them living in a sky palace with everything they love it is easy to jump onboard. She really catches a lot of different ideas in a way that I’ve never thought of, and I really enjoyed the material we covered.

*Part Two:*

1.  What does Sartre mean by saying that “Hell is other people”?  Is he correct?

  When Sartre says that “Hell is other people” he is referring to all the things people bring with them. We all do extra work for the benefit of other people over what would be preferable for ourselves, like grooming or fashion. I’m not saying that no one would bath or anything, but I do it far more often than I would if I didn’t have to spend time around other people. I also do not enjoy small talk with strangers, so I often go out of my way to avoid crowded areas or bring large headphones to ward away curious strangers. The gaze of strangers is anxiety provoking on some level for all of us, because we worry about the judgements we face from others. The social interactions we crave torture us like an alcoholic sitting in a bar all day, so yes hell is other people.

2.  Discuss De Beauvoir’s choice of the title “A Very Easy Death".

  I think she was trying to say that death itself is the only part of dying that is easy. The process of it is agonizing and exacerbated by the way medical professionals deal with a dying patient. The way people die in the modern society we live in is often humiliating as loved ones will treat you like a child to save themselves grief. Our children must see things that are difficult to share and experience. By the time death comes for you I can’t imagine you wouldn’t be ready to embrace it and move easily into whatever happens after we die.

3.   Discuss Abbey’s story’s **title**: “Dead Man at Grandview point”. [Discuss THE TITLE, and its **TWO** elements]

  The title sets up the duality of the story because the scenery described in the story is quite breath taking, but the discomfort of death is as equally powerful. Abbey goes into detail about the serene area in which the man died and paints it as a very peaceful death. The man’s body however is gruesomely accurate in his description as bloated and had most likely soiled himself post mortem. The body isn’t what Abbey focuses on to make his point about the way we avoid death and how uncomfortable it really makes us. The men must carry the bloated corpse in a body bag, which is just heavy as it is hard to ignore. The scenery he describes contrasts the dark sense of mortality the characters feel as they carry the body back to the ambulance. The title is a blue print for the entire story and I suppose in a way he gives away the story in the title. I envy the characters at least have some nice scenery while they carry the body bag.

4.  Use either Larkin’s “Aubade” or Unamuno, to muse upon “How should I think about my own dying”.

  I think Larkin would try to convince you to accept your death as soon as possible rather than ignore it until it is too late. In “Aubade” he seems to lament not living his life as if he were going to die. I think he is insightful by referring to it as a special way to be afraid, because most of humanity spends it’s time trying to pretend it won’t happen or convince yourself there is an afterlife. There is no way to prepare for your death because you have only known life and inherently cannot comprehend what death is like. We experience life through our senses and in death we have no senses, you can’t use any of your bodily senses once your body dies. In some ways that makes it scarier, but also it would be easier to ignore.

5.  In your view, does the phrase “From the Absurd, nothing follows” work as a uniting theme for this second set of readings? Why or why not?

I think the phrase “From the absurd, nothing follows” still applies to the bodies of work we have sampled in our second set of readings. Each author found a unique way to show the absurd nature in which we ignore embracing death and the folly of pretending we can achieve immortality. Heidegger focused in on social constructs and not getting sucked up into “The They,” which would be absurd to think would save you from death. Sartre discussed the concept of being conscious rather than engaging in groundless behavior to hide from death, which is just absurd a strategy ignoring it. Both Sartre and Heidegger shared an idea of separation as a means of discovering personal freedom. Simone De Beauvoir focused heavily on the ridiculous way we hide death from our main stream society and the often humiliating way in which a person dies in the modern age. I think her point was commenting on how absurd it is that we hide the dying process and the lack of dignity in which social constructs afford us. Although we only had a small reading from Larkin, Abbey, and Unamuno they each offered different perspective on accepting death. Larkin’s poem was deeply moving for me, but I enjoyed the contrasting subject matter and scenery by Abbey. Unamuno was a little everywhere but there is something admirable about his arrogant defiance towards the universe, which I deeply respect. All the readings show us some deep flaw with society which obfuscates the importance of death in our culture and the need for its reverence.