My (mis)Understandings of Others

**The Buddha (~500 BC)** has detachment as a central tenant. Where Meaningness is in complete agreement with Buddhism is when it comes to being detached from outcome of any task. If one is sincere about something, it does not matter if the outcome is "good" or "bad". E.g. if a book sells well or not is insignificant if one is sincere in writing it. There is also some overlap in the sense that Buddhism aims to detach from our cultural biases and prejudice, our insecurity, (social) suffering, and ego, even if meaningness is not really the same as detaching from these, rather to acknowledge and engage with them. Buddhism is the complete opposite everywhere else in its striving to detach from such worldly needs as Eachother, which makes other people threats to one's detachment (people are sticky), and thereby they become objects and not persons. There is also a totalitarian goal of Nirvana, where one is detached from all preconceptions and one with the world. This is denying our biological nature. And it is to detach from a greater goal, which I find contradictory at best. At the same time there is an element of true engagement with the self, the shredding of cultural identities and layers, often through meditation. So there is overlap, but the differences are fundamental.

**Socrates (~400 BC)** said that the unreflected life in not worth living for a human being. By that he started and ended existential philosophy.

**Aristotle (385-322 BC)**, Socrates' grand student, thought that if something is good because of what it produces, then what it produces is better. Therefore, the highest good must be that which is good in and of itself, and secondary virtues are those which produce this, and so on. He defines this highest good as “eudaimonia”, which is often translated as happiness, but "human flourishing" may be a better translation, and sometimes he refers to “eu zên” which means to live a good life. Aristotle also defines what constitutes a good life based on biology (he was the first biologist after all), by asking what uniqueness humans possess as a creature--that must be our purpose. He concludes that we are the only creatures who can guide ourselves by the use of reason. If we use reason well, over a full lifetime, only then can we flourish as human beings. By this, he can then agree with Solon's words a few centuries earlier: "Count no man happy [flourished?] until he be dead."

**Jesus (0-33)** allegedly said: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ Completely glossed over that first you need to love yourself.

**Martin Heidegger (1889-1976)** was a big fan of Aristotle. Despite this, Heidegger only came half way towards finding meaningness. He understood to discard the importance of cosmic meaning. It was Heidegger's rather superficial dismissal of modern notions of individuality which prevented him to embrace personhood as something to strive for. His dismissal lead Heidegger to embrace culture as the only means for engaging with others and find meaning, while personhood takes its form by questioning one's culture. His concept of attention, the basis of phenomenology, is very similar to what I call sincerity. He sees our culture, with its historical context, as our destiny, and when we perceive the world through our true cultural filter, we not only bring it into being, but we do so in a *destined* manner (manifesting destiny) by our culture and its historical trajectory (modernity is not respectful to the historical context of our culture). He further saw the German culture as destined to dominate, just as Greek culture had done during Antiquity, which made his philosophy align well with the German National Socialists (Yes, he was a Nazi, after his diaries were found this is undesputed fact). If only he would have faced his discomforts with modernity's individualism...

**Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986)** a student of Heidegger (who was politically his polar opposite (Marxist)), realised the importance of a project, but (to my knowledge) failed to answer the "then what" questions satisfactory. Even if she embraced *authenticity*, which is very similar to what I call sincerity, she did not (to my knowledge) make the connection. The concept of the Other is very important for de Beauvoir and her fellow existentialists. (Existentialism is the notion that existence comes before meaning, which could be seen as a dismissal of cosmic meaning). They recognise the distance between the self and the other, and found it impossible to breach, because they did not expect the Other to be Authentic in kind towards the Authentic existentialist, which they believed formed an impenetrable gulf between people, causing much anxiety. Jean-Paul Sartre quipped: *"Hell is other people."*

**Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)** was also a student of Heidegger's and a life-long partner of de Beauvoir's, tried to argue that existentialism is a humanism in a famous lecture. He claimed that those actions are morally good which would remain good if all of of humanity performed them. This is a totalitarian failure, since one then needs to do things because they are good if everyone does the same, not for the sake of doing them. It is only through sincerity that existentialism becomes a humanism. He also failed to make a coherent connection between his ethics and authenticity.