

# **Philosophy as a Guide to Living**

## **Part I**

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Professor Erickson has been a guest faculty member at a number of psychoanalytic institutes, including the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute and the Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis, and has been a visiting scholar in New Hall, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England, and the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. He has served as president of the Karl Jaspers Society of North America and was a member of the Planning Committee for the Millennium Conference on Integration in the United Kingdom. He has recently served on the American Philosophical Association (APA) Committee on the Status and Future of the Profession and has been a director of conferences for the Liberty Fund, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana, for more than 20 years. He is a member of the International Advisory Board of the Centre for Fundamental Research in Modern Culture, St. Petersburg, Russia; serves as the chair of the Academic Advisory Board of *Collegium Hieronymi Pragense* in Prague, Czech Republic; and serves on the Editorial Advisory Board of the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* in the United States.

Professor Erickson has received awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Earhart Foundation, as well as four Wig Awards at Pomona College for excellence in teaching. He has lectured throughout the United States and Europe and in South America and Asia and currently leads conferences and seminars that deal with our controversially globalized transition into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the promise of human freedom, and the spiritual and cultural challenges we face.

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## Philosophy as a Guide to Living

### Scope:

*Is there a meaning to human life? Can this question be answered by philosophy? If so, could any positive answer be pursued through the practice of philosophy itself?*

These questions became increasingly timely, haunting, and controversial among European philosophers after the Enlightenment (c. 1750) when reason came more and more to trump religion as a way of explaining the world and our place in it. These questions remain timely and controversial today. They are the focus of *Philosophy as a Guide to Living* and are considered through the lenses of mostly European (Continental) philosophers, who have reflected on them from the time of the Enlightenment to the present.

Why single out these philosophers in particular? Because they speak in important ways to the time in which we now find ourselves. They are concerned with exploring the limits of human reason and are focused on the likely course of history. These philosophers tend also to pay close attention to our lives *in* the world, enmeshed in culture and questing after significant opportunities for self-understanding and personal development.

Though we are *in*, we are not altogether *of* this world, even if, in no literal sense, any other world exists.

This statement captures what I will be referring to as the *axial sensibility*: the sense that we find ourselves caught up largely in *appearances* and are trapped in and subject to various forms of bondage, such as political, psychological, and possibly spiritual ones. Coupled with this sense is the further sense that there must be an *elsewhere*, or another and better way of being here in the world as it is now, one that better engages *reality* and gives us a sense of liberation rather than confinement. This *axial* sense may prove to be but an inchoate and unrealistic longing, but it has been and continues to be experienced by many as genuine and inescapable. It has often been described as a *longing for a belonging*, driven in part by a sense of not belonging to the world as it is, of being displaced in it.

The claim became a focus and battleground for philosophers after the Enlightenment, and our course will continually return to its differing and often conflicting meanings. Thus, this course will be as much in depth as in extension. It will take no position but will probe and explore many. It will do this primarily through the telling of a philosophical story that has unfolded over the last 250 years and continues to inform our present.

A central dimension of this story is ancient, however. It needs to be kept in mind as our adventure unfolds. As I have indicated, the philosophical and religious West has been *axial*. It has understood human life as a journey: from appearance to reality, bondage to liberation, confusion to insight, darkness to light, the changing to the unchanging, and time to eternity. Until the time of the Enlightenment the task of life was largely construed as overcoming ignorance and bondage through direct and transforming encounter with reality. But this *axial* vision suffered a major blow from within philosophy itself. It is with this blow that our story really begins.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), whose ideas are considered by many to represent a great watershed in Western thought, based all human hope on reason alone, dismissing all alternatives as forms of superstition. Yet he also claimed that our reason was limited in its scope and that our true humanity was available to us only if we considered certain fundamental metaphysical questions, even though the answers to these questions would be inaccessible to our rational capacities. Here already a disturbing paradox is found in Kant's writing, and intense controversy soon erupted. If reason—perhaps best exhibited today as technology—is our indispensable ally, and Kant himself claims that it must fail us in the end, how could knowledge of ultimate matters be possible? What could possibly serve as a foundation for human hope? In differing ways, all the philosophers we will consider in this course take up the challenge of answering these questions.

Beyond these questions lie even more. If, finally, reason cannot be relied upon, and religion, supposedly, has been superseded by Enlightenment thinking, by what means can claims about human extraordinariness be sustained? Did not the notion of a “metaphysical dimension to the human” become simply another superstition to overcome? In varying ways, the philosophers whom we consider in this course take up the challenge of responding to these questions as well.

Part of philosophy's post-Enlightenment quest for meaning involves attempts at finding something more fundamental in human beings than reason and a goal more elemental and transforming than knowledge. The truth, it

has been said, will set people free. This notion is at the core of the *axial* understanding of human life. But perhaps there is no truth, just facts. And perhaps no wisdom, either, just information.

Could it be that liberation, not knowledge, is the true end purpose of human life and even its meaning? And might this liberation be achieved through nonrational means: power, sexuality, revolution, resignation, creativity, compassion, or solidarity? All these pathways are explored in differing ways by Continental philosophers such as Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Foucault, and others—all seeking a meaning to human life through a diagnosis of what the supposed “predicament of human existence” actually is. All assume that there *is* a human predicament, that it can be understood, and that it can, to some significant degree, be surmounted. What, in fact, *is* the human predicament? If this predicament is not so much ignorance (of something) as bondage (to something), what must we be liberated *from*, and what are we thereby liberated *for*? Liberation that is merely *from* something has a problematic, negative possibility accompanying it. Once liberated, we humans might find nothing positive in relation to which to exercise our newly acquired freedom. The resulting danger is something that has been called *nihilism*, the “discovery” that nowhere is to be found anything deserving our devotion or support, *that life has no meaning*.

Nihilism is in fact a genuine danger and concern for many of the philosophers whom we will consider in this course, including Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. We will be taking a close look at nihilism, its motivations, dynamics, and conflicting strands. Is nihilism avoidable and, in any case, can it be overcome by philosophical means? Does philosophy have resources to guide us around or through and beyond nihilism? The French Existentialist John Paul Sartre says that meaningful life begins on the other side of despair. What sense might we make of such a claim?

Many say that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a *postmodern age*, and that postmodernism is inherently nihilistic. Postmodernism is said by some to close the door on all sustainable quests for meaning and even to render philosophy itself obsolete. In the light of our preceding explorations, I will suggest alternative ways in which philosophy may nonetheless thrive in our time, pursuing the quest for meaning and thereby providing various *guides to living*.

# Lecture One

## The Axial Model

**Scope:** The philosophical and religious understanding of life in the West has been *axial* for almost 3,000 years, emerging with the Ancients. We will explore how axial thinking, the understanding of life as a journey, came into being and how it has shaped our belief systems. During the *Enlightenment*, the axial vision suffered a major blow from within philosophy itself. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose ideas are considered by many to represent a great watershed in Western thought, based all human hope on reason alone, dismissing alternatives as forms of superstition. Professional philosophy taught in our colleges and universities today still takes its impetus primarily from Enlightenment thinking. We will explore the major philosophical trends, from Kant through modernity, that have influenced and shaped the way that we perceive the world today. Our journey will be a somewhat unusual one. It will be a narrative overview of particular philosophical perspectives, but it will also be a consideration of where we are in point and time on the axial path and how to perceive the future of the human spirit.

### Outline

- I. Over the course of this series of lectures, I will be taking you on a journey. It will be an unusual journey in certain respects, and I want to outline its contours and some of its uncommon features before we begin.
  - A. We will be looking at whether or not there may be a deeper meaning to human life than we ordinarily experience and whether or not philosophy can help us to determine what that meaning might be.
    1. Some might say that such matters come down to whether we are healthy or not, whether we enjoy life or not, and whether or not we are successful.
    2. Others might feel that such matters are private and belong to the realm of religion.
    3. During our journey together, we will respect both of these viewpoints but will follow a philosophical path
  - B. There are three fundamental questions that we must ask within the context of philosophy:
    1. Is reliable knowledge of our human nature possible? In fact, do human beings even have a nature?
    2. In a time such as ours, perhaps far less superstitious than disenchanting, what might be the human predicament?
    3. Can human life be lived with both integrity and fulfillment?
  - C. Some of the issues that we will discuss together are complicated and controversial, but I'll hope to present a number of perspectives with which to engage you. No one could agree with all of them.
    1. If you agree with some of these views as we go along, then I hope you will value them and be enriched by them.
    2. If you disagree with them, I hope that you will dwell on them nonetheless, if only to stimulate your thinking even further.
- II. Let us look for a moment at the backdrop from which the sorts of ideas we will be considering arose.
  - A. We start with an ancient model, the axial model, which was developed somewhere between 800–200 B.C.E. In the axial model, a sharp distinction was made between this world and a world beyond, and the idea arose that, although we are *in* this world, we are not *of* this world. According to this model, human life is a journey that leads from appearance to reality, bondage to liberation, confusion to insight, and darkness to light.
  - B. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Enlightenment challenged this axial notion. It was thought important to abandon the past and all old beliefs and superstitions and move on to a determination that our own human reason is the instrument through which our lives find their paths to meaning.
- III. We will be looking more at “big pictures” as we continue, rather than focusing on narrow, specifically defined problems.
  - A. For example, we will look at what human beings in past centuries were concerned about.

1. In the ancient world, the great human concern was with death—how the fact that we die affects us and how it forces us to understand life.
  2. We will note a time, often associated with the Protestant Reformation, when the overarching human concern was with guilt: Are we doing the right thing? What ought we do? Why do we not always do the right thing?
  3. In our time, and especially from the 20<sup>th</sup> century on, we arrive at a concern with meaning. It is not a question of rightness or wrongness but, rather, what is it that really matters? Is there anything worth doing? Is there anything that is genuinely meaningful?
- B. Another big picture suggests that if you start with the philosophy of Plato—a great believer that we are not of this world and a philosopher who distinguished between appearance and reality—the relentless development of Western thought brings us eventually to a world today where technology triumphs. This world is one where technology is viewed more and more as the solution to everything and where human life, therefore, is altogether in this world and does not have a home elsewhere.
  - C. A third view leads to Nietzsche. He says that Western thought has developed in such a way that sources of significant experience are dwindling. Therefore, fewer and fewer things matter—in short, that meaning in a deeper sense no longer has any grounding.
- IV. Ours is an uncertain time, when everything is questioned. We are concerned about politics, economics, and natural disasters. We see controversies about the nature and future of religion. Underlying these worries is the desire to have an overview that makes sense of all these issues.
- A. When the axial model was in place, people understood themselves on a journey in life.
  - B. With the Enlightenment, reason came to replace faith and tradition.
  - C. Do we live in a world now where we have no overview, no schema to make sense of the things that happen and how they fit together? Are we concerned about the price of all things but care nothing about the value of anything?
  - D. Do we seek out technology as the solution for every problem, as if we can fix and manipulate things better than we can understand and appreciate them?
- V. An important consideration in this course involves the history of philosophy.
- A. Initially, and almost until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, philosophical investigation involved the development of a systematic picture of the cosmos.
  - B. In the past two centuries, philosophy has moved to a concern with history and how we fit into the course and direction of history.
  - C. For many decades now, the academic discipline of philosophy has become more focused on specific, technical areas of investigation such as conceptual issues.
  - D. But technical philosophy has distanced many people because they prefer that philosophy concentrate on questions regarding core human concerns such as “the meaning of life.”
- VI. But philosophy can also be construed as the quest for guidance in the *Art of Living*, the pursuit of the very meaning of life and the means for attaining this meaning.
- A. Classically, Socrates described philosophy as *learning how to die*, which implies coming to know what human life really *is*—not just how to live through it, but how to live it well.
  - B. More recently, the American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) claimed that philosophy only deserved attention and respect to the extent that it turned from dealing with the problems of philosophers and returned its attention to the problems of human beings.
  - C. Philosophy in this sense involves bringing things into question that may not have been questioned before, while also recognizing that the way in which these questions are being resolved will most likely reverberate back upon and influence our way of living.



- D. In philosophy construed as a guide to living, there is an important difference between providing information and engendering a kind of engagement that elicits participation in the probing of issues and reflection on alternative ways of resolving them.
1. Information is important, but it can compel a misleading objectivity in which you are brought into a formation of sorts, a common understanding where complying with this formation's dictates is more or less expected and becomes more important than probing more deeply into the issues.
  2. Philosophical engagement is anything but arbitrary and subjective. As we will see, it requires a rigor of its own, something we will hope to some extent to pursue together.

VII. Why have I chosen European philosophers on which to focus primarily in this course? Because they speak in important ways to the time in which we now find ourselves.

- A. They are concerned with exploring the limits of human reason.
- B. These philosophers tend also to pay close attention to our lives *in* the world, enmeshed in culture and engaged in a quest for significant opportunities for self-understanding and personal development.
- C. These philosophers are also focused on the likely course of history. Does it have a direction?

VIII. In our time, various overlapping guides to living can be seen as reconfiguring in distinctive ways.

- A. Reference to the past is giving way to hopes regarding the future, engendering the growing ascendancy of politics and economics.
  1. The promise of biotechnologically driven human enhancement brings traditional values into question.
  2. Economic outlooks have replaced more traditional ways of understanding the world, religious or political, for example.
- B. Concerns regarding ways in which we are better able to be *in* the world are coming to dominate concerns regarding ways that we are not altogether *of* the world.
  1. The transporting features of "high" culture are receiving commercial retranslation through mass-marketability motivations.
  2. Medical avenues receive an emphasis and extension previously granted primarily to religion.

IX. In the course of our pending journey, we will consider four basic themes from a historical and thematic standpoint.

- A. It has been said that though we are *in* we are not altogether *of* the world. This notion, the *axial* understanding of human life, underwent significant challenge when thinkers in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment argued that all superstitions be conquered through reason and knowledge.
- B. It has been said as well that fundamental themes of human concern increasingly revolve more around meaning and meaninglessness than around guilt and innocence or immortality versus extinction.
- C. A controversy has emerged over the asking of questions regarding meaning. Even if carefully pursued, are these sorts of questions expansive of our humanity or symptomatic of some kind of illness or malaise?
- D. Finally, what is the nature and status of human reason since the Enlightenment? Has reason come to be understood as a means of resolving *all* issues? Or might there be alternative means?

**Essential Reading:**

Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

Richard Tamas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What roles can philosophy play in understanding life's meaning?
2. How does Enlightenment thinking challenge axial thinking?

## Lecture Two

### Kant's Hopeful Program

**Scope:** Philosophy has been understood in two overlapping ways: as a means to knowledge and as a guide to living. The latter arises out of a particular understanding of human life, *viz.*, the *axial* model. In its terms, human life is a journey through darkness to light and from appearance to reality. To the degree that the journey is successful, human life is delivered from bondage to liberation. Representative samples of the axial model at work in Western philosophy are reviewed before a turn is made to the beginning of the collapse of this model during the Enlightenment (c. 1750) and most notably in the writings of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). The crisis that Kant inaugurates is explored through his account of what metaphysics is, why we must pursue it, what our reason demands yet also prevents us from achieving, and what obstacles deter us from comprehending human life as an axial journey. Finally, Kant states succinctly three intertwined questions that shadow any philosophical attempt to provide a guide to living: *What can we know? What ought we do? For what can we hope?*

### Outline

- I. In the axial mode, human life is understood as involving a journey in which those who are successful move from a Lower to a Higher Realm. This journey is central to the meaning of life.
  - A. Through an elevated mode of knowing, the world as we ordinarily experience it is left largely behind, deemed lesser if not illusory, and the domain of reality itself is approached.
    1. Often a quite disciplined nonmystical analytical training is construed as a prerequisite for the ultimate kind of knowledge sought, the Higher Realm.
    2. Ultimate knowledge typically is understood as both transformative and incommunicable.
  - B. The Lower Realm is construed as an arena of bondage, either the consequence of ignorance of higher realities, or the result of enslavement to various passions that confuse and distract us.
    1. In sustained contact with reality, we are understood to have become liberated, one with our true selves, and thus to have become who we really are.
    2. To have become one's true Self is to have become Good, and to be in this sense Good is said to bring happiness.
  - C. A significant and pivotal distinction is made between living in confusion—however unwittingly—and the attaining of insight, often called *Enlightenment*.
    1. Initial insight can often be fleeting and itself somewhat baffling. It may only reorient the traveler on the axial journey. The life of Socrates provides a paradigmatic example of initial insight. His moment of initial insight came when he was told that he was the wisest of the Athenians. He doubted this assertion, so he began asking questions that set him on a new path of personal discovery.
    2. Final and sustainable Enlightenment is typically construed as involving an arduous discipline and has as a consequence the viewing of the ordinary and everyday world differently.
  - D. The axial understanding of human life is found in a pervasive ocular imagery that is endemic both to religion and to philosophy: the quest to move out of darkness (the Bad) and into the light (the Good).
    1. Sight has been given a priority in philosophy that has tended to make philosophical guides to living primarily matters of the intellect.
    2. Axially (and somewhat inexplicably) the realm of light was deemed unchanging, thus reliable and *the* foundation for all human wisdom and successful activity.
    3. Light, liberation, and reality came to fuse as the sought after, hidden foundation of *everything*. Reaching it meant salvation itself.
- II. Paradoxically, the Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a watershed event in the West, was in crucial respects contrary to the traditional "Enlightenment" as embedded and understood within the axial mode.
  - A. The "highest" kind of knowing the axial vision offered—intuition—came to be viewed negatively and dismissively.

1. What passed as wisdom was construed most typically as the remains of superstition.
  2. Frequently, a “higher” knowing was debunked as mystification and/or a disguised means of reaffirming and protecting the privileges of various elites.
  3. Higher knowledge was often construed as the stale residue of traditions and customs no longer relevant to the modern world.
- B.** The emerging empirical sciences were taken as the paradigms of knowing.
1. Humans themselves came increasingly to be viewed as proper “objects” of scientific knowledge.
  2. Humans were seen as altogether *in this* world and not of any other realm except in the most extended and metaphorical of senses.
- C.** Knowledge came more and more to be coupled with power and was construed as an instrument for controlling the world, not as a means of transcending its ordinariness in a journey toward a Higher Realm.
1. Liberation became more a concern with freedom *from* interference than the attainment of oneness with one’s axial true Self.
  2. The qualitative notion of fulfillment eroded in the face of the quantitative pursuit of pleasure.
- III.** The watershed work of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) can be understood as an attempt to reconcile the dynamics and hopes of the axial mentality with the data and opportunities made available through developing modern science.
- A.** Kant distinguishes two quite distinct and equally important understandings of metaphysics, both of which he claims to be vital to our comprehension of our human futures.
1. Metaphysics can be construed as itself a science, a systematic organization of our knowledge of that which we encounter as existing *beyond* the world of our direct worldly experience.
  2. Metaphysics in this sense, as a science, Kant claims to be beyond our human capacity. Regarding the existence of axial reality, Kant is thus officially agnostic.
  3. Kant also understands metaphysics as a natural disposition of the human “soul,” exhibiting itself in the unavoidable urge to ask questions regarding our human nature and destiny, the existence of a power or powers beyond us, and the overall intelligibility of the universe as a whole.
  4. *Kant claims that we are only fully human to the degree that we ask these questions.* Their philosophical pursuit itself offers guidance in living, even if they will not yield to scientific investigation.
- B.** Following tradition, Kant claims that there are but two avenues for knowing. One is human reason. The other is by means of our sensibility, primarily through our senses.
1. Kant understands reason as interpretive, not as capable of directly revealing reality without distortion.
  2. Kant also claims that reason generates certain ideas that he believes to be inescapable, yet rationally irresolvable.
- IV.** The cognitive legacy of Kant is to give comfort to the axial mind, yet to deny claims that humans can have rational insight into metaphysical realities.
- A.** Philosophy now bifurcates into the analytical investigation of concepts on the one hand and alternative reflections on the meaning of life on the other.
- B.** A central question arises regarding how (and what kind of) human freedom might fit into this axial, scientific, and philosophical understanding of our life *in* the world.
- C.** A further question arises regarding how philosophy might actually provide guidance to life under the circumstances Kant outlines.
- V.** As previously mentioned, Kant believes that there are two avenues to know reality: reason, which we have already discussed, and the senses.
- A.** Kant says our senses are tied to physical things and can reveal the physical, but that we have no extrasensory capacity.

- B. Our Western tradition says that we see this world solely through our senses and that we have no sense that allows us to see beyond this world.
- C. Kant offers the notion of unanswerable questions that our senses and our scientific knowledge cannot comprehend: Do we have a soul? Is there a power beyond us—God perhaps? Can this power tell us what will happen to us after this life ends?
- D. Kant finally poses the three most fundamental questions that we all must ask:
  - 1. What can I know?
  - 2. Given the limits of my reason, what ought I do?
  - 3. For what can I hope?

**Essential Reading:**

Sebastian Gardner, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*.

Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, Volume II: The Science of Freedom*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*.

P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense, An Essay of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*.

**Questions to Consider:**

- 1. What are some of the different ways in which the axial model understands the journey of life?
- 2. How does Kant understand metaphysics and assess the possibility of its pursuit?

## Lecture Three

### The Kantian Legacy

**Scope:** Kant claims to have demonstrated the limits to our knowledge, even of ourselves, yet makes many arresting claims regarding our human nature. By what right and by what means does he do this? Particularly crucial is his assertion that at our core is something he calls imagination, a “blind but indispensable function of the soul.” Equally important is his conception of the “I,” our supposedly subjective self. Most central, however, is Kant’s robust account of how our moral life ought to be led in the face of our irremediable ignorance of ultimate things. The consequences that this entails for our understanding of religion are explored.

### Outline

- I. A brief review of Kant’s account of reason in relation to the enterprise of metaphysics will help us to understand Kant’s complicated vision and his influential legacy.
  - A. As a cognitive capacity, reason has at least two limiting aspects:
    1. The transcendental function of reason is to interpret human experience.
    2. Reason is also a generator of ideas that are inescapable and with which we must grapple, for example, the idea that there is an ultimate foundation to our experience.
  - B. As we have seen in Lecture Two, Kant believes that the three main questions are: What can we know? What ought we do? For what can we hope? But he believes our reason is limited as a means of knowledge regarding the true nature of things.
    1. Reason gives rise to antinomies, especially regarding human freedom, when it makes claims about the whole of reality.
    2. Irresolvable, intellectual conflicts emerge when reason attempts to obtain knowledge of the true nature of the self—conflicts that Kant refers to as *paralogisms*.
- II. Kant’s particular account of reason as the core of a person’s dimension was groundbreaking, but it raised problems for Kant’s successors in a number of ways:
  - A. The standpoint from which Kant’s examination of reason takes place is itself controversial.
    1. There is a conflict between the pervasively interpretive function of reason and its allegedly direct noninterpretive knowledge of itself.
    2. The notion that reason has a structure that is neither culturally nor historically bound is typical of Kant and the Enlightenment but is attacked as too abstract by many successors to the Enlightenment.
    3. The categories that Kant uses to explain things do not depend on the language used. Later philosophers claim that those who speak a different language may not have the same understanding.
  - B. Kant’s account of the conceptual status of the “I,” a notion he refers to as “the transcendental unity of apperception,” is not an easy concept to understand. We will approach it as follows.
    1. Kant makes an important distinction between the concept of “I” and any supposedly Real Self that we are said to possess.
    2. Kant also distinguishes between the “I” and those empirical dimensions of the Self that are available to scientific investigation.
    3. Kant also distinguishes our true Selves, even though we cannot know our true Selves.
- III. The notion of imagination is central to Kant’s philosophy. It is somewhat obscure in Kant and has important implications for later philosophical reflections on possible meanings for human life.
  - A. Kant considered the imagination to be in a necessary relation to all of our acts of knowing. His account has complex implications for any understanding that we might generate regarding our human nature.
    1. There is a central and perennial philosophical argument regarding the relation of formal structure to power or energy.
    2. For Kant, imagination is problematically resistant to any rational comprehension.

- B. Kant's use of the word "imagination" is both unfortunate and at the same time suggestive in promising ways.
    - 1. The unavoidable conclusion is that what Kant labels as imagination must be a precognitive, mysterious, and even an irrational faculty.
    - 2. Among the Romantics, imagination is intimately connected with creativity. In this respect, they, particularly Coleridge, claim inspiration from Kant.
- IV. Kant's understanding of the moral life is central to his conception of our human nature and, of course, human freedom.
- A. Human freedom is a necessary but theoretically unprovable assumption for the existence of any moral life at all.
  - B. Kant makes space available in his theoretical philosophy for the (problematic) presence of freedom.
  - C. Kant divides the human moral predicament into a battle between duty and inclination, between rationality and passion.
    - 1. Kant's deontological stress is shown in his emphasis on rational motivation.
    - 2. Kant distinguishes between hypothetical and categorical imperatives to action.
    - 3. Kant offers alternative criteria for evaluating those maxims by which actions are decided upon in the moral sphere.
- V. Religion has an important place in Kant's understanding of our human situation.
- A. Kant's consideration of the notion of God, understood by him as an "absolutely necessary being," is controversial.
    - 1. Kant rejects traditional proofs for God's existence.
    - 2. Teleological concerns are hauntingly present in Kant's thought, for example, in his intrigue with the notion of internal purposiveness in the natural world.
    - 3. Kant rejects ordinary and institutionally driven conceptions of God.
  - B. Kant places the fundamental elements of religion within a thoroughly rational conception of the demands of moral life.
    - 1. The notion of immortality is a rational postulate.
    - 2. Kant asserts that there must be an infinite period of time in which to make it possible for us to become perfect and morally pure.
    - 3. The notion of God as a rational postulate has implausibilities for many.
- VI. Kant's is an austere view, mixing reason with moral duty and viewing religion as arising from a rational conception of moral duty. It puzzles some and outrages others.

**Essential Reading:**

Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason, German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*.  
Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*.  
Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork on the Metaphysics of Morals*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What are the basic functions that Kant believes reason to have?
2. What is the role of imagination, according to Kant?
3. How does Kant understand the dynamics of our moral life?

## Lecture Four

### Kant and the Romantic Reaction

**Scope:** Kant becomes subject to much criticism for comprehending the trajectory and ideal of human life too restrictively as a battle between moral duty and personal inclination. Especially unacceptable to his *Romantic* critics is his description of passions as “Cancers of our Pure Reason.” In reaction, a philosophical agenda emerges that glorifies the individual and the exceptional—a movement that we now call *Romanticism*. This movement stresses intuitive capacities and the promise of genius. It also emphasizes the power of nature and of communal life, set apart from the rest of society, to heal human wounds and to enhance human potential by lifting it out of the tediously ordinary and away from the idea of the moral construed as the regimented and merely moralistic. Romanticism tends to vacillate between extolling those rare cases of creative genius and treasuring the (“romanticized”) life of the simple person who is removed from the chronic stressfulness of business and industry.

### Outline

- I. We have seen how Kant advocates a strict moral life in the face of our ultimate human ignorance regarding the true nature of things. But Kant also leaves us with the dilemmas of the unknown, the external world as it is in itself and our own (true, but shrouded) inner nature.
  - A. “The unknown thing as it is in itself” is sometimes referred to (quite problematically) as the *noumenal* world.
    1. The interpretive and inherently conflicted—dialectical—features of human reason prevent us from grasping things as they are in themselves.
    2. The consequence of the success of the historical movement called Nominalism was that reality came to be viewed as comprising individual items. In Kant, however, our human understanding works only in a classificatory way, in terms of categories. Thus, we cannot directly know the reality of individual items, according to Kant.
    3. The notion of a noumenal world is even more problematic: What is suggested is a reality arrived at through the very thinking of it. In addition or alternatively, reality is altogether nonsensible, unavailable to our normal and accepted modes of encounter, and thus otherworldly in nature.
    4. Unavoidably, a sense of separation and even of alienation grow. Science gets construed as telling us more and more about the appearances of things to us, but reality, thereby, remains shrouded—unattainable by and unavailable to us.
    5. Fideism—a leap of faith regarding the nature of reality—is tempting, but the Enlightenment’s, and especially Kant’s own reliance on reason, makes blind, nonrational faith no legitimate alternative.
  - B. Kant even considered our own (true, but hidden) inner natures as potentially driven by reason.
    1. Kant divides our inner lives into *duties* and *inclinations*. The passions—a word that encompasses a wide swath of ordinary human desires—are viewed by Kant as *cancers of human reason*.
    2. The German philosopher Johann Fichte, claiming to be Kant’s true successor, viewed the world as a moral testing ground.
    3. Kant does claim to discover a sublimity *within*, something occasionally encountered through a fusion of imagination and understanding, but one that lies beyond images and concepts.
    4. In his doctrine of autonomy, Kant demands a separation of desire from will, a separation that provokes a strong reaction from proponents of the Romantic Movement.
    5. Inconsistently, Kant suggests that we do have a possible access to our true natures through a particular phenomenon (in German an *Uhrphenomenon*): the will.



- II.** What we have come in retrospect to think of as Romanticism grows out of an intense desire to experience the unity of personhood, to transcend dichotomies, both in oneself and (possibly) in relation to others, and thereby to come into direct contact with reality itself, something masked by the worlds of ordinary experience and science. A fusion is sought.
- A.** The aesthetic experience is taken as paradigmatic, for it arises out of feeling and gives further rise to feelings of unity, unification, and of belonging. Through this experience, a number of problems are solved simultaneously.
    1. One example is the opposition between mechanism and teleology.
    2. Another is the division of the person into separate and warring components.
    3. Further dichotomies are resolved through the opening of an avenue, a potentially healing one, to a religious experience that is not conditioned by science, morality, or general belief systems.
  - B.** Through the work of Fichte and Johann Gottfried von Herder, a German Romantic philosopher, the normative notion arises of unity of a people in terms of shared features of their language and culture.
    1. In Fichte, this notion has a strong voluntaristic and nationalistic tone that will clash with the more cosmopolitan and universalist aspects of Enlightenment thinking.
    2. In Herder, cultural elements get greater play, and unities of culture are celebrated.
    3. These celebrations of variety and individuating differences fly in the face of a uniformity implied by nonconformity coming from Enlightenment values.
- III.** Largely congruent with these Romantic motifs and urgings, an expressionistic understanding of the Self and (particularly) of language emerges. Expression itself is believed to offer the means of coming into touch with one's underlying (true) Self and thereby enabling one to become authentically individual.
- A.** The agony of Romantic individualism is that it may be a great—and even noble—but failed attempt to establish a deep unity within the life of the individual.
    1. It attempted to convey ideas and ideals through artistic and nonrational means alone.
    2. It construed the artist not only as an outsider but as the paradigm of individuality.
    3. It was especially concerned with the quality versus quantity of life.
    4. Romanticism involved a quandary regarding rights. Were they primarily political, having to do with the establishment of organic communities, or were they more psychological, having to do with inner integrity.
    5. The Romantic Movement rejected Realism because of its concern with calculation, external success, and worldly power.
  - B.** Some core values and conflicts within Romanticism have lingered long after the movement waned.
    1. The notion of the *lonely wanderer* emerges as a successor to the otherworldly directed axial pilgrim.
    2. A special valuation is given to that which lies deeply within.
    3. Conflicted reactions emerge regarding communities and cosmopolitanism. Thus, the simple and the “untainted” are given the highest value.
    4. The Romantics knew that beyond organization, industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucracy, there must be something with which to connect, but the challenge was to find the true inner Self.

**Essential Reading:**

Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*.

W. T. Jones, *The Romantic Syndrome: Toward a New Method in Cultural Anthropology and History of Ideas*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What are some of the central values of the Romantics?
2. What are some of the core problems that the Romantics sought to address?
3. What limitations do you see in the Romantic outlook?

## Lecture Five

### Hegel on the Human Spirit

**Scope:** The Enlightenment and its consummate philosopher, Immanuel Kant, pay little attention to human history. Their focus is on the future as a place where—through reason, science, and education—the harm caused by tradition and superstition can be overcome and equality achieved among people. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) dramatically alters this picture of human life and seeks to undermine its assumptions. Attesting to our unity as human beings, he construes us most fundamentally as Spirit, and not as reason and will, or duty and inclination. As Spirit, we participate in and even constitute a process. Properly approached, the meaning of our lives can be found through this ongoing process. Hegel provides a blueprint for understanding human history as the unfolding of Spirit—in effect, as God’s autobiography and the only way to comprehend divinity after the advances of science and the liberating doctrines of the Enlightenment. He provides models for meaningful and even exceptional human lives.

### Outline

- I. Georg W. F. Hegel is one of the extraordinary figures in the history of philosophy and his understanding of our human situation, even in our pervasive rejection of it, determines much of our philosophical self-understanding and sense of how to guide our lives today.
- II. What are the influential pre-Hegelian accounts of history and in their terms what is history’s actual purpose?
  - A. History can be understood as *cyclical*, both in “wisdom” literature and in Plato.
    1. The notion of a detached escape from history is a controversial one.
    2. Dimensions of the axial attitude are found in both cyclical accounts, as well as in reincarnation theory.
  - B. A brief elaboration of history with reference to guides will be helpful.
    1. The influence of the Platonic journey from the Cave is an important one.
    2. For a better understanding, we might also mention Socratic, Stoical, Messianic, and “Eastern” models of deliverance from history.
- III. What is to be made of Hegel’s influential account of the development of history, involving the notion of Spirit?
  - A. Hegel’s understanding of human life is best comprehended through the notion of Spirit.
    1. Spirit (in German, *Geist*) must be understood as a process, not as an object.
    2. Construing ourselves as *consciousness* or *mind* can be misleading.
    3. Hegel’s notion of Spirit is a fusion of reason and imagination. In Kant, these would have been separated elements.
    4. Spirit in Hegel is a totality, rather than an exclusively cognitive capacity.
  - B. Spirit has a problematic reflexivity in that it bears a relation to itself, the nature and quality of which is essential to its constitution.
    1. Hegel articulates this reflexivity in terms of the categories “in-itself” and “for-itself.”
    2. Hegel describes components that enter into selfhood, as well as their possible separations and conflicts.
  - C. Spirit—construed now as the *Self*—invariably experiences itself in a mediated manner. Our consciousness of ourselves always reflects those situations in which we find ourselves.
    1. Notions of Spirit in Medieval life and Romanticism provide examples of such mediation.
    2. There are intimations that mediation can be transcended in Hegel’s account of Absolute Spirit. But the distinction between belief and pure insight discourages such a thing.
  - D. Hegel’s concept of *Absolute Spirit* has a problematic relation to our individual and finite spirits.
    1. Absolute Spirit is a successor notion to the notion of God and involves an understanding of history’s unfolding as God’s own autobiography.

2. History is sometimes taken as a means and measure of the justification of particular historical actions and events.
    - a. This view can be highly problematic.
    - b. We have to separate moral from creative activities.
  3. Hegel claims that Spirit develops over historical time in a manner that he refers to as *dialectical*.
    - a. Hegel has an understanding of rational discrepancy that has a significant relation to both Plato and Kant's notions of discrepancy.
    - b. In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1907), we find a distinction between existential discrepancy and rational discrepancy.
    - c. Hegel writes about socioeconomic forces and their collision. Such collision constitutes a dialectic working itself out in concrete history.
  4. Hegel understands history to have reached an end.
    - a. The end of history signifies the closure of the possibility of anything genuinely new happening, not the stoppage of history as a set of occurrences.
    - b. This notion involves *Aufhebung*, a German term that is virtually untranslatable. That is, we live through the conflicts of history. We do not abandon a conflicting element; we absorb it.
- IV. Hegel places great emphasis on the role of great people in the configuring of history.
- A. Certain people are construed as the embodiment and expression of ideas that move history forward to its next stage of development.
    1. Hegel insists that ideas are the prime movers of history.
    2. In the course of working in reason's service, we can be deceived by reason itself. This deception Hegel calls the *Cunning of Reason*.
  - B. Hegel has a positive conception of the statesman or leader who creates or sustains a stable context in which the life of Spirit can flourish.
    1. Hegel claims that the rights we possess and the duties that we have to the state are intimately connected.
    2. Hegel has more appreciation for an activist state involved in culture than in a state that acts like a neutral umpire.
  - C. Hegel has a notion of the philosopher.
    1. Philosophy is the highest of human possibilities.
    2. Influenced by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Hegel believes that all experience must be appropriated. This belief is an alternative, both to the spectatorial standpoint of the Greeks, and to the ecstatic standpoint found in much religion.
- V. Individual human life in community and the creative development of the life of Spirit are in tension with each other in Hegel.
- A. Formal morality and a life led in terms of concretely embedded customs offer different models for living.
    1. Kant's deontological formalism is viewed by Hegel as empty and motivationally sterile.
    2. Customary behavior within the norms of a specific community cannot help at times but raise serious problems for a community member.
  - B. Moral evaluation may take place on a different scale than that which serves as a measure of creative output.
    1. Ludwig von Beethoven, Pablo Picasso, and James Joyce serve as helpful, illustrative examples of split verdicts.
    2. Invariably, a conflict exists between progress and conservation, between creativity and formal moral customs.
- VI. Hegel has problems resolving the tensions between aspiring to greatness and living out an ordinary existence.
- A. Hegel finds the dynamics of dominance and subordination endemic to human life.
    1. Hegel emphasizes passion and extraordinary acts of will.

2. Hegel gives great significance to recognition. To be fully human, we must be recognized by others as human.
- B. Hegel trumpets many rewards through an ordinary life lived out in a stable and culturally rich society.
  - C. Hegel says that we *can* tell a story about human history, that both wonderful and terrible events have happened in this history, and that history enables us to relive the great moments of history.

**Essential Reading:**

Walter Kaufmann, *Hegel*.

Terry Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Robert Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why does Hegel understand our human nature as Spirit?
2. What is the relationship among history, religion, and the unfolding of Spirit?

## Lecture Six

### Hegel on State and Society

**Scope:** Hegel understands human history to be the progressive, though problematic, journey to human freedom. His notion of freedom and of human rights in general is different from and more inclusive than our Anglo-American versions. For us, rights are primarily immunities that secure us from interference. Freedom is construed as the right to be left alone to do as one wishes. Hegel understands our freedom as involving the supplementary opportunity to find our rightful needs recognized and met through those institutions and social arrangements that constitute our social and political life and are protected through our citizenship. Rights are constituted by that nexus of objective conditions that promotes free expression and the responsive acknowledgement of legitimate human needs. Hegel also provides a provocative account of the creation of states and our relation to them. He finds meaningful life in society and citizenship.

### Outline

- I. Hegel's account of human life in its inner nature and historical unfolding is not only understood as Absolute Spirit coming to full and articulate awareness of itself *as* Spirit. It is also construed as the difficult journey to complete human freedom.
  - A. There is a problematic notion of historical and personal transition in Hegel. It is construed as a perilous challenge and as an *Übergang* (a perilous transition).
    1. Hegel believes that, living with full passion, we must commit to facing life's difficulties and getting through and beyond them.
    2. Hegel celebrates the notion of retrospective necessity. After the fact of a major decision, we can tell a story that makes that decision appear to be inevitable and sensible.
    3. Hegel has a selective theodicy involving the notion of sacrifice and elements that are irredeemably negative.
  - B. Hegel understands death as a metaphor for spiritual transition.
    1. Hegel does not ask if there is a life after death; he asks if there is a life after birth. He believes that we may be "deadened" by various situations and conditions in our lives.
    2. Hegel construes a series of such deaths as necessary for the fruition of Spirit.
    3. Hegel hopes we will live in a wholehearted, passionate way.
  - C. Hegel speaks not only about the whole of history but also of our individual histories.
    1. We can live a history that allows us to see the past and experience what it meant.
    2. We can also have a history of living forward in the future and being open to it and its conflicts.
- II. Hegel's account of freedom is closely tied to his understanding of the French Revolution. This revolution itself is discussed under the heading of "Freedom and Terror" in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.
  - A. Unusual circumstances surrounded the writing of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.
    1. Napoleon was seen as the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the time), riding one day on horseback through Jena, Germany, where Hegel used to work.
    2. Hegel's own personal situation is illustrative of his conception of the meaning of history.
      - a. He had a publishing deadline to meet.
      - b. A young girl was expecting his child.
  - B. Hegel's diagnosis of the meaning of the French Revolution is provocative and controversial.
    1. Institutions were needed, both political and social, that would acknowledge the needs of human beings and speak to those needs.
    2. These needs must carefully be distinguished from wants.
    3. It is important that individuals be able to recognize themselves in those institutions that support them and to know that they and their needs are recognized by those institutions.
    4. The underlying cause of revolutionary activity is the failure of these conditions to be met.

- III.** Hegel's understanding of human freedom is intimately related to the notions of liberties and rights.
- A.** The Anglo-Saxon notion of right is viewed as both important and insufficient.
    1. Rights are construed both as liberties and as immunities.
    2. Hegel understands this Anglo-Saxon notion as an account of subjective right, the right to be free from interference.
    3. Hegel believes in an essential human nature and is concerned about its notions regarding its erosion through the seduction of diffuse desires and wants.
  - B.** In its full, positive sense, freedom must include the recognition of one's rightful place in an order that rationally acknowledges one.
- IV.** Hegel accounts for the genesis of states and emphasizes their importance in the life of the human spirit.
- A.** The Social Contract theory is insufficient as an account of society, according to Hegel.
    1. There is no general will that is operative prior to the formation of the state.
    2. Contractarian theory fails, for transactions cannot be legitimated outside of a preexisting legal nexus.
  - B.** Hegel claims that states are formed through the compelling acts of illustrious individuals.
    1. States are the result of coercive activities.
    2. Once formed, states have an objective status and duties to them precede rights within them.
    3. Freedom and rights are the freedom and rights of humans, and humans can only exist within those structures constituted by the states.
  - C.** At a later stage in his career, Hegel celebrates the middle class and commercial society because of three of its features.
    1. It has the rule of rationally based law.
    2. In it, objective rights are in place and are acknowledged. Action must be in accordance with them.
    3. The right to private property is recognized. It is involved in self-recognition. For Hegel, it is required if one is to be fully recognized as a person.
- V.** Important differences exist between the younger and the more established Hegel.
- A.** The younger Hegel is favorable to revolution.
    1. The emphasis is on process.
    2. Political tendencies are toward the Left.
    3. Hegel looks to the transcendence of institutional religion.
  - B.** The established Hegel is far more conservative in disposition.
    1. The emphasis is on the system.
    2. Political tendencies are to the right of center.
    3. Hegel wishes to conserve gains and is celebratory.

**Essential Reading:**

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*.

Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What does Hegel mean by freedom, and how does it differ from our ordinary conception of freedom?
2. If Hegel is correct, what is our relation to the state?

## Lecture Seven

### Hegel on Selfhood and Human Identity

**Scope:** What emerges in and through Hegel is a conception of *Self* involving relational elements—as if the *Self* were as much a *relating* as a “thing” standing in *relation*. At first, this conception may seem counterintuitive. There have been a number of quite natural reasons for understanding the *Self* on an underlying level as singular and as a unity. After reviewing the various political, religious, and everyday grounds for this “billiard ball” view, consideration is given to the relational alternative that derives from Hegel. Much philosophical guidance for living draws from it, even while partially rejecting it. On this account, there are (at least) three dimensions to our selfhood. Included is our own conception of ourselves. But also the manner in which “others” might be said to contribute to our constitution as *Selves*. Primary consideration is given to the nature and changeability of our self-conception over time, and how others are decisive in such matters.

### Outline

- I. The “billiard ball” conception of what a person *is*—an item distinguishable from its relation to other items—has been very influential in Western thinking. However, it has seldom been dwelled upon as a concept. In some ways, it is so commonsensical that it could hardly draw a great deal of attention.
  - A. Even so, the “billiard ball” conception is not easy to think beyond and thus to escape.
    1. In the “billiard ball” conception, each of us is a quite separate and distinct individuality, a single something, a simple, underlying unit.
    2. This conception arises in part from the longstanding, obvious commonsense experience that each of us inhabits a separate, physical body and thus reality.
    3. It is our further experience that we know the contents of our own minds directly, but we have only inferential knowledge—or need to accept on faith—what is occurring in the minds of others. We are “we.” They are “they.”
    4. The “billiard ball” conception is given further impetus by religious doctrines that construe souls as distinct from bodies and make each individual responsible for his or her own soul, itself an interiority out of the reach of others.
  - B. Still further impetus for the “billiard ball” theory is lent by moral and legal doctrines that stress individual responsibility and culpability.
    1. Political developments increasingly stress the rights of individuals not to be interfered with *as* individuals.
    2. Political and economic developments in an increasingly capitalistic, entrepreneurial world stress private property, the significance of individual initiative, and opportunities for individual achievement.
- II. In Hegel, we find an alternative to what I am calling the “billiard ball” doctrine. This alternative is very influential, for, even when modified or rejected, it retains extraordinary force in the history of ideas.
  - A. A person might be said to have three dimensions, each constitutive of person—or selfhood. Our concern in this lecture is primarily with two of these dimensions.
    1. People have conceptions of themselves. We do not live without them.
    2. The conception that a person has of himself or herself is not extraneous, like clothing. It is a part of the person or, alternatively, the person is embedded in the conception constitutively. This conception is the *first dimension* of personhood.
    3. Paradoxically, even if a self-conception is not in accord with the *Self* it conceives, it is nonetheless part of that person and has no mere secondary status. This is the *second dimension* of personhood: self images or conceptions, whether accurate or not.
    4. Even if that conception changed to a different, equally “inaccurate” conception, it would mean that, to a considerable extent, the person would have become a different sort of person.
  - B. Three somewhat extreme cases are worth mentioning.



1. A person may be *so* out of touch that we call that person psychotic.
2. A person may have virtually no horizon, no perspective regarding himself or herself, that is, a person so completely “one with self” that he or she has no imagination, no scope, no tension.
3. Self-deception is the most intriguing case: Is the “cure” for self-deception a coming to terms with one’s *real* person? Or is the *real* person the one that is being cured?
  - a. Some have said that self-deception is an essential part of our creative nature.
  - b. In peeling away conceptions of self, where does one arrive? This process poses a conundrum.

**III.** Whatever humans turn out to be, a relationship is involved.

- A. The two *relata* are the Self and that Self’s image (understanding, conception) with respect to itself.
- B. A further element, a *third dimension*, comes into focus when we consider the nature and sources of conceptions of ourselves.
  1. Often—in fact, invariably—various institutions and historical circumstances in which we grow up contribute to our conception of ourselves.
  2. These circumstances are not of our own making. Coming about through *others*, they nonetheless are involved in our self-understanding.
  3. Others thus enter into the constitution of who we are. Had they made—or were they to make—our social, historical, and/or institutional circumstances different, we would understand ourselves differently. We would be different persons than we are, quite probably even different *kinds* of persons.
  4. Essential to historicism is the claim that our natures change over time because of changes in historical circumstances. As for the “billiard ball” model, historicism is either false or makes no sense at all.
  5. Central to these conflicting views is the distinction between internal and external relations.

**IV.** Based on what might be called the historicist model, it is possible to talk altogether coherently about “losing one’s identity.”

- A. Again, part of who a person is—one’s identity—is one’s understanding of oneself, and that understanding involves constitutive and nutritional elements provided by one’s (historical) circumstances.
- B. The loss of, or an abrupt change in, these circumstances will alter and initially cause people to lose their sense of who they are.
  1. If they have or are identified with such circumstances, the alteration of these circumstances will bring about at least a partial loss of their sense of identity.
  2. The language of religion can give us an example of this experience. St. Augustine writes engagingly regarding the notion of *losing* oneself in order to *find* oneself.

**Essential Reading:**

Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*.

Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What sense does it make to claim that there are differing dimensions to our Selfhood?
2. Do the conceptions that we have of ourselves make a difference as to who we actually are?

## Lecture Eight

### Schopenhauer's Pessimism

**Scope:** Is there truly a human predicament—and might there be some direct access to ourselves—that better reveals to us our composition and thus those components that we must come to terms with in any guiding of our lives? An unusual presence in philosophy, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) offers an account of our nature that is most bleak, earning him the title of pessimist. His own life makes his pessimism more likely. This life is explored in the light of the soon-spreading notion that philosophies are confessions of temperament, not objective insights into valid life strategies. Regarding external reality, Schopenhauer aligns himself with Kant: knowing it is ultimately impossible. Yet, Schopenhauer claims, reality *is* directly experienced by us through our Will. An examination of Schopenhauer's understanding of Will sheds light on his pessimism regarding human life and conduct.

### Outline

- I. We have looked at two models of philosophical guidance—that of Kant and that of Hegel—and at some of the specific advice that each has offered. Each model has a specific bearing on our present and has turned out to have unexpected consequences. Each also influences Arthur Schopenhauer.
  - A. Kant's division of the world into appearance and reality is forwarded as a means of reconciling reason and faith.
    1. Recently, the progress of science has been thought by many to crowd faith out, or at least to make its presence less comfortable.
    2. The technological extension of knowledge that allows us to *do* with the world what we want suggests to us that we must actually know how things truly are.
    3. At one time, knowledge could mean obedience (conformity) to the nature of things, from which protection might arise and, hopefully, even transformation.
    4. Knowledge has now come to mean instrumental power over things, the bending of them to human purposes.
    5. Such progress and success have for many diminished both an interest in religion and a sense of its plausibility.
  - B. Kant promotes what might be termed “two-worldly” living. Based on the limitations of reason, science allows us to master appearances, and reality is reserved for us as an object of faith. At the same time, Kant promotes wonder through his conception of metaphysics as a natural disposition of the human soul.
    1. Kant suggests that maybe we are two people: one who can wonder and the other who may be caught up in scientific investigation.
    2. Kant remains concerned about origins and destinies.
    3. Kant's concern with totalities leaves open questions regarding our place in the universe and the limits of the universe itself.
    4. Kant reiterates that it is in the inescapable nature of our reason that we speculate.
- II. Schopenhauer's importance arises out of his conception of our contact with reality. There is one place where Schopenhauer finds that contact direct and revelatory, *viz.*, through our own bodies. This finding is a significant departure in philosophy.
  - A. There are three strong aversions in philosophy regarding the body:
    1. The Socratic-Platonic doctrine that the body is a prison or fortress from which we hope to escape;
    2. The Augustinian complaint that the body leads to temptations and is a locus of desire; and
    3. The Cartesian bifurcation of us into free, thoughtful minds problematically connected to materially determined bodies.
  - B. Schopenhauer gives a precise account of our direct experience of our bodies.
    1. Knowledge of our bodies is “internal,” nonrational, and nonsensory.

- a. Our actions and our “Will” are not causally related, but manifest the same thing, *viz.*, that which might be best referred to as energy.
- b. Regarding ourselves, this knowledge of our bodies is unique and noninferential. We just live it and are not its spectators.
- 2. Our inner sense—applicable only to ourselves—gives direct knowledge of more than “acts of Will.”
  - a. Emotions, moods, desires, cravings, fears, and strivings are also made evident to us.
  - b. Schopenhauer’s pessimism is evident in his belief that these emotions and desires all are incessant, multiple, tangled, urgent, and often conflicting.

**III.** Schopenhauer’s basic notion of reality is as “Will,” but this is an unfortunate and misleading term.

- A. By Will, Schopenhauer has in mind a blind, rationally inaccessible force that is primitive energy itself.
  - 1. This energy manifests itself in and through everything and is best revealed, because only thinly veiled, in its manifestation in us.
  - 2. This energy is impersonal, insatiable, and its manifestation in us is a source of considerable suffering.
    - a. Plato speaks about this energy in his writings.
    - b. After desires and cravings are satisfied, there is a brief respite, but this is typically accompanied by a sense of boredom and emptiness.
    - c. Unsatisfied desires are painful not to act upon, but seldom satisfied satisfactorily, and satisfaction often has unfortunate and painful consequences.
- B. Important comparative connections with the traditions of philosophy highlight Schopenhauer’s thought.
  - 1. Kant’s understanding of imagination and willpower has intriguing classical forbears in its own right.
  - 2. Plato’s doctrine of the erotic comes closest to capturing Schopenhauer’s intent.
  - 3. Hegel’s emphasis on passion and spirit is nonetheless cognitive and rational in thrust. In contrast, Schopenhauer emphasizes the irrational.

**IV.** Schopenhauer’s circumstances in life are claimed by some to illumine his fundamentally pessimistic outlook, which may have grown out of aspects of his temperament.

- A. His distant and dismissive relation to the official philosophical establishment is not to be taken lightly. It helps us to understand his outlook regarding philosophy as a guide to living. For instance, Schopenhauer felt in competition with Hegel.
- B. Schopenhauer has very complex and unfortunate attitudes toward women.
  - 1. Schopenhauer’s life and writings regarding women were not well received.
  - 2. Schopenhauer had a complex relationship with his mother (a successful writer) as well as with Goethe.
- C. Schopenhauer’s major work was not well received until several years before his death.

**V.** Schopenhauer believes that reason is impotent and stresses the importance of coming to terms with the Will.

- A. Reason is construed as the unwitting instrument of the Will.
  - 1. The outbreak of rational consciousness is but the provision of an arena for the Will’s activity.
  - 2. History for Schopenhauer has no rational direction.
- B. The demands of the Will are insistent and insatiable.
  - 1. Schopenhauer was an agnostic.
  - 2. Schopenhauer turned toward Buddhism.

**Essential Reading:**

Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*.

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Will to Live*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Rüdiger Safranski, *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why does Schopenhauer take Kant so seriously?
2. Should one's temperament be a factor in developing a philosophy of life?

## Lecture Nine

### Schopenhauer's Remedies

**Scope:** Optimally, a guide to living delivers us not only from something but also for or to something. The latter is lacking in Schopenhauer. In the end there is nothing. Philosophy can only diagnose. It can suggest partial alleviations but not provide them, according to Schopenhauer. As with Marx, solutions must come from elsewhere. Schopenhauer offers four routings. The first involves assuming a disengaged, aesthetic attitude. A second requires the recognition that we humans are all the victims of the same inexorable agonies. Out of this recognition a consoling sympathy might arise. A third option is to pay special heed to certain forms of music as a means of assuaging the Will. Finally, Schopenhauer counsels a losing of the Will to live and, in this counsel, he claims to touch base with the depths of Buddhism. We will consider the significance of this claim.

### Outline

- I. Under the influence of the axial model, philosophy as a guide to living has often been concerned with the notion of deliverance, a deliverance from the human “predicament.”
  - A. Because philosophy has primarily been rationalistic and emphasized the benefits of thought, the philosophical concern has mostly been with the predicament of ignorance.
    1. Often this has involved a distinction between a lower and a higher nature possessed by human beings.
    2. Typically, the lower nature is viewed either as bad in itself or, less negatively, as tending to distract us from the pursuit of higher things.
    3. As predecessors to Schopenhauer, both Kant and Hegel provide illustrations of this notion of deliverance.
      - a. Kant’s notion of a rational moral life subsumes desires and puts the Will at the service of reason.
      - b. Hegel distinguishes between our ordinary life in the world and our philosophical comprehension of the world.
      - c. Both conceptions can be derived from a faculty of psychology found in Plato.
  - B. In Schopenhauer, whose views become quite influential, knowledge that overcomes ignorance regarding our human situation is not enough, for knowledge alone cannot bring about deliverance.
    1. Schopenhauer conceives knowledge to be the largely unwitting tool of the activities of the Will, the pulsing energy within us.
    2. Knowledge is controlled by and does not itself control the Will.
    3. Strictly speaking, knowledge is limited to appearances and offers explanations that do not reach reality.
    4. Schopenhauer’s own wisdom regarding life is instructively problematic.
  - C. Schopenhauer’s “world”—which he construes as appearance—is understood materialistically. But Schopenhauer claims the world could not be material.
    1. Issues regarding causality and the presence of “forces” in nature make a materialist account unviable.
    2. Schopenhauer’s basic categories (space, time, causality, and motivation) are limited to “appearances.”
    3. Schopenhauer, in some respects, anticipates more contemporary physics and, in other respects, Sigmund Freud.
- II. For Schopenhauer, reality (the Will) is something to be escaped, not something to be embraced. There are four methods by which this escape might be sought.
  - A. Escape from the destructive ravages of the Will is made necessary by Schopenhauer’s account of its nature.
    1. The Will’s activities are not historically progressive.
    2. The Will is insatiable and uncontrollable.
  - B. The four methods of escape from the influence of the Will each have limitations.
    1. *Aesthetic contemplation* is one avenue, but its effectiveness is temporary.

- a. The spectatorial nature of contemplation diverts us from those urgent drives at the heart of the Will's dynamics.
  - b. The energy required to sustain the contemplative is insufficient to the task, however.
  - c. The notions of disengagement and "getting one's mind on other things" illustrate Schopenhauer's notion of the aesthetic.
2. The *cultivation of sympathy* for one's fellow beings is another avenue of escape, but its effectiveness is also temporary.
    - a. Sympathy involves the recognition that each individual is a manifestation of Will and thus suffers the same agonies as all others.
    - b. Sympathy may engender a noncompetitive quietism that assuages the Will's drives.
  3. *Music* has a special capacity to capture the rhythms of the Will in an assuaging way.
    - a. Schopenhauer believes that music is the noumenal expressing itself through us.
    - b. One major power that music has is to circumvent our intellects and speak to us in a language of its own that makes us more at one with ourselves.
    - c. This idea captivated the great German composer, Richard Wagner, who read Schopenhauer.
    - d. Music is a means of engendering wants, playing them out, and then bringing them to closure and satisfaction.
  4. The best, though most challenging, strategy would be *to lose the "Will to live,"* to reach a condition of quiescence where our individual Wills do not toss and turn us.
    - a. The loss of the Will to live is not the same as the desire to commit suicide.
    - b. Suicide would itself be an act of Will.
- III.** Schopenhauer brings a strongly negative and pessimistic element into the European philosophical scene, which tempers the rationalism and the optimism of the Enlightenment and of Hegel. Utopian hopes begin to recede.
- A. A subterranean, nonrational reality not only comes strongly forward but begins to dominate.
  - B. The notion of a Higher Realm, beyond or after this one, is rejected.
  - C. The parallels with Eastern philosophy, particularly Buddhism, are strong and suggest that peace of mind and disengagement from the painful cycle of desire—not progress—are the ultimate goals.

**Essential Reading:**

Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*.

Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Will to Live*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Bryan Magee, *Wagner and Philosophy*.

Irvin Yalom, *The Schopenhauer Cure*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Do Schopenhauer's remedies strike you as realistic?
2. Is Schopenhauer's understanding of the Will too pessimistic?

## Lecture Ten

### Alienation in Marx

**Scope:** A guide to living must understand the nature of that Self whose life will be led. Hegel understands this Self socially, institutionally, and individually. Controversially, Hegel understands us to stand in a complex relation to ourselves. It forms us, but does so in significant measure through the sociopolitical institutions in which we find ourselves embedded. Our self-relatedness does not take place in a vacuum, and, if those societal arrangements that form the fabric of our self-relatedness are changed, we ourselves are very essentially changed as well.

For Karl Marx (1818–1883) it is not our reason, but socioeconomic forces that constitute our basic relation with the world. He believes that not thought, but the *concrete*, the work activities we engage in, reveal, determine, and distort our natures.

### Outline

- I. Guidance in living can be understood as seeking some form of escape from the world or as seeking conquest of or reconciliation with the world. In any of these alternatives, the world we find ourselves in must be understood for what it is.
  - A. Influencing Marx greatly, not only negatively but positively, Hegel understands our very human natures—thus our identities—to be bound up in sociopolitical and economic circumstances.
    1. The early Hegel, a positive influence on Marx, sees such circumstances as often in need of dramatic alteration (revolution). He writes about the three possible outcomes of such an alteration:
      - a. It might result in chaos.
      - b. It might result in even worse circumstances.
      - c. It might result in better circumstances.
    2. The later Hegel, a very negative influence on Marx, celebrates the virtues of Prussian society and claims that its structures are supportive of our human identity and require no essential alteration.
  - B. Marx believes that the institutional arrangements of the world in which he finds himself do not reflect and respond to human need nor to the potential of human nature. Thus, Hegel’s celebration of such arrangements enrages Marx.
    1. Marx sees the dynamic and courageous spirit of the early Hegel giving way to a self-serving, complacent, and highly inequitable conservatism.
    2. Marx calls *alienation* the circumstance in which one does not find oneself acknowledged in and through the institutional arrangements that are supposed to mirror and speak to one.
    3. Alienation can be understood as a disconnection with something to which you belong—and which is meant to be supportive of you. Marx finds our primary disconnection, and thus alienation, in the socioeconomic circumstances and dynamics in which a person is enmeshed.
- II. Philosophers often take our basic relation to the world to be the most revealing indicator of our own nature and of the world’s most basic features.
  - A. Hegel understands this pivotal relation to be by means of thought.
    1. Hegel confirms the Western valuing of rational comprehension as our highest capacity. In both the Greeks and Hegel, it is importantly spectatorial.
    2. Hegel directs such knowledge toward the concrete, social, and cultural world of his time, not beyond it.
    3. Hegel believes his current world incorporates the completion of history itself.
    4. Hegel understands knowing as a continuing recapitulation and appropriation of what is already known in the full richness of its content.
    5. The world so revealed is rich in features but remains pervasively an object of rational comprehension.

- B. Marx understands our most crucial and revelatory relation to the world to be through work (or labor). We have no adequate term for exactly what Marx has in mind, though we understand it quite well from our ordinary experience.
    - 1. Concrete, practical engagement in the world expresses most fundamentally our own natures as agents unavoidably and constitutively involved in cooperatively productive activities.
    - 2. Such engagement reveals as well a malleable world of socioeconomic relations and forces into which the natural world is drawn. The ideas and cultural elements found in these circumstances are derivative from this matrix of relations and forces.
- III. Marx's diagnostic understanding of our alienation involves at least three circumstances in which a separation of ourselves from our true underlying nature occurs.
- A. In the positive, nonalienated circumstance, the "something" that results from a person's productive activity is made in the manner that its "author" chooses to make it, and that producer is entitled to dispose of it in the manner in which he or she chooses.
    - 1. If this occurs, the agent involved is productively free and self-determining.
    - 2. Marx claims that the result—the "product" involved—can then be construed as an essential expression of its producer. It is importantly a dimension of that person himself or herself.
    - 3. The activities involved and results of these activities—the products—are understood by Marx to enter into the very constitution of the person who is their author. Through such activities, people become who they really are, much more so than through the ideas or thoughts that these people might happen to have. Marx construes these ideas and thoughts as mere epiphenomena, impotent results of underlying activities, but not contributors to these activities—in other words, only effects not causes.
  - B. In the positive, nonalienated circumstance, the productive agent's time is his or her own and is subject only to the timing and partitionings of time that are of that agent's own choosing.
    - 1. Even as early as the Stoics, we have the notion that our relation to our own time is most intimate, and to hypothecate our time is essentially to impoverish ourselves.
    - 2. Two essential questions arise regarding our time.
      - a. Does it belong to us or to someone else?
      - b. Does it belong to us, or do we belong to *it*?
    - 3. There is an important experiential distinction between clock and "existential" time. The first externalizes us. The latter is potentially restorative.
    - 4. The Stoic Seneca says that, among all of our possessions, time is the most precious, and, paradoxically, we are always giving it to others.
    - 5. Marx says that our time must be our own, not sold to others. He finds the world exploitative, enslaving people who are forced to sell their time to others.
  - C. In the positive, nonalienated circumstance that Marx extols, the relations that humans sustain with each other are concrete, existential relations that are fully human, involving a wide range of aspects.
    - 1. Marx claims that such relations enter into our very nature and that not the least of them is the relation of man and woman.
    - 2. Marx reacts critically to a matrix of human relations that sorts them out primarily in economic terms, for example, buyer and seller, economic competitors, and employer and employee.

### Essential Reading

Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

———, *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*.

### Supplementary Reading:

Eric Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*.



**Questions to Consider:**

1. How does Marx believe that he departs from Hegel and prior philosophical thought?
2. To what degree has Marx been influenced by Hegel?
3. What are the basic elements of reality for Marx?

## Lecture Eleven

### Marx's Utopian Hope

**Scope:** Philosophical strategies for dealing with the world sort out into three types, involving transcendence, resignation, and transformation. Marx believes that we belong to history and that we will find the meaning of our lives through it. The history that he outlines involves oppressive class distinctions, socioeconomic conflict, and the domination of the weaker by the stronger. It is not ideas but property and power—and the forces controlling them—that have moved human history. Marx believes that ideas, taken alone, are not efficacious. Ideas are understood by Marx to be “ideological.” They are distortedly employed as a means of deceiving us. Through ideology, our circumstances are represented to us differently than they are, thus anaesthetizing us to our true human condition. Marx is among the first philosophers whose guide to living involves a critique of religion as destructively ideological. He forwards communism as a means of overcoming our alienation and transforming our spirit. For this to happen, however, Marx claims that revolution is necessary. Philosophy itself will not help.

### Outline

- I. The axial notion that we are *in* but not *of* the world suggests three possible strategies with respect to our relation to the world: transcendence, resignation, and transformation.
  - A. The notion of transcendence has played the primary role because of the Greek preference for theory over practice.
    1. The very configuration of the human soul in Plato encourages this consequence.
    2. The Christian notion of a kingdom not of this world has a similar consequence but puts philosophy in the service of considerations of faith.
      - a. This development was a watershed, for it made philosophy, construed as an autonomous quest for transcendence, a supporter of religion.
      - b. Marx believes, however, that religion is an opiate for the people.
      - c. A further and typical consequence has been to transform the use of philosophy as a guide to transcendence into a somewhat secret and/or esoteric pursuit, but Marx dismisses this notion.
      - d. One of the consequences of the Enlightenment was the submergence of otherworldliness and the emergence of philosophy out from under the control of theological concerns.
    3. As the world came increasingly to be understood scientifically and axial instincts decreased, transcendence came to be understood as escaping the material world and entering into the realm of contemplative thought.
  - B. Resignation has also been a dominant strategy, almost to the point of being identified with philosophy itself, as in “being philosophical” about things.
    1. Even in Socrates, but especially in Stoic and Hellenistic thought, it is believed that no harm can come to a good person and thus that goodness is a matter of character, something inward. Marx, however, considers this notion to be escapism.
    2. Deontological ethical systems, emphasizing the evaluation of motive over consequence, are frequently sophisticated forms of resignation from the world. Marx disagrees, believing that people can use this notion to dominate others.
    3. Schopenhauer’s is also a philosophy of resignation, if not renunciation.
      - a. In important ways, Schopenhauer rejects reality itself and might be called “nihilistic.”
      - b. Marx says that we must accept and change *this* world.
    4. The strategy of resignation lives off an unstable mixture of beliefs regarding the compensatory features of the inner life, the actual insignificance of the world, and what Marx construes as a futile celebration of the world’s fruits. Marx views these fruits as unjustly available only to a privileged few.

- C. Marx's notion of a philosophical guidance for living, one leading to the world's transformation, has involved the underlying beliefs that worldly life is not just clothing for the human spirit, but essential to it, and that human history is a narrative of progress toward an intended goal, whether that goal is fully and consciously comprehended or not.
1. Hegel believes that there is a worldly and qualitatively measurable development of the human spirit through history.
    - a. Past stages are taken up into the present in reconfigured form.
    - b. Ideas matter and, in fact, drive history.
    - c. On Hegel's account, the end of history, its goal, has been reached.
  2. Marx focuses on historical development and is famously said to have inverted Hegel.
    - a. For Marx, history has not reached its final stage, but that stage can be prospectively predicted and in some ways hastened or at least anticipated.
    - b. The complex of socioeconomic forces and their dynamic development configure and define human life. For Marx, ideas are derivative.
    - c. The current (and penultimate) stage of development, which Marx refers to as capitalism, involves significant traceable and comprehensible distortions of human life and human consciousness.
    - d. As guidance for living, philosophy in Marx transforms into social critique and visionary prophecy.
- II. On the Marxist account, socioeconomic forces are sorted out in a capitalist society in terms of ownership and labor. Societal and property configurations within this disposition of resources are said to distort human life and even to make the comprehension of these distortions challenging.
- A. This set of historical circumstances is greatly influenced by Hegel's famous "Master and Slave" section of his *Phenomenology of Spirit*.
    1. Hegel takes to be fundamental the notion that domination and subordination provide the dynamic that structures human relations.
    2. Out of this notion later comes "the politics of recognition."
  - B. On Marx's account, the dynamic of Master and Slave plays out in capitalism.
    1. These laws are said to engender and reinforce alienation.
    2. The mode of thinking involved in these circumstances is termed *ideological*, and is said to nurture "false consciousness."
    3. For Marx, philosophical guidance involves diagnosis: the detecting and exposure of ideology (claims that give us skewed views of the world) and the dispersal and extinguishing of false consciousness.
    4. Rather than being objective, revelatory, and/or transformative, ideology masks the interests of the dominant class and presents these interests as if they were reliable accounts of how the world is and in fact ought to be.
    5. Marx decries religion as a particularly effective means of distortion, a means of displacing human energy.
    6. Marx gets construed by some as a prophet of social justice.
- III. Marx believes that people would revolt and create a communist society, where each person would be rewarded according to his needs and work according to his talents.

**Essential Reading:**

Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*.

Robert Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why is ideology such an important concept in Marx?
2. What is Marx's critique of religion?
3. How does Marx understand our future historical development?

## Lecture Twelve

### Kierkegaard's Crises

**Scope:** Large and pervasive phenomena preoccupy the reflections of Hegel, Schopenhauer, and Marx. Philosophical guidance is worked out against the backdrop of history and other impersonal or supra-personal forces. In Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855), often labeled the “father of Existentialism,” these large-scale considerations fall away. An intense focus is placed upon the individual. A consideration of three crises in Kierkegaard’s own life illumines very basic tenets of Existential philosophy itself: the focus on individuality as an accomplishment, not a given, and an extreme concentration on the separateness and inner seclusion required for an authentic and genuinely meaningful human life. Kierkegaard makes the extraordinary claim that a set of three stages must be traversed for a human life to be complete. A consideration of Kierkegaard’s own crises allow us to focus the dynamics and message of a religiously oriented Existentialist guide to living.

### Outline

- I. Before Kierkegaard, the notion of detaching from one’s specific individuality and coming to relate (and even belong) to something larger than oneself had dominated much philosophical thinking regarding the best way of living.
  - A. The most fundamental means for accomplishing this transcendence was thought to be through the deployment of detached or passionate reason.
    1. Typically, this thought suggested the separability of a higher and a lower aspect of our human nature; the one dispensable, the other essential.
      - a. Assuming that only *like* could know *like*—and that truth was eternal—it was possible to conceive a part of oneself as being immortal. This rational capacity achieved a special dignity for some philosophers.
      - b. At a minimum, a kind of “objective” immortality was suggested: direct knowledge of what does endure, whatever happens to oneself.
    2. Great struggles may nonetheless be involved in the subduing of our lower nature, if our higher nature is to have its full opportunity to develop.
      - a. In Augustine, one’s sensual nature is a great stumbling block, as it is for many of the Stoics.
      - b. We have seen that the passions were believed to be directed toward the transitory and unimportant.
  - B. The form that the quest for transcendence took in Kierkegaard’s time was *historical*. The comprehension of the blueprint of history itself was sought. It did not matter whether one actually contributed personally to historical developments or not.
    1. Danish Hegelians, for example, were contributors to the dialectical development of various aspects of Danish history.
    2. Kierkegaard detests this spectatorial detachment. He extols the passionate and committed *living through* of various events.
    3. Kierkegaard wants to make life more difficult.
    4. He understands the active “*living through*” of something to be very specific, concrete, and individual and as having no particular “rationality” in terms of an explicable, repeatable pattern.
- II. Part of Kierkegaard’s “Existentialism” is captured in the very specific circumstances he details in his *Fear and Trembling*, regarding the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac.
  - A. Kierkegaard construes Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, as a “teleological suspension of the ethical.”
    1. Morally, it is utterly wrong that Abraham should slay his son, and it remains morally wrong.
    2. That Abraham is commanded by God to perform this sacrifice does not make it morally right, but makes it something Abraham must do. Such a command from God is in fact the only justification for acting in this manner.

3. Kierkegaard hopes to undercut all human claims to creativity insofar as they are employed as justifications for disregarding morality.
  4. For Kierkegaard, actions such as Abraham's are the essence of defining "crisis" situations in human life. They are neither rational nor transferable beyond the concrete situation out of which they arise.
- B.** Kierkegaard's own life involves an "Abrahamic" circumstance, and it focuses his religious Existentialism.
1. Kierkegaard breaks his marriage engagement to Regine Olsen, claiming to spare her in so doing.
  2. Though he claims his melancholy to be a motivating reason, Kierkegaard actually believes that he needs to "sacrifice" Regine for the sake of his God-relationship. He believes that this God-relationship must not be diluted.
    - a. Wholehearted, singleminded, and undistracted commitment to God—a leap of faith—is Kierkegaard's conception of the only complete life.
    - b. Kierkegaard seeks purity of heart.
    - c. Such a life is inward and largely hidden.
  3. Kierkegaard distinguishes between a "knight of faith" and a "knight of resignation."
    - a. Kierkegaard believes that knights of resignation, who display their religion, their poverty, and their humility, and who resign from the ordinary pleasures of life, are really calling attention to themselves.
    - b. The faith of the knights of faith, on the other hand, is inward, hidden, and personal.
- C.** Another crisis in Kierkegaard's life illustrates his notion of our underlying, if almost always uncomprehended, separateness and isolation from others.
1. Kierkegaard challenges a satirical journal, *The Corsair*, to satirize him, which it does at great social cost to Kierkegaard.
  2. Altogether unlike Hegel, Kierkegaard claims that our relations to others are false reassurances and *ersatz* support systems.
  3. For Kierkegaard, security is a form of death.
- III.** Kierkegaard's relation to the State Church of Denmark becomes a defining crisis for him upon the death of Bishop Jakob Mynster and a subsequent eulogy delivered by Professor Hans Martensen at Myster's funeral.
- A.** Kierkegaard claims that only a direct spiritual connection to God, not one mediated by any other individual or by an institution, is desirable and even possible.
1. Unlike Hegel, Kierkegaard believes institutional settings to falsely hijack, not enhance, the human soul.
  2. Kierkegaard explains true spiritual relatedness to be necessary for salvation. For him, it is attainable by no visible means, and true Christianity is offensive to human reason.
  3. According to Kierkegaard, if you believe in Christianity because it makes sense, you have misunderstood Christianity.
- B.** On Kierkegaard's account, even to reach the point where a true spiritual commitment can be made, prior stages have to be lived fully and overcome.
1. Kierkegaard believes individuality is attained only after reflections on oneself.
  2. Unlike secular Existentialism, Kierkegaard believes our true nature to exist and only fully to be reached in a specific relation to God.
- C.** As a guide to living, Kierkegaard uses philosophy rigorously and intensely to show philosophy's ultimate unimportance and irrelevance in the face of what really matters.

**Essential Reading:**

Søren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals: A Selection*.

Walter Lowrie, *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Joakim Garff, *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Which of Kierkegaard's crises seem valid as explanations of his philosophical views?
2. Why does Kierkegaard find our separateness from other people so important?

## Timeline

1596	Birth of Descartes
1650	Death of Descartes
1697	Publication of Bayle's <i>Historical and Critical Dictionary</i>
1712	Birth of Rousseau
1724	Birth of Kant
1744	Birth of Herder
1749	Birth of Goethe
1756	Birth of Mozart
1762	Birth of Fichte; Publication of Rousseau's <i>Social Contract</i>
1769	Birth of Napoleon
1770	Birth of Hegel and Beethoven
1774	Publication of Goethe's <i>Sorrows of Young Werther</i>
1776	U.S. Declaration of Independence
1778	Death of Rousseau
1781	Publication of Kant's <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
1788	Birth of Schopenhauer
1789	Outbreak of the French Revolution
1791	Death of Mozart
1793	Publication of Kant's <i>Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone</i>
1800	Publication of Fichte's <i>Vocation of Man</i>
1803	Death of Herder
1804	Napoleon crowned emperor; death of Kant
1805	Beethoven's <i>Eroica</i> Symphony
1806	Birth of John Stuart Mill
1807	Publication of Hegel's <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>
1808	Publication of Goethe's <i>Faust, Part I</i>
1813	Birth of Kierkegaard; birth of Wagner
1814	Death of Fichte
1818	Birth of Marx
1819	Publication of Schopenhauer's <i>World as Will and Idea</i>
1820	Birth of Engels
1821	Publication of Hegel's <i>Philosophy of Right</i>
1823	Beethoven's <i>Ninth Symphony</i>
1827	Death of Beethoven
1831	Death of Hegel



1832	Death of Goethe
1843	Publication of Kierkegaard's <i>Either/Or</i> and <i>Fear and Trembling</i>
1844	Birth of Nietzsche
1848	Publication of Marx's <i>Communist Manifesto</i>
1855	Death of Kierkegaard
1856	Birth of Freud
1859	Birth of Husserl and Dewey; publication of Darwin's <i>Origin of the Species</i>
1860	Death of Schopenhauer
1867	Publication of Marx's <i>Capital</i> (Part 1, Vol. 1)
1872	Publication of Nietzsche's <i>Birth of Tragedy</i>
1873	Death of John Stuart Mill
1882	Première of Wagner's opera <i>Parsifal</i>
1883	Death of Marx and Wagner
1886	Publication of Nietzsche's <i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
1887	Publication of Nietzsche's <i>Toward a Genealogy of Morals</i>
1889	Nietzsche's collapse into insanity; birth of Heidegger
1895	Death of Engels
1900	Publication of Freud's <i>Interpretation of Dreams</i> ; death of Nietzsche
1905	Birth of Sartre
1913	Birth of Camus
1914–1918	First World War
1926	Birth of Foucault
1927	Publication of Heidegger's <i>Being and Time</i>
1929	Birth of Habermas
1930	Publication of Freud's <i>Civilization and its Discontent</i>
1933	Heidegger becomes rector of Freiburg University in Germany
1938	Death of Husserl; publication of Sartre's <i>Nausea</i> and Freud's <i>Moses and Monotheism</i>
1938	Freud moves from Vienna to London to escape Nazism
1939	Death of Freud
1939–1945	Second World War
1942	Publication of Camus' <i>The Stranger</i>
1943	Publication of Sartre's <i>Being and Nothingness</i>
1951	Publication of Camus' <i>The Rebel</i>
1952	Death of Dewey
1960	Death of Camus

- 1961 ..... Publication of Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*
- 1976 ..... Death of Heidegger; Publication of Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1:  
An Introduction
- 1980 ..... Death of Sartre
- 1984 ..... Death of Foucault
- 1985 ..... Publication of Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*

## Glossary

**Absolute Spirit (Hegel):** The historical unfolding of human consciousness. This is construed by Hegel as the insightful replacement for (and successor to) the traditional notion of God. In its totality, Absolute Spirit is said to be the history that “God” is producing as human life unfolds.

**Aestheticism:** The doctrine that most principles, and especially moral ones, can be and are derived from personal preferences or temperamental inclinations regarding beauty.

**Agnostic:** The position of those who doubt that certain questions have attainable answers that will be convincing to them, or that a reliable course of action can be determined through these answers. Often, agnostic people make no attempt to come to a definite conclusion on a particular matter.

**Alienation (Marx):** Disconnection from or insufficient connection with something to which you belong and that constitutes an essential part of your nature.

**Ancient:** Going back in history to pre-Christian (Greek and Roman) times.

**Angst:** A notion found especially in Existential philosophy: the feeling of dread or anxiety arising from an often-suppressed awareness that we cannot escape the human predicament and its pervasive problems.

**Antecedent:** Something that happened before or existed prior to something else (and may continue to exist).

**Anthropological:** Relating to the study of human attitudes, practices, and artifacts, especially the study of cultures.

**Anthropomorphism:** The attribution of human characteristics, form, or behavior to nonhuman and possibly even nonexistent realities, such as deities in mythology.

**Antinomy:** Two apparently correct and reasonable theses that do not agree, exhaust the available options, cannot hold up to thorough scrutiny, and therefore produce an uncertain and bewildering conclusion.

**Apollo (Nietzsche):** Greek god, patron of music and poetry, construed as the principle of form, organization, and order.

**Aufhebung (Hegel):** (German) Technical term in Hegel for the abandoning of a conflicted, perhaps even contradictory, outcome and the carrying forward of its conflicting elements into a seemingly reorganized and harmonious context.

**Augustinian:** Relating to St. Augustine of Hippo (the 4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup>-century church father), to his doctrines, or to any of his ideas regarding spiritual life.

**Axial:** The conduct of life construed as a journey from darkness to light and from bondage to liberation; the underlying assumption that there are two orders: that of *this* world (appearance) and that of *another* (reality).

**Being:** The most basic and pervasive constituent of reality, without which nothing could exist.

**Bifurcate:** To split or separate off into two parts.

**Bolshevism:** The ideology and policies of the most radical communist movement in Russia around the time of the Russian Revolution, especially the advocacy of the forcible overthrow of capitalism in the pursuit of a socialist order and command economy.

**Buddhism:** The teaching of Gautama Buddha, which proclaims that all human life involves suffering, that sorrows arise from attachments, and that attachment can be eradicated through a disciplined life involving both disengagement and compassion.

**Capitalism:** An economic system based on private ownership and characterized by the rule of law, transparency in transactions, and a free and competitive market motivated by considerations of profit.

**Cartesian:** Relating to the 17<sup>th</sup>-century French philosopher René Descartes, who claimed that mind and matter are separate realities and that we can experience directly only the contents of our own minds.

**Consumerism:** The belief that buying and selling various items is our basic and most desirable relation to the world and that it can bring happiness.

**Contextualize:** To place an idea within a particular framework or setting in which it may be seen differently and understood better.

**Contractual:** Involving an agreement that two or more parties voluntarily enter into and consider binding for all parties involved.

**Cyclical history:** The theory that there are phases of development that recurrently reach completion and then repeat themselves over and over again in largely the same sequence.

**Deontological:** Relating to philosophical theories that claim that the moral value of an action depends on its motivation, not on its consequences.

**Depth psychology:** The study of dimensions of human consciousness that are beneath its surface and typically hidden from view.

**Derivative:** Arising from and influenced by sources beyond itself and therefore not original.

**Despotism:** Involving the rule and arbitrary use of power, typically, by an individual who has monopolized power and is not accountable to anyone.

**Dialectic:** The pursuit of truth through discussions that question assumptions; the intellectual tension that exists when two or more conflicting ideas are brought into relation.

**Dionysus (Nietzsche):** Greek god of fruitful abundance and wine who was often celebrated in orgies. In Nietzsche, Dionysus represents unbounded and often chaotic and destructive energy.

**Empathy:** The ability to identify with and understand another person's feelings or difficulties from that particular person's own point of view.

**Empirical:** Based on direct and usually verifiable observation and experiment rather than speculative theory.

**Endemic:** Characteristic of or unavoidably present in a particular place, or as part of a particular reality or situation.

**Enlightenment:** An intellectual movement that began in Western Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and that continues to be very influential. It emphasizes reason and science in the study of human nature and in the explanation of all aspects of reality.

**Entschlossenheit (Heidegger):** (German) Resoluteness; an underlying steadfastness in outlook, orientation, and commitment.

**Episteme (Foucault):** A defining principle employed to sort out and configure human knowledge as well as social arrangements.

**Epistemology:** The branch of philosophy that focuses on the nature of human knowledge; in particular, its foundations, limitations, scope, reliability, and validity.

**Eros:** The god of love in ancient Greece. Perhaps best construed, especially in Plato, as an underlying, uncomprehended desire for something that is lacking.

**Ersatz:** A substitute for something that is the original and presumed to be of superior quality.

**Ethical:** Consistent with agreed upon (and thus seldom achieved) principles of acceptable moral conduct.

**Existentialism:** A 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophical movement that often denies that the universe has an intrinsic meaning or purpose; it urges people to focus upon their own particular lives and to take individual and unapologetic responsibility for their own actions.

**Faith:** Belief in, devotion to, and/or trust in somebody or something without rational certainty that such commitment is warranted.

**Fideism:** The view that religious knowledge, when all is said and done, depends upon faith and/or revelation.

**Formalism:** A strong or excessive emphasis on structure; the outward appearance of something instead of its purported content or meaning.

**Forms (Plato):** The nature or essence of a thing; that which makes a thing what it is. In Plato, forms are considered to exist apart from the particular items that embody them.

**Grace:** In Christianity, the infinite favor, mercy, and love shown to humankind by God. Through grace, humans are said to be capable of redemption and salvation.

**Hellenistic:** Concerned with or characteristic of those ideas embedded in Greek civilization from roughly the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.

**Historicism:** The belief that each period of history has its own features, beliefs, and values and can only be understood in its own terms. Typically, the conception of universal and enduring values that transcend historical circumstances is denied.

**Human predicament:** The human situation construed as involving unavoidable, common, and pervasive problems in need of understanding and (hopefully) some measure of resolution.

**Iconoclasm:** The frequently disorienting and destructive overturning of traditional, religiously significant customs, beliefs, and values.

**Imagination (Kant):** A blind but indispensable function of the human soul; a power on a level deeper than reason that is involved in producing images and ideas.

**Immunity:** Exemption from outside interference in the carrying out of one's activities in a particular realm. Such interference is typically understood to come from either government or nongovernmental agencies or individuals. Government itself is usually construed as the appropriate protector of individuals from such interfering activities.

**Imperative:** Absolutely necessary or unavoidable.

**Impotence of Reason (Schopenhauer):** The view that, however insightful, reason is incapable of remedying or resolving the problems it reveals.

**Last Man (Nietzsche):** A person devoid of all strength and courage. Such a person is inclined merely to consume and is then himself or herself consumed by the trivialities of life *in* this world only.

**Meaning:** The significance of something, its end-purpose, or the insight it reveals.

**Messianic:** Relating to an inspirational, often charismatic leader, especially one claiming to be a liberator or savior.

**Metaphysical:** Relating to the study of that which may be beyond the physical world.

**Modernity:** In philosophy, the period commencing after the Middle Ages, roughly the turn into the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Modernity is associated with the rise of science and the gradual abandonment of tradition, custom, and otherworldly concerns.

**Moral life:** Life lived according to a set of ideas regarding what is right and therefore ought to be done—and what is wrong and therefore ought to be avoided.

**Mutuality:** A relationship between individuals that involves a reciprocal sharing of concerns and that takes their mutual feelings and perspectives into account.

**Narcissism:** In psychiatry, a personality disorder characterized by an obsession with and an overestimation of one's own ability and appearance. An excessive need for admiration from others is typically present, indicating—somewhat paradoxically—an underlying sense of little worth or even worthlessness.

**Nihilism:** The rejection of metaphysical and religious beliefs and an attendant sense that life has no reliable foundation or meaning.

**Noumenal:** Pertaining to that which is beyond the empirical world (that which is based on direct observation) and can only be known or identified, and potentially encountered, by the intellect or reason, not by the senses.

**Objectification:** To construe or to perceive something, in some cases misleadingly, as a thing, an object.

**Objective (Hegel):** The philosophical belief that moral truths and external objects and ideas generally exist independently of specific individual minds and perceptions.

**Objective Right (Hegel):** That to which you are entitled and that complements and completes your nature as a rational being.

**Ocular:** Perceived or having access to by means of the eye; features so revealed are said to be ocular.

**Omnipresent:** Continuously and simultaneously present throughout the whole of reality; present all the time and everywhere.

**Ontological:** Concern with the nature of things and their underlying being. Some claim that no such reality exists beyond what science can determine and thus that nothing is ontological.

**Oracularism (Heidegger):** To be prophetic in a somewhat mysterious and unaccountable way.

**Paradigmatic:** That which sets the standard and implies rules for evaluation and further investigation in a particular domain.

**Paradox:** A statement or proposition that goes contrary to our normal intuitions and appears surprising and often even false or absurd.

**Paralogism (Kant):** In logic, an invalid argument that has gone unnoticed. It involves conclusions that the premises of an argument may appear to support but, upon closer analysis, do not justify.

**Perennial:** Constantly recurring; sometimes construed simply as lasting for an indefinite time.

**Phenomenology:** The science or study of things as they are *perceived* rather than as they may actually *be* apart from their appearance to us; the philosophical investigation and description of our conscious experience without reference to whether what is experienced has independent reality.

**Platonic:** Relating to the ideas and philosophy of Plato. Plato believed reality to be eternal and unchanging and available to us by means of our reason.

**Postmodern:** The view that there is no credible narrative that explains our human history and its likely future. The view that there is no foundation upon which our experience rests that could secure its meaning.

**Radical:** Related to the basic nature or most important features of something in an extreme way.

**Realism:** The theory that things exist independently of our thoughts and perceptions and can be directly known to us. Sometimes construed as the acceptance of things as they are, as opposed to how we might want them to be.

**Reality:** How things really *are*, as opposed to an idealized, imaginary, or false way in which they may appear to us. Often contrasted with appearance or illusion.

**Reason:** Understood by the Greeks as the unique feature of humans, reason is sometimes identified with thought.

**Reflexivity:** The relation that something has to itself. People, for example, are said to have a certain conception of themselves and thus possess self-relatedness (reflexivity).

**Representationalism:** The theory that the mind has no direct access to external objects but apprehends them only through ideas and data that are found in the mind.

**Romanticism:** In the arts and philosophy, the rejection of the view that “form” is most fundamental and that reason is most central to human life.

**Self:** That which one relates to as one’s person, involving but not necessarily being exhausted by predominantly physical and psychological factors.

**Socratic:** Relating to the Greek philosopher Socrates or to his method of arriving at truth through asking questions and seeking definitions of concepts through critical conversation.

**Spirit:** A vital force in living beings. Though some identify this force in humans with the mind or with consciousness, others understand it more as a divine force or as something organic.

**Stoic:** An attitude arising from an ancient Greek school of philosophy that asserted that happiness can be achieved only by accepting life’s ups and downs as the products of an unalterable fate.

**Subjective (Hegel):** That which is understood only as “inner” or as pertaining almost exclusively to the individual and not to a larger community or world.

**Subjective Right (Hegel):** The right to be free from interference. This right is important, but negative in the sense of not having specific content. It amounts to the opportunity to be left alone.

**Sublimation:** The channeling of impulses or energies often regarded as dangerous or unacceptable, especially sexual desires, toward activities regarded as more socially acceptable. The satisfactions coming from sublimation are often viewed as substitutes for what is really wanted.

**Sublime:** Of the highest esthetic or spiritual value and largely inaccessible to rational analysis.

**Symbolism:** The taking of some reality or realities to represent or give access to the meaning or nature of other realities.

**Teleology:** An approach that studies actions and things in relation to their ends, use, or purposes.

**Terror:** Intense or overwhelming fear; typically connected with threats to the very foundations of one’s life upon which one has been able to trust and rely.

**Theodicy:** Arguments in defense of God’s goodness in the face of what at least appears to be the existence of evil.

**Totality:** A bringing together of items that takes all relevant ones into account; these elements as so combined.

**Transcendence:** That which has an existence, place, or standing above, beyond, and apart from other things.

**Transference:** The process, especially in psychoanalysis or other psychotherapy, whereby feelings, fears, or emotions relevant to one domain or person are unwittingly redirected or repeated with regard to a new person or object, often the analyst or therapist.

**Truth (Nietzsche):** In Nietzsche, truth is defined as that which affirms life and promotes energy and growth. This type of affirmative power is the possession of rare individuals whom Nietzsche calls “supermen.” (*Übermenschen*). More conventionally, truth is understood as a feature of propositions that accurately correspond to the reality.

**Two-worldly:** Belonging to this world as well as some other world beneath and/or beyond this one. Involves recognition of the fact that not all that is experienced and sought can be found in and explained by the elements present in this world.

**Übergang:** (German) Transition, usually a problematic and even perilous one.

**Übermensch (Nietzsche):** (German) A superior kind of human being, especially in Nietzschean philosophy. Such beings are said to be able to overcome their prior conditions of being and, at the extreme, to overcome the limitations of humanity itself.

**Uhrphenomenon (Schopenhauer):** (German) A special phenomenon, uniquely placed, that allows a person exceptional access to an underlying reality or to reality itself.

**Unheimlichkeit (Heidegger):** (German) A sense of not being at home in the world.

**Utopian:** Having to do with an ideal or perfect state or place, usually viewed as unattainable.

**Will:** Executive part of one’s being, through which decisions are made and actions are taken. Many controversies exist over whether this Will is free or determined by outside or hidden forces.

**Wisdom:** Often construed as involving, but also transcending knowledge and information and offering transformative guidance in living. The Ancients tended to believe that wisdom could be found, whereas the Moderns have tended to limit the basis for guidance in living to the realms of factual knowledge and information.

**Zeitgeist:** (German) The ideas prevalent in a particular historical period and place, especially as expressed in philosophy, religion, and the arts.

## Biographical Notes

**Alfred Adler** (1870–1937). A Viennese physician, Adler was part of the early development of the psychoanalytic movement. Parting from Freud, Adler came to believe that the drive for power was our most fundamental motivator.

**Ludwig von Beethoven** (1770–1827). Major German composer of the Romantic period who was inspired by the French Revolution and its ideals. Among his famous symphonies are the *Eroica* and the *Ninth Symphony* (which includes Schiller's *Ode to Joy*). Becoming deaf at the early age of 32, Beethoven wrote his greatest music in his later life. When he died in 1827 in Vienna, more than 10,000 people streamed to the Austrian capital to attend his funeral. He had become a public figure as no composer had been before him, triumphing over personal tragedy. The artist as hero had been born.

**Albert Camus** (1913–1960). Algerian-born philosopher and writer who was greatly active in France during and after the Second World War. Camus is perhaps best known for his Existential novel, *The Stranger*. Camus is frequently connected with Sartre, though their views on the human predicament, and its resolution, differ. Camus won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957 and died in a car accident on his way to Paris in 1960.

**René Descartes** (1596–1650). Considered by most the father of modern philosophy (the period of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries), Descartes was initially educated by Jesuits. He rejected a job in the church, however, for one in the army of Prince Maurice of Orange and Breda (Netherlands). Descartes resigned his commission in 1621 and moved to the Netherlands in 1628 to devote himself to his philosophy and a study of the physical theory of the universe, mathematics, and the examination of truth. He attempted to reconcile the claims of common sense with the developing concepts of the science generated by Galileo and others. He died in 1650 of pneumonia in Sweden, where he had gone several months earlier upon the invitation of the Swedish queen.

**Friedrich Engels** (1820–1895). The eldest son of a German industrialist, Engels was sent to London. He was so shocked by the working conditions in his father's factory that he joined the Communist League, which proclaimed "the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, the domination of the proletariat, the abolition of the old bourgeois society based on class antagonisms, and the establishment of a new society without classes and without private property." He met Karl Marx in London and financially supported Marx and his family. Together they wrote *The Communist Manifesto*, which was published in 1848.

**Johann Fichte** (1762–1814). A German philosopher, Fichte encountered Kant's philosophy when he was asked to tutor a student in Kant's theories. He became very concerned with extending and correcting the philosophy of the great Enlightenment thinker and had an unhappy meeting with Kant in 1791. Kant was not impressed. Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* (1808) is taken by many as a major step toward philosophical nationalism.

**Michel Foucault** (1926–1984). Perhaps the most famous and controversial French philosopher after Sartre, Foucault published widely on such topics as insanity, punishment, and sexuality. He attained the prestigious position of Chair in the History of Systems of Thought at the Collège de France and regularly lectured at the University of California at Berkeley.

**Sigmund Freud** (1856–1939). Born in Freiberg, Moravia (Austria), Freud spent most of his productive career as a physician and theorist in Vienna. His lectures and books about the conscious and the unconscious, and especially his theories about hysteria and sexual desires, brought him fame and following but also much controversy. After fleeing from the Nazis to London in 1939, he died of cancer a few months later. Freud is known as the father of psychoanalysis and first attained fame through the publication of the *Interpretation of Dreams*. Most of psychoanalytic thought remains in Freud's debt.

**Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (1749–1832). The Shakespeare of the German world, Goethe wrote poetry and novels as well as reflections on science, particularly regarding color. Most major German philosophers saw Goethe as a prime example of creative talent and rational intellect. Goethe is most famous for his *Faust*, an epic drama written over a number of decades (1808, publication of part I). Living in Weimar, Goethe was also the advisor to those in political power.

**Jürgen Habermas** (1929–). A contemporary German philosopher, Habermas is concerned with political and social philosophy. Some would call him Neo-Marxist. He is especially concerned with examining communicative reason within a capitalist society, democracy, and the rule of law. His major work is *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981). He is retired from teaching but remains an active writer and worldwide speaker.



**Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel** (1770–1831). The most important of 19<sup>th</sup>-century German philosophers, Hegel was enthralled by the French Revolution and concerned with combining reason with history in order for history to be seen as a narrative of human development. In relative obscurity until after the publication of *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), Hegel became a professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin and was viewed by many as a defender of the Prussian State in his later career.

**Martin Heidegger** (1889–1976). Author of *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger became the major voice in German thought during the decades both prior to and after the Second World War. Because of his controversial connection with the Nazi Party, Heidegger became a very divisive figure in the world of political philosophy, and this fact made serious questioning of the relationship of philosophy, politics, and life unavoidable. Most of his career was lived out in the Black Forest region surrounding Freiburg, Germany, where he held the chair in philosophy at the university.

**Johann Gottfried von Herder** (1744–1803). Herder is one of the German “Romantic” philosophers who criticized Enlightenment thinking. He argued that a philosophy based on human reason alone, excluding human passions and desires, cannot be valid. For Herder, historical, cultural, and psychological factors have to be taken into consideration, and he opposed the idea of a reason-based philosophy that was timeless.

**Edmund Husserl** (1859–1938). Credited as the founder of the Phenomenological Movement, Husserl wrote extensively in the early decades of the 20th century regarding the task of philosophy, which he saw as description without assumptions or evaluations. Husserl held the chair in philosophy in Freiburg, Germany, prior to Heidegger and was of great influence on Heidegger’s development of philosophical method.

**Carl Gustav Jung** (1875–1961). A noted researcher in his own right, Jung collaborated closely with Freud in the early stages of the development of the psychoanalytic movement. More sympathetic to religion and humanism in general than Freud, Jung came to believe that the quest for meaning was our most fundamental drive.

**Immanuel Kant** (1724–1804). Though he was born and spent virtually his entire life in Königsberg, Germany, Kant wrote the watershed work of modern Western philosophy, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Earlier in his career as a professor, Kant wrote important essays regarding the sciences and was highly respected throughout Europe. Later in his career, Kant attempted to reconcile free will and morality in their relation to deterministic claims made in science. His influence continues today.

**Søren Kierkegaard** (1813–1855). A Danish philosopher born in Copenhagen, Kierkegaard wrote voluminously during his short life, both on philosophical and religious topics. Viewed by some as a frivolous socialite, witty and superficial, Kierkegaard often wrote under pseudonyms. He attacked Hegelian philosophy and often under his own name cast scorn on the State Church of Denmark. Kierkegaard is called the “father of Existentialism.”

**Melanie Klein** (1882–1960). An English psychoanalyst, Klein was central to the development of the object-relations school of psychoanalysis. She put great emphasis on the interpersonal as opposed to the standard Freudian claim that most all-important material is intrapsychic and thus internal to individuals. Freud’s daughter, Anna, defended her father’s views against what was labeled by many as the “Kleinian Heresy.”

**Karl Marx** (1818–1883). Born in Germany, Marx lived out the bulk of his productive career in England. He was horrified by the working conditions in 19<sup>th</sup>-century England and contemptuous of the ways in which privilege was disguised by sophisticated theories. With Engels, his great friend and supporter, Marx wrote *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). The first volume of *Capital*, his major contribution to economic theory, was published in 1867. The later volumes were published posthumously by Engels.

**John Stuart Mill** (1806–1873). Educated from an early age by his father, James Mill, John Stuart Mill wrote works championing human liberty and the toleration of different ideas and lifestyles. Mill was a utilitarian concerned with promoting the greatest good for the greatest number of people. He made his living through employment in the office of the East India Company, where he became chief examiner of the India correspondence.

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756–1791). A major composer in the Western world, Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria, and performed his music in many European courts from a very early age. He produced an astonishing volume of work in his short life. A number of philosophers, including Kierkegaard, considered Mozart’s many compositions as the best that music had to offer and as examples of the highest realm of the aesthetic.

**Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844–1900). Born in Saxony, Nietzsche was educated in Bonn and Leipzig and became a professor of Classical Philology in Basel, Switzerland. Known by most as the trumpeter of the “Death of God,” Nietzsche spent the last years of his sane life wandering among various boarding houses in Italy. Nietzsche had a famous friendship with Richard Wagner, the composer, and with him also a great falling out. Among Nietzsche’s many works are *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. Nietzsche went insane in 1889 and died in 1900.

**Plato** (427–347 B.C.). Perhaps the most influential philosopher in the West, Plato wrote dialogues regarding justice, love, law, politics, and the human soul. A young man at the time of Socrates’s famous trial in Athens, Plato was enthralled by Socrates’s method of inquiry. Going beyond Socrates, Plato developed metaphysical doctrines.

**Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1712–1778). A French writer with interests ranging from education to the ordering of society, Rousseau greatly influenced those who are given credit (or blame) for the French Revolution. He is largely anti-intellectual and concerned more with emotion and authenticity. His *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* (1750), *Emile* (1762), and *The Social Contract* (1762) ensured his fame and highly controversial status among almost all succeeding social thinkers.

**Jean-Paul Sartre** (1905–1980). A 20<sup>th</sup>-century French philosopher who was identified with the French resistance in World War II and made Existentialism popular as a movement, Sartre wrote novels, plays, and philosophical treatises such as *Being and Nothingness* (1943). After the Second World War, he became concerned with developing a political philosophy and had an extended flirtation with Marxist social and political ideas. Sartre was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1964, but he declined to accept the award to protest what he considered the degenerate values of bourgeois French society.

**Arthur Schopenhauer** (1788–1860). Known both as a pessimist and the philosopher who brought Buddhism to the attention of Western philosophy, Schopenhauer had very little in the way of a professional career. His major work, *The World as Will and Idea*, was published in 1818 but did not begin to receive attention until the 1850s. Schopenhauer is said by many to have influenced novelists such as Thomas Hardy, and the composer Richard Wagner claimed to be greatly in Schopenhauer’s debt.

**Socrates** (469–399 B.C.). Viewed by many as the true originator of Western philosophy, Socrates wrote nothing but engaged fellow Athenians in conversations that challenged them to explain what they meant and knew. Partly because of political antagonisms in Athens, but also because of irritations stemming from his probing conversational inquiries, Socrates was arrested and charged with impiety and corruption of youth. Convicted, he was forced to drink hemlock.

# **Philosophy as a Guide to Living**

## **Part II**

**Professor Stephen A. Erickson**



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**Stephen A. Erickson, Ph.D.**  
Professor of Philosophy, Pomona College

Steve Erickson received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Yale University at the age of 23. Since 1964, he has taught philosophy at Pomona College, where he is a professor of philosophy and holds the E. Wilson Lyon Chair in the Humanities. He is the author of *Language and Being* (Yale University Press), *Human Presence: At the Boundaries of Meaning* (Mercer University Press), and *The (Coming) Age of Thresholding* (Kluwer Academic Publishers), as well as numerous articles published in such journals as *The Review of Metaphysics*, *Man and World*, *Philosophy Today*, *The Harvard Review of Philosophy*, and the *International Philosophical Quarterly*.

Professor Erickson has been a guest faculty member at a number of psychoanalytic institutes, including the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute and the Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis, and has been a visiting scholar in New Hall, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England, and the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. He has served as president of the Karl Jaspers Society of North America and was a member of the Planning Committee for the Millennium Conference on Integration in the United Kingdom. He has recently served on the American Philosophical Association (APA) Committee on the Status and Future of the Profession and has been a director of conferences for the Liberty Fund, Inc., Indianapolis, Indiana, for more than 20 years. He is a member of the International Advisory Board of the Centre for Fundamental Research in Modern Culture, St. Petersburg, Russia; serves as the chair of the Academic Advisory Board of *Collegium Hieronymi Pragense* in Prague, Czech Republic; and serves on the Editorial Advisory Board of the *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* in the United States.

Professor Erickson has received awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Earhart Foundation, as well as four Wig Awards at Pomona College for excellence in teaching. He has lectured throughout the United States and Europe and in South America and Asia and currently leads conferences and seminars that deal with our controversially globalized transition into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the promise of human freedom, and the spiritual and cultural challenges we face.

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## Philosophy as a Guide to Living

### Scope:

*Is there a meaning to human life? Can this question be answered by philosophy? If so, could any positive answer be pursued through the practice of philosophy itself?*

These questions became increasingly timely, haunting, and controversial among European philosophers after the Enlightenment (c. 1750) when reason came more and more to trump religion as a way of explaining the world and our place in it. These questions remain timely and controversial today. They are the focus of *Philosophy as a Guide to Living* and are considered through the lenses of mostly European (Continental) philosophers, who have reflected on them from the time of the Enlightenment to the present.

Why single out these philosophers in particular? Because they speak in important ways to the time in which we now find ourselves. They are concerned with exploring the limits of human reason and are focused on the likely course of history. These philosophers tend also to pay close attention to our lives *in* the world, enmeshed in culture and questing after significant opportunities for self-understanding and personal development.

Though we are *in*, we are not altogether *of* this world, even if, in no literal sense, any other world exists.

This statement captures what I will be referring to as the *axial sensibility*: the sense that we find ourselves caught up largely in *appearances* and are trapped in and subject to various forms of bondage, such as political, psychological, and possibly spiritual ones. Coupled with this sense is the further sense that there must be an *elsewhere*, or another and better way of being here in the world as it is now, one that better engages *reality* and gives us a sense of liberation rather than confinement. This *axial* sense may prove to be but an inchoate and unrealistic longing, but it has been and continues to be experienced by many as genuine and inescapable. It has often been described as a *longing for a belonging*, driven in part by a sense of not belonging to the world as it is, of being displaced in it.

The claim became a focus and battleground for philosophers after the Enlightenment, and our course will continually return to its differing and often conflicting meanings. Thus, this course will be as much in depth as in extension. It will take no position but will probe and explore many. It will do this primarily through the telling of a philosophical story that has unfolded over the last 250 years and continues to inform our present.

A central dimension of this story is ancient, however. It needs to be kept in mind as our adventure unfolds. As I have indicated, the philosophical and religious West has been *axial*. It has understood human life as a journey: from appearance to reality, bondage to liberation, confusion to insight, darkness to light, the changing to the unchanging, and time to eternity. Until the time of the Enlightenment the task of life was largely construed as overcoming ignorance and bondage through direct and transforming encounter with reality. But this *axial* vision suffered a major blow from within philosophy itself. It is with this blow that our story really begins.

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), whose ideas are considered by many to represent a great watershed in Western thought, based all human hope on reason alone, dismissing all alternatives as forms of superstition. Yet he also claimed that our reason was limited in its scope and that our true humanity was available to us only if we considered certain fundamental metaphysical questions, even though the answers to these questions would be inaccessible to our rational capacities. Here already a disturbing paradox is found in Kant's writing, and intense controversy soon erupted. If reason—perhaps best exhibited today as technology—is our indispensable ally, and Kant himself claims that it must fail us in the end, how could knowledge of ultimate matters be possible? What could possibly serve as a foundation for human hope? In differing ways, all the philosophers we will consider in this course take up the challenge of answering these questions.

Beyond these questions lie even more. If, finally, reason cannot be relied upon, and religion, supposedly, has been superseded by Enlightenment thinking, by what means can claims about human extraordinariness be sustained? Did not the notion of a “metaphysical dimension to the human” become simply another superstition to overcome? In varying ways, the philosophers whom we consider in this course take up the challenge of responding to these questions as well.

Part of philosophy's post-Enlightenment quest for meaning involves attempts at finding something more fundamental in human beings than reason and a goal more elemental and transforming than knowledge. The truth, it

has been said, will set people free. This notion is at the core of the *axial* understanding of human life. But perhaps there is no truth, just facts. And perhaps no wisdom, either, just information.

Could it be that liberation, not knowledge, is the true end purpose of human life and even its meaning? And might this liberation be achieved through nonrational means: power, sexuality, revolution, resignation, creativity, compassion, or solidarity? All these pathways are explored in differing ways by Continental philosophers such as Nietzsche, Freud, Marx, Schopenhauer, Heidegger, Foucault, and others—all seeking a meaning to human life through a diagnosis of what the supposed “predicament of human existence” actually is. All assume that there *is* a human predicament, that it can be understood, and that it can, to some significant degree, be surmounted. What, in fact, *is* the human predicament? If this predicament is not so much ignorance (of something) as bondage (to something), what must we be liberated *from*, and what are we thereby liberated *for*? Liberation that is merely *from* something has a problematic, negative possibility accompanying it. Once liberated, we humans might find nothing positive in relation to which to exercise our newly acquired freedom. The resulting danger is something that has been called *nihilism*, the “discovery” that nowhere is to be found anything deserving our devotion or support, *that life has no meaning*.

Nihilism is in fact a genuine danger and concern for many of the philosophers whom we will consider in this course, including Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. We will be taking a close look at nihilism, its motivations, dynamics, and conflicting strands. Is nihilism avoidable and, in any case, can it be overcome by philosophical means? Does philosophy have resources to guide us around or through and beyond nihilism? The French Existentialist John Paul Sartre says that meaningful life begins on the other side of despair. What sense might we make of such a claim?

Many say that the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a *postmodern age*, and that postmodernism is inherently nihilistic. Postmodernism is said by some to close the door on all sustainable quests for meaning and even to render philosophy itself obsolete. In the light of our preceding explorations, I will suggest alternative ways in which philosophy may nonetheless thrive in our time, pursuing the quest for meaning and thereby providing various *guides to living*.



## Lecture Thirteen

### Kierkegaard's Passion

**Scope:** A fervently religious person, Kierkegaard nonetheless claims that the fundamental problem everyone must first face is boredom. Any guide to living must first speak to this, he claims, and it must even explore the dynamics of sexual seduction as a means of facilitating an escape from boredom. Having diagnosed and described this “aesthetic” stage of life, Kierkegaard argues the need for a “leap” and a passionate commitment to an “ethical” life. But by ethical he means a life devoted to the discovery and a subsequent becoming of who we really are. In Kierkegaard, genuine philosophical inquiry becomes an irreversible avenue toward religious salvation. Philosophy does not reach God, but it makes a desperate leap of faith almost unavoidable. Philosophy serves religion, though it cannot engender it. Kierkegaard’s account of human salvation further intensifies the isolatedness endemic to most Existentialist thinking. Passion, commitment, and faith are described in influentially provocative ways.

### Outline

- I. Kierkegaard claims that the stage of life at which all humans start out, and from which very few of us escape, is the aesthetic stage.
  - A. Aesthetic life involves episodes, thus discontinuity; calculation, thus no commitment; and underlying *boredom*—a great philosophical worry for Kierkegaard.
    1. Ibsen’s play *Peer Gynt*, particularly the “Button molder” scene, illustrates the aesthetic condition quite helpfully. Peer Gynt is an aesthete.
    2. From within the aesthetic life, what is real is defined as whatever can capture one’s interest.
    3. Only through memory, imagination, and the calculated rotation and careful dispensation of pleasures can boredom be temporarily overcome.
    4. Kierkegaard offers despairing passages, suggesting a sense that the “aesthete” finds life futile. There is no integrating passion by which to live or to die.
  - B. Kierkegaard claims that there is a dynamic to the aesthetic life, the capstone of which is relayed in his “The Diary of a Seducer.”
    1. It is necessary to become altogether shrewd and artful, if there is any chance of overcoming boredom.
    2. Kierkegaard claims that the dynamics of aesthetic life lead to calculated seduction of another person as the aesthetic life’s highest form.
    3. Kierkegaard counsels the fully developed aesthetic life, claiming, however, that it leads to a despair and terror. This experience of despair and terror is what first and only makes a leap out of the aesthetic life possible, though not ensured.
- II. Kierkegaard offers his account of the aesthetic life in a volume, entitled *Either/Or, Part I*, which is meant to stress that a choice must be made between the aesthetic life and a life Kierkegaard calls “ethical,” which is the second of life’s three stages.
  - A. There are problematic, yet intriguing, features to the notion of either/or in Kierkegaard.
    1. The *Either/Or* volume portrays the two ways of life, the aesthetic and the ethical, through two pseudonymous authors. Their writings are supposed to represent and convey these two ways of living.
    2. Judge William, the embodiment of ethical life, claims that the aesthetic can be retained and absorbed within the ethical. But then is there truly an either/or?
    3. Questions arise as to whether, at the extreme of the aesthetic, one could actually remain within it.
  - B. The ethical life is not so much about morality *per se* but about making the choice to attempt to become oneself, who one really is.
    1. In the ethical, one despairs over one’s current condition and decides to work at becoming one’s (true) Self.
    2. This is the core of nonvoluntarist Existentialism: the choice is not over *who* you are, but over whether you will pursue this Self and whether you will find it.

3. In the ethical, one controls one's impulses by means of a sense of duty. This Kierkegaard construes as acting within the "universally human."
4. One judges oneself in terms of an ideal conception of *who one really is*. In the ethical, one experiences it as a duty to live up to this ideal.

III. In *Purity of Heart*, Kierkegaard forwards the notion of integration of (and with) oneself as the criterion of having become oneself.

- A. Kierkegaard claims that the failure to become oneself can be measured by degrees of disintegration. Failure to find oneself is often experienced in three, ascending stages.
  1. Failure first gets construed in terms of omissions and commissions: You have a picture of who you are, but you find that there are things you do that are out of sync with that picture and things that you do not do that you should do to be in sync with it.
  2. Failure is next construed as resulting from some aspect of oneself, something about oneself, viewed as a part of oneself that can either be removed or overcome.
  3. Failure is finally viewed as resulting from one's very Self: We reach a certain point where we may find that who we are keeps us from becoming who we are. Something essential and inescapable regarding oneself is experienced as keeping one from becoming oneself. This point is the maximum peril.
- B. Kierkegaard claims that acknowledgement of this ultimate failure at the furthest reach of the ethical stage is what makes possible and necessary—though still avoidable—the leap of faith, which leads us to, and is, the third stage.
  1. Kierkegaard's God—altogether unlike Hegel's—is utterly transcendent and not of this world.
  2. Cultural and political history are not God's autobiography.
  3. This God speaks only to individuals and does not act through organizations.
  4. Kierkegaard emphasizes the necessity, yet the contradictoriness and offensiveness, of the God-man relationship.
  5. Kierkegaard claims that a sustaining relation to God must be renewed at every moment.

**Essential Reading:**

Robert Bretall, ed., *A Kierkegaard Anthology*.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part I*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Part II*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is Kierkegaard's diagnosis of the human condition in the aesthetic stage of life?
2. Should Kierkegaard's connecting of his Existential thought with religion be controversial?

## Lecture Fourteen

### Why God Died—Nietzsche's Claim

**Scope:** Though Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) are each categorized as Existential, Nietzsche differs from Kierkegaard dramatically. For Nietzsche, religion is not viewed as solving problems of meaning in human life but as creating and worsening them. One important task of philosophy is to expose the genealogy and motives underlying religious orientations and thereby partially discredit them. Another is to explain why philosophy has tended toward otherworldliness and contributed to the devaluation of primal (and for Nietzsche vital) human instincts. Nietzsche accounts for the rise of philosophy itself and seeks to discredit a number of its operating principles. Rather than providing a way to affirm life, Nietzsche indicts both philosophy and religion as contributing to human decadence. After announcing the “death” of God, a claim we will analyze as heralding for Nietzsche both pervasive disorientation and the arrival of a time of potentially courageous nihilism, Nietzsche extols the power of human creativity.

### Outline

- I. Nietzsche's dramatic pronouncement that “God is dead” involves the claim that the axial outlook that has dominated the West is no longer effective or credible.
  - A. God's “death” announces the end of foundationalist illusions, in particular the illusion that there is an unchanging reality beyond us, or that we have an underlying subjective nature that is substantial and fixed.
    1. Nietzsche claims that this changing world in which we find ourselves has been depreciated in the name of a Platonic world of eternal and unchanging forms.
    2. Nietzsche calls Christianity “Platonism for the People.” For Nietzsche, Christianity involves the denial of our instinctually based energies. These are taken to be aspects of our lesser and baser natures.
    3. Influenced in his youth by both Plato and Schopenhauer, Nietzsche wants to recast Plato's *Eros* and Schopenhauer's *Will* into life-affirming phenomena. His term for the underlying reality in which he claims us to be is one of the *Will to Power*.
    4. Nietzsche attacks the notion of a substantial ego, an underlying personal substance, as is found in Descartes and in many other famous philosophers.
  - B. The announcement of God's “death” is also a way of calling attention to a lack of robustness and passion—a decadence—in human affairs and a corresponding dwindling in number and intensity of opportunities for significant and enhancing experiences in human life.
    1. We do not believe enough in God to make religious passion *possible*, and we believe enough in God to make a celebration of life *impossible*.
    2. In the Nietzschean marketplace where God's death is announced, the reaction is casual, bemused, and derisive. There is indifference rather than piety, apathy rather than outrage.
    3. Nietzsche believes that the truth of God's death has yet to sink in. Its impact is yet to be felt.
    4. Nietzsche fears that this death will leave many with nothing to live or to die for.
    5. Religion has now lost its binding force. Because religion has been the inspiration and basis of culture, this loss means the growth of a great wasteland.
    6. What “value” culture has previously had as a transmitter of positive meaning will now deteriorate and become used up, and only a wasteland will remain.
    7. A life of passive consumption—indicated in Nietzsche's notion of the “Last Man”—will come to prevail.
    8. People will “hide wastelands within.” Nietzsche believes that life will become progressively more hollow and empty.
  - C. Nietzsche captures the situation of increasing decadence through diverse, and often unusual, references: to differing notions of the meaning of suffering, to a hammer, and through aphorisms that bewilder or shock.
    1. Nietzsche claims that this life itself should be precious enough to justify immense suffering. Suffering should not be justified as dispensing or as orienting one toward something beyond this world.

2. Nietzsche's hammer is a tuning fork that seeks out the hollow and the insincere.
  3. Nietzsche finds philosophy's guidance not through systems but through isolated and usually disconnected insights.
    - a. For example, he says that human maturity means to have captured one's childhood playfulness and innocence.
    - b. He suggests that thoughts of suicide may help us through many a difficult time in life.
    - c. He also says that there are no moral phenomena, only moral interpretations of phenomena.
- II.** Nietzsche's account of the rise of Platonic philosophy against the backdrop of Greek tragedy provides a provocative picture of us humans as dynamic interrelations of form and energy.
- A.** The personal circumstances surrounding Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music*, provide insight into its motivation and the frostiness of its reception.
    1. Nietzsche had a meteoric and envied rise in the academic world and was offered a very prestigious philosophical position in Basel at a very young age.
    2. His first book extolled Schopenhauer and Wagner. Nietzsche was enthralled with Richard Wagner's music as a sign and promise of future human creativity.
    3. Reviews of the book were unfavorable.
  - B.** In the book, Nietzsche offers an account of the core of Greek tragedy that captures, he claims, the core elements at the heart of our human existence.
    1. The Greek god Apollo represents the formative, clarifying, and individuating capacity that we possess. It crafts appearances and is exhibited to us in our dreams.
    2. Dionysus represents the primal, boundary-breaking, and potentially destructive energy that pulses through us at times. It obliterates distinctions and is exhibited to us through intoxication.
    3. A creative interaction of these two principles acting within us makes possible a continuing life affirmation in which much is brought to dynamic form. But no such creation needs to be continually sustained, thereby suffocating future creativity.
    4. Nietzsche claims that the legacy of Platonized Christianity was precisely a codification of one set of values that has long since become old and stale.
    5. Nietzsche understands the work of Socrates to be a disengaged conceptual quest, potentially otherworldly, detached in nature, and negating a celebration of life.
- III.** Nietzsche claims that the moral motivations that drive people are actually expressions of a wellspring of activity that is neither moral nor immoral: *the Will to Power*.
- A.** Nietzsche's philosophical guidance involves the unmasking of the origins of those principles we have come to hold as high and noble. These origins, Nietzsche claims, are typically found in the accidental, the base, and what can only be viewed as the intensely self-serving.
  - B.** Nietzsche claims that our most prevalent ways of valuing our lives in the world have arisen out of resentment toward the strong and the more fortunate.
  - C.** Nietzsche claims that there is no moral "truth," just differing forwardings of human interests. Nietzsche believes that this fact will be enormously difficult for us to absorb. Living without metaphysical constraints, however, is something that Nietzsche believes that the truly creative and the "philosophers of the future" must embrace and celebrate.
  - D.** Philosophy comes to be seen as exhorting otherwise-compliant people to a liberating, life-celebrating creativity.

**Essential Reading:**

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*.

———, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (and) *Ecce Homo*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why is Nietzsche so critical of previous philosophy and religion?
2. What should be made of the claim that “God is dead”?
3. In what ways is Nietzsche a nihilist?

## Lecture Fifteen

### Nietzsche's Dream

**Scope:** Any effective guide to living would itself need the actual “truth” to guide it. Otherwise, it would be blind. Nietzsche challenges this claim, however. If “truth” means some objective certainty, then for Nietzsche there either is none, or it offers no guidance. Famously, Nietzsche claims that there are no facts, just interpretations, especially in the realm of morality. He offers a most fundamental and provocative distinction between a slave morality that conforms to (supposed) norms and a master morality that creates values through its very activities. Truth is thereby redefined by Nietzsche as that which affirms life and promotes energy and growth. This type of affirmative power is the possession of rare individuals whom Nietzsche calls “supermen” (*Übermenschen*). These individuals embrace challenges and, by overcoming them, grow in power and influence. At the extreme, this ideal type says “Yes” to the whole of life, even its negatives, and would gladly live it again repeatedly and without change.

### Outline

- I. When Nietzsche came to see Plato’s true world as a fable, his notion of philosophy’s task turned in a provocative, even iconoclastic direction.
  - A. The notion of truth has sometimes been conflated with that of a mighty power. Fusion with or obedience to this power was believed to liberate and save one.
    1. In Plato, that part of the soul that is highest unites with the Forms and the Good.
    2. Because the highest in the soul is reason, the relationship is one of rational participation in reality (truth) itself.
    3. To know this truth is to conform to it and act in accordance with it, for, on Plato’s view, to know reality is to know the Good, and, on Plato’s account, one always acts in accordance with what one takes to be good. The only issue to be concerned with is whether one has full, complete, and certain knowledge. Moral goodness will automatically follow.
    4. Within the Christian appropriation of Plato—especially in Augustine—a flawed will is added, so that knowing the truth and acting in accordance with it do not correlate.
    5. In varying forms throughout the Western tradition, grace is needed, a gift from beyond. Its purpose is to connect one with reality. One will then know the truth and be set free.
  - B. Often moral and behavioral prerequisites are in place as conditions for the attainment of truth.
    1. In Plato’s *Republic*, an entire educational system is instituted to guide citizens toward the knowledge of reality itself.
    2. Assumptions are made regarding our higher and lower natures, and for truth’s attainment, we must find and develop that higher nature.
  - C. With Descartes and modern philosophy, moral requirements are dropped, and clarity, power, and discipline of mind become the sole virtues in the quest for truth.
    1. Truth nonetheless remains something objective and capable of being found.
    2. Reality, however, whether scientific or metaphysical, does not necessarily provide a basis for determining moral action.
    3. As science ascended over metaphysics (the legacy of Kant), even less a basis for action could be found in reality. This development is seen even more so in our contemporary world through the projecting of biotechnological possibilities based on scientific discoveries.
      - a. The concern not to violate something’s “nature” becomes problematic once the notion that something has a nature has been stripped.
      - b. The world of self-instrumentalization has now been entered: one’s own personhood becomes an object of potential manipulation.
- II. Somewhat inconsistently in his writings, Nietzsche construes the *True* as that interpretation which is life-affirming and/or enhancing, and the *Untrue* is construed by Nietzsche as that which is life-denying and/or

diminishing.

- A. On such an account, standard Western metaphysical and religious doctrines are *untrue* because they are life-denying. In the name of a (fictional) world beyond this one, these doctrines exhort us to negate the natural, instinctually based life of becoming that we live out in this world.
    - 1. Sometimes construed as a philosopher of life, Nietzsche puts great stress on the embrace and cultivation of instinctual energy.
    - 2. The *True* is that which enables us to affirm this life in its totality—the dangerous, dynamic, and even the “evil” and cruel—and which enables us to say “yes” to it without qualification.
  - B. For Nietzsche, the *Untrue* means an allegiance to the life-denying. It rests upon a commitment to otherworldliness and brings about *nihilism*: the devaluation of values and an ensuing decadence and sense of emptiness.
    - 1. The values that grow out of life-denial and/or illusions of a higher and better world are not sustainable. Nietzsche is on this respect a critic of what he takes to be a decadent Western culture.
    - 2. Nietzsche champions a creative affirmation and shaping, especially of oneself.
- III. In Nietzsche’s distinction between master and slave morality is found a key to the complex directives in his thought that constitute his guidance with respect to living.
- A. The slavish orientation justifies projects and action through antecedent laws and rules.
    - 1. The slave mentality is reactive and conformist.
    - 2. The laws and rules of the slavish mind tend toward asceticism. Asceticism is a “priestly” means of seeking dominance over the strong, life-affirming, and healthy.
  - B. The masterly orientation generates rules and laws virtually as an afterthought, as the implications of the master’s own robust, life-affirming, and creative celebration of self.
    - 1. Applied to society, a literal application of master morality may have alarming consequences.
    - 2. Nietzsche’s account is best applied to creative activities in the realm of culture, the interpretive strategy of the gentle Nietzscheans.
- IV. Two prime notions in Nietzsche are that of the *Übermensch*, misleadingly translated as “superman,” and the *Eternal Return*, which is his alternative to otherworldliness, a notion with which Nietzsche attempts fully to embrace and to affirm this real and tangled world of becoming in which we inescapably find ourselves.
- A. The task of the *Übermensch* is to accept challenges and to overcome them, not submit to them nor construe them in their own initial terms.
    - 1. The creative life seeks after and defines its own challenges.
    - 2. Antecedent definitions are construed as a consequence of weakness and passivity.
    - 3. Either we can take the risk and try to overcome challenges or we can “go under.”
  - B. The doctrine of *Eternal Return* involves saying “Yes” to the totality of life.
    - 1. The affirmation of life is desirable, not in spite of, but along with life’s “negative” aspects, including suffering, cruelty, and misfortune.
    - 2. The ultimate in affirmation is to be willing to live one’s same life an infinite number of times, again and again.

**Essential Reading:**

Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche, Life as Literature*.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Curtis Cate, *Friedrich Nietzsche*.

Irvin Yalom, *When Nietzsche Wept*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is Nietzsche's understanding of the concept of truth?
2. What does Nietzsche mean by the "superman"?
3. What would be involved in saying "Yes" to the whole of life?



## Lecture Sixteen

### Freud's Nightmare

**Scope:** Is it the best we can do to make shrewd compromises with life? Surely this would depend upon how human life was understood and the cost of the compromises. The philosopher in Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) told him that such compromises were both highly costly and terribly necessary. We will be looking behind and beyond Freud's fame and notoriety, his pervasive influence and current dismissal, in order to consider those aspects of Freud's early professional life that led him into what became *psychoanalysis*. We will consider his understanding of dreams as well as some quite everyday, waking occurrences that he viewed as symptomatic of our most basic human conflicts. A guide to living must open us to everyday and quite piecemeal solutions to the problems of life, however large these problems may be. Our attention will focus on Freud's two pivotal means of working out our "salvation": *work* and, especially, *love*.

### Outline

- I. The context in which significant portions of Freud's thought can be placed is philosophical and raises questions about the management of one's psychological faculties.
  - A. Plato's tripartite division of the soul is a model of human functioning quite relevant to understanding Freud.
    1. The vegetative (or appetitive) dimension of the soul—the level of desire, instinct, and impulse—in Plato resembles Freud's notion of the *id*.
    2. The spirited dimension—our will or willpower—resembles, though less so, the Freudian notion of the *ego*.
    3. The rational dimension—the conscience—resembles, though both problematically and revealingly, the Freudian *superego*.
    4. Our conscience and our desire conflict.
    5. Often our drives are not known to us; they live in the realm of the unconscious.
  - B. Plato's account of Eros (from which we derive our notion of the erotic) is important to Freud's understanding of human sexuality and the pleasure principle.
    1. That there is an underlying, nonrational energy at the core of our human nature is a view that we have traced from Plato through Kant and Schopenhauer to Nietzsche.
    2. In Freud's account, the underlying dynamic is quite close to Schopenhauer's and involves pleasure and satisfaction.
    3. Freud believes that there is also a death instinct.
- II. A key to understanding the place of Freud is found in his justification of making dreams a subject of scientific investigation.
  - A. Freud holds to a recapitulation theory of our dream life.
    1. Dreams reveal the earliest stages of the human race.
    2. Dreams retrace the development of those earliest stages.
    3. Dreams reveal primal forces at work that are at the core of human life and defy all modern rationality.
    4. Dreams are recapitulations not only of the development of the human race but also of our own development from childhood through adulthood.
  - B. Significantly, Freud quotes Nietzsche in this respect.
    1. Oddly, in the face of Nietzsche's documented loss of sanity, Freud claims Nietzsche to have exceeded all others with respect to self-knowledge.
    2. There are serious questions raised through Freud regarding both the limits and the dangers of self-knowledge.
    3. Greater self-knowledge is for Freud far less a "cure" than a means of shrewder self-management.

- III.** Some aspects of Freud’s early professional career before the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900 reveal important, underlying dynamics of the development of psychoanalysis.
- A.** Freud is drawn into actual medical practice by circumstances external to his career plans.
    - 1. Work in Brücke’s Institute, a renowned research institute, draws him further toward neurophysical investigations, but a racial “quota system” blocks his progress because Freud is Jewish.
    - 2. The need to support a wife causes Freud to pursue medical practice.
  - B.** Freud’s collaboration with Josef Breuer, an Austrian physician, reveals “hysterical” phenomena and, almost accidentally, leads to the discovery of therapeutic possibilities.
    - 1. Breuer’s practice is cathartic and related primarily to recent events in a patient’s life.
      - a. Breuer employs hypnosis, a technique at which Freud is poor.
      - b. Breuer is taken aback by what becomes the pivotal case of “Anna O.”
    - 2. Freud takes a more narrative approach. He is historical in his orientation and stresses insight.
      - a. The practice of encouraging “free association” (letting patients talk about anything at all) receives encouragement and confirmation.
      - b. Gradually, the crucial concept of transference develops.
  - C.** Freud’s encounter in Paris with the work done by the neurologist Charcot using hypnosis further reveals a stratum of the “mind” virtually unknown to the functioning consciousness.
    - 1. The zone of hypnotic influence opens to Freud numerous possibilities for the development of his theory.
    - 2. There is a continuing relatedness and divergence between the notion of individual patient treatment and the development of what Freud construes as a scientifically developed psychoanalytic theory.
    - 3. Far less optimistic than his American successors who largely medicalized psychoanalysis in the United States, Freud talks of “making shrewd compromises with life.”
- IV.** Freud speaks of salvation through work and love.
- A.** Freud writes extensively regarding love, though his views change and are complex.
    - 1. The component of love sometimes called “object choice” involves directed desire.
    - 2. Another component, sometimes called “identification,” is a form of self-love, also referred to sometimes as *narcissism*. It is never absent.
    - 3. Taken together, these two components constitute an essential core of love, never absent and always in need of careful monitoring and management.
  - B.** “Work” in Freud can mean many things, but it usually involves activity that productively externalizes energies, sublimates drives, and gains a measure of esteem for those who engage in it.
    - 1. Freud is always concerned with realistic ways of acknowledging actual desires, yet effectively engaging with the world in constructive ways.
    - 2. Sublimation involves intelligently constructed consolation prizes.
  - C.** In important ways, Freud construes human life as the relentless disappointment of deep human needs.
    - 1. Such frustration can only engender destructive impulses that become increasingly difficult to manage.
    - 2. Freud connects civilization and violence closely.

**Essential Reading:**

Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*.  
 ———, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Peter Gay, *Freud, A Life for Our Time*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How does Freud understand our dreams?
2. How does love play into Freud’s account of our nature?

## Lecture Seventeen

### Freud on Our Origins

**Scope:** Kant had thought us most human when we openly asked ourselves questions concerning our origins and destiny. In stark contrast, Freud thought the very presence in our minds of such questions was symptomatic of illness. Part of the reason for Freud's bleak view concerning *metaphysical* questioning came from his understanding of our origins. He viewed humans as having arisen from what were once primal hordes dominated by a primal male. It was through the typically violent breaking out from this arrangement that Freud believed our truly human and terribly conflicted and ambivalent human life took hold. Freud offers a highly controversial account of the origins of much religion and the motivation of much creative activity in the realm of art. Further consideration of Freud's account of dreams offers us insights into the complexities of human motivation. We will also consider briefly again what Freud calls "transference," an unwitting aspect of us that prevents us from seeing each other as what we are.

### Outline

- I. Freud's account of how human civilized life came to be—and thus we humans ourselves—is closely related to anthropological theories of his time. Freud develops one of them in a striking way.
  - A. In primeval times, Freud alleges, what we now know as humans lived in small hordes, each under the influence and dominion of a powerful male figure.
    1. The "primal father's" dominion was absolute and included exclusive sexual access to the females in the horde.
    2. A somewhat organized rebellion among the "sons" occurs with differing outcomes in differing instances.
    3. The "optimal" outcome involves the victory of the sons, out of which comes a division of spoils, cooperative behavior, and a sharing of power.
  - B. An underlying religious dimension is to be found in the midst of this story of the emergence of humankind.
    1. Out of the complex and confused overlapping of fear, love, anger, and remorse, the primal father is slain.
    2. This "event" gets periodically reenacted. It comes to be seen by Freud as the originating element in much of religion.
    3. Freud's account goes a long way toward explaining ambivalence in human life, especially toward authority, that is, being both grateful for it and resenting it.
    4. The Oedipus complex is central to this ambivalence.
- II. Freud's account of dreams gives further insight into what Nietzsche, quoted by Freud, calls "that primeval relic of our humanity."
  - A. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud refers to "wishes," talking about them as dream thoughts.
    1. These are supposedly primal instincts that weave the fabric of what becomes and is the unconscious.
    2. In *The Future of an Illusion*, three primal, thickly disguised, and deeply hidden instincts are identified by Freud. They are the incestuous, the cannibalistic, and the homicidal.
  - B. Freud refers to a censorship mechanism as well, also woven into the fabric of the psyche.
    1. The censorship mechanism prevents the primal "wishes" from reaching human consciousness.
    2. In other words, we are prevented from experiencing directly what our most basic instincts are.
    3. Nonetheless, these basic instincts exert enormous pressure to get released, expressed, and acted upon.
  - C. Freud develops the notion of the Dreamwork—not the dream—whereby the underlying, primal wishes circumvent the censorship mechanism and find their way into the actual content of our dreams, though in very disguised form.

1. One fundamental tactic of the Dreamwork is condensation, the fusing of many elements into one image at one location in the actual dream.
  2. Another tactic is displacement of psychological intensities, whereby the incidental and marginal elements of the dream come to carry the important underlying, but hidden, content.
  3. A third element is referred to by Freud as “considerations of representability,” which is more popularly known as symbolism.
  4. A final element is secondary revision, a kind of editing done, in fact, in ordinary waking life as well as in dreams.
- D. The dream as we know it is the result of the intensity of primal desires, the strength of the censorship mechanism, and the cleverness of the Dreamwork.
1. The work of interpretation is a reversing of the process of dream creation, using knowledge regarding the tactics of the Dreamwork as aids and clues.
  2. Insight into the underlying “wishes” is thought by Freud to release pressure and moderate the tensions growing out of instinct frustration.
  3. At a certain point, Freud, along with Shakespeare, comes to understand all the world as a “dream,” filled with hidden messages, and sees as well that our waking life itself is a form of dreaming.
- III. Transference is a very fundamental notion in Freud and in psychoanalysis as a whole. It remains to a considerable extent unaccounted for in philosophical theories of our knowledge of each other.
- A. Freud discovered transference almost accidentally, after seeing that some patients became enraged when they spoke to him, whereas others came to adore him.
1. A transfer of intensely felt emotions, from their previous and actual object (or target) to a person currently present and serving as a renewed opportunity for their unwitting discharge, was experienced and discovered in part through Freud’s own modesty regarding his “powers.”
  2. The “couch” and psychoanalytic reticence played roles.
    - a. Freud preferred to use the couch so that he did not have to look at peoples’ faces as he worked.
    - b. Likewise, his use of free association and reticence came about one day when a patient told him that he should just be quiet and listen as the patient spoke.
- B. Transference is said to pervade human life, yet to be largely unrecognized and to keep people from experiencing each other without distortion.
1. Transference is said to result in part from crucial and crucially unresolved situations from the past.
  2. Oddly, transference has some of the features that the Hindus refer to as *karma*.
  3. What is suggested is that part of the problem of the meaning of life is the discovery of what one’s life in the present is actually like.
  4. Part of the problem of the meaning of life, in short, is first to discover the illusions that one lives and then to escape them.
- IV. Freud wanted to strip away illusions, fears, and even the hopes of patients and thus help them to live fully in the present.

**Essential Reading:**

Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*.

———, *The Origins of Religion: Totem and Taboo, Moses and Monotheism, and Other Works*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Janet Malcolm, *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession*.

Daniel Yankelovich and William Barrett, *Ego and Instinct: The Psychoanalytic View of Human Nature—Revised*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How does Freud understand our human origins?
2. What is the nature and significance of transference for Freud?

## Lecture Eighteen

### Psychoanalytic Visions in and after Freud

**Scope:** Some say that, through psychoanalysis, sin gave way to guilt, and the soul was replaced by the unconscious. The idea of a fundamental human drive, whether sexual or meaning-oriented, was central to much depth psychological theory. A major problem has been to understand this drive and to come to terms with it. Often, the solution suggested has been *sublimation*. An account of some psychoanalytic milestones enables us to understand central aspects of the (supposed) human predicament. Do impersonal drives determine us, or is there something far more personal at our core? Are family dynamics often the source of our emotional problems, or are such illnesses more basic than could be caused by familial interactions? What is the nature and value of *interpretation*, and is empathic response often a better means of illumining human problems?

### Outline

- I. The notion that there is a goal to human life and a right way to journey toward this goal has been recurrent in both philosophical and psychological guides to living.
  - A. The axial model has underwritten fundamental quests for meaning.
    1. The perennial model provided through Plato has required another world available primarily through intelligence and reason.
      - a. Stress gets put on some lesser part of our nature, in need of varying forms of suppression.
      - b. Human life in the “other world” can be construed as later and permanent, or as fleeting.
    2. Through Christian appropriations of the perennial philosophy, the “other world” became more substantial and active, and this world became more subject to negative judgment.
      - a. A redeemer figure or figures now actively intervene in *this* world, bringing grace.
      - b. Fundamental human drives get construed as sinful.
      - c. St. Augustine represents a paradigm of this development.
  - B. The movement of depth psychology has involved the attempt largely to deny the axial model, if it means belief in the existence of another world. Depth psychology has also tried to rehabilitate and reaffirm those fundamental human drives that the axial model had put into question.
    1. Freud and others are concerned about a delayed gratification that is illusory and oppressive.
    2. Human passions in their diversity come to be seen more as fonts of enjoyment and energy.
    3. Questions emerge in our time regarding whether economic concerns may replace religious ones as unwitting instruments of tyranny.
  - C. In the classical period of depth psychology, there is controversy over the nature of a supposed fundamental drive that was singularly dominant.
    1. Freud focuses on sexuality.
    2. Following Nietzsche, the psychoanalyst Alfred Adler takes power and dominance dynamics to be fundamental.
    3. In wide-ranging and often diffuse ways, Carl Jung, a Swiss psychiatrist, takes the quest for meaning to be central and determining of other drives.
- II. The notion of sublimation (or substitute satisfaction) comes to play a large role in depth psychological reflections.
  - A. Sublimation suggests problematic features of human motivation that require management.
    1. Hostile and aggressive impulses are recognized as inherent and not altogether eradicable.
    2. Our underlying psychological life is construed as curiously impersonal.
  - B. Sublimation also provides a partial explanation and justification of both creativity and culture.

1. Freud's famous (and also notorious) example of artists pursuing "fame, honor, and the love of women" is often taken as a reductive explanation of creative life.
  2. Absent "otherworldly" inspiration as an alternative explanation, the sublimation model has had a considerable following.
  3. Culture gets construed as a disguised and derivative means of coming to terms with unacceptable urges.
- III.** Both object-relations and family-centered accounts of the human situation have challenged more individually oriented and classical psychological theories.
- A.** A divide arose between intrapsychic and interpersonal accounts of human needs.
    1. The classical school, following Freud and his daughter Anna, stresses the intrapsychic.
    2. Melanie Klein and the object-relations school puts more emphasis on a need for connectedness that is interpersonal and understands humans more in terms of a journey through and beyond symbiosis.
    3. We constantly venture from "home," the place where we began, but we always want to return home; part of our psychological health includes that turning away from home as well as returning home.
  - B.** The notion of a family nexus opens further the original insularity of classical theory.
    1. On such accounts, humans become aspects of communication systems.
    2. Group therapy is generated from a family-orientation, but it raises complicated questions regarding the status of individuals as individuals.
- IV.** Significant recent work has been done by a school of thought sometimes referred to as Self-Psychology.
- A.** An importance is given to what is termed internalization (or introjection).
    1. Understandings of ourselves are often construed as the result of early incorporations of the attitudes toward ourselves adopted by significant others.
    2. The alteration—called by some, transmutation—of these internalizations is viewed as central to the development of an authentic understanding of who we are.
  - B.** A great controversy has emerged over the relative value of something called interpretation and a method of approach called empathy.
    1. The classical model of therapy involved interpretation, more an intellectual activity of reaching insight into one's motivations and the reasons for them.
    2. Empathy involves the provision both of a supportive environment and of a mode of revealing by which the therapist is said to reach a deeper understanding of the patient's problems.
- V.** A therapeutic culture is one that understands the meaning of life issues largely in post-axial and consequential ways.
- A.** The notion of transcendence is largely circumvented or ignored.
    1. Ways in which we can better be *in* the world define the field of concern.
    2. Ways in which we may not be altogether *of* the world tend to be construed as pathological misunderstandings or substitute satisfactions.
    3. Pathological and ontological anxieties must be distinguished.
      - a.** Pathological anxiety is viewed as something that needs to be cured.
      - b.** Ontological anxiety is viewed as an appropriate recognition that life is strange, precious, and precarious and therefore need not be cured.
  - B.** Enjoyment and productivity become dominant concerns.
    1. Negotiating the gaps between underlying desires and realistic, nondestructive possibilities becomes the goal.
    2. Therapies become the handmaidens of productivity concerns, sometimes in the service of self-esteem considerations, sometimes in the service of economic imperatives.
    3. Therapies can also become personal management.

**Essential Reading:**

Carl G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*.

Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*

J. Reppen, ed., *Beyond Freud, A Study of Modern Psychoanalytic Theorists*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

R. May, *Love and Will*.

R. May, E. Angel, and H. Ellenberger, eds., *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*.

S. Shamdasani and M. Münchow, eds., *Speculations After Freud: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Culture*.

Irvin Yalom, *Love's Executioner and Other Tales of Psychotherapy*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Is there a better means of helping people in distress than through interpretation?
2. To what degree is there something altogether personal at our core?
3. What are some of the more promising developments after Freud?

## Lecture Nineteen

### Heidegger on the Meaning of Meaning

**Scope:** Could our time have become so disenchanted that it no longer concerns itself with questions of meaning, but only calculates costs and very practical, instrumental benefits? Considered by many to be the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most influential philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) claims this to be the case. Heidegger believes that we have become so lost in “average everydayness” that we barely comprehend our authentic possibilities. Each of us has irreplaceable and nontransferable possibilities, but Heidegger believes that we mostly flee them. Only through a resolute comprehension of our finitude—the finality and inescapable possibility of our death—can we find our authenticity. Challenging philosophical orthodoxy, Heidegger claims that it is actually our moods, all of which are variants of *Angst*, that reveal to us the depths of our human situation: We face nothingness, and the ways we are encouraged, even by traditional philosophy, to be *in* the world only remove us further from a saving confrontation with our plight.

### Outline

- I. Heidegger begins his reflections with two, almost opposite, considerations: our average, everyday ways of being in the world and the indifference we demonstrate regarding the meaning of being.
  - A. In the midst of average, everyday life, Heidegger points to two modes of living: the authentic versus the inauthentic.
    1. Authentic existence involves discovering what are truly one's own unique life possibilities.
      - a. Humanly essential traits are not simply given but involve historically contextualized options.
      - b. Authentic possibilities can be grasped only against the backdrop of a full realization of one's finitude, the omnipresent possibility of one's death.
      - c. To understand the human involves focus on the “who,” for the human being is by nature intensely personal.
    2. Inauthentic existence involves, often uncomprehendingly, a fleeing from what are one's own individual possibilities.
      - a. Heidegger claims that moods are disclosure of our human situation and that the fundamental human mood is *Angst* (German for fear, best translated here as dread or anxiety).
      - b. Other moods, Heidegger claims, are derivative from and lesser forms of *Angst*.
      - c. Inauthentic existence involves living amidst the routine and the conventional. One, thereby, hides from oneself and from what one's unique options are.
    3. Heidegger attempts to revivify and intensify our sense of not being at home in the world (*Unheimlichkeit*) in order to engender a reraising of the questions: What does it mean to *be*? What is the meaning of being?
  - B. Heidegger claims that the basic question of philosophy—and by implication, of human life itself—is the question of the meaning of being.
    1. Famously, Heidegger claims that we do not even understand what this question is asking, nor does it bother us that we do not. From this indifference, all philosophical reflection must take its start.
      - a. Heidegger is stressing our disenchantment with the world as something that can no longer enthrall us.
      - b. The ultimate in disenchantment is a failure to recognize that disenchantment is the pervasive circumstance of human beings.
    2. Heidegger attempts to reraise the question of the meaning of being by altering the focus of inquiry.
      - a. Heidegger's claim is that the categories for construing the meaning of being have been misleadingly drawn from worldly “objects.”
      - b. It is the questioner of the meaning of being, traditionally termed the “subject,” that must be the focus of a new reflection, one that will both reorient and alter that “subject.”



- II. Heidegger claims that philosophy itself has blocked the way to an appreciation of the issue of the meaning of being—in effect the concern with *the meaning of meaning*.
- A. Concerns in the field of epistemology have diverted attention away from our actual life-in-the-world.
    - 1. Since Descartes, representationalism has brought about a relatively sharp cleavage between an inner set of cognitive activities and an external material world.
    - 2. A problem emerged as to how we might know with certainty that there is an external world.
    - 3. A detached knowing got construed as our fundamental relation to the world.
  - B. A false problem regarding the “refutation of idealism” came to hold center stage.
    - 1. Kant famously claimed that no proof had yet been found for the “existence” of the external world. He called this a scandal of philosophy.
    - 2. Heidegger counters with the claim that the great scandal of philosophy is that such proofs were ever sought after in the first place, for we already find ourselves quite specifically situated *in* the world.
    - 3. To prove the world’s existence, Heidegger claims, is an artificial undertaking.
  - C. Heidegger gives an account of what it is to be *in* the world, what is best meant by “world,” and how to understand the “who” of *being-in-the-world*. Heidegger’s account flaunts philosophical conventions.
    - 1. On Heidegger’s account, to be *in* the world is best understood as through concern and involvement. Spectatorial detachment is explained by Heidegger as a derivative and misleading way of approaching both the world and ourselves.
    - 2. Heidegger means by “world” *not* a set of items displayed in our surroundings but the framework in terms of which these items are experienced.
      - a. This framework is in part constituted and revealed through our moods.
      - b. Our individual worlds can be both separate and shared.
    - 3. The “who” of our life *in* the world is in large measure impersonal, determined by common and public opinion and subject to the conventions of the day.

**Essential Reading:**

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*.

———, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Herman Philipse, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation*.

**Questions to Consider:**

- 1. How does Heidegger understand our current human predicament, and why should an interest in being help us to deal with it?
- 2. What is the importance of death in Heidegger’s philosophy?
- 3. Is Heidegger’s account of *Angst* plausible?

## Lecture Twenty

### Heidegger on Technology's Threat

**Scope:** Is an industrialized, globalizing, and technologically efficient and manipulatable world liberating, or is it on the whole disenchanting? And is disenchantment a loss or a symptom of realistic human maturation? Heidegger construes art to be the potential replacement of, if not the successor to, a Nietzschean world in which “God is dead” and the gods have fled. Heidegger locates our core problem as humans—dehumanization—in technology itself. Inevitably, the West has framed human life to further the extraction of resources, their storage, and even to reconceptualize the human itself as just one more resource. Through unconventional suggestions, Heidegger forwards a Van Gogh painting and an abandoned Greek temple as offering possible pathways toward a precarious personal salvation. Through these reflections, Heidegger develops a very sober and controversial prospect for human hope.

### Outline

- I. Heidegger claims that the appropriate posture for human beings is an openness to being, by which he can be taken to mean a concern about the dwindling of meaning in our human situation.
  - A. Heidegger’s historical interpretation claims that our pre-Socratic ancestors were enthralled and in awe of the emergence of things into their presence.
    1. This wonder and amazement allowed our ancestors to be enchanted and to give themselves over to caring for things in their being.
    2. Platonic philosophy disrupted this engagement by intellectualizing our contact with the world and construing it as an unchanging grasp of something that lay behind appearances and was itself unchanging.
    3. On Heidegger’s view, this formalism can only lead over time to an agenda that attempts to control and manipulate the world around us to our ends.
    4. Heidegger believes technology to be a tyrant in our world.
    5. In particular, Heidegger believes that our desires to extract the power inherent in things and use that power for very anthropomorphic purposes will divest the world of any enchanting features.
  - B. After a series of stages of this devolution, Heidegger claims that we have arrived in a time where what is fundamental is the absence of meaning.
    1. Our era is one of multiple, short-lived satisfactions but nothing in the way of fulfillment.
    2. Fulfillment would require at least three orientations to be taken up and sustained.
      - a. Absence of meaning would need to be recognized, thus the movement from an uncomprehended absence of meaningful presence to a painfully experienced presence of the very absence of meaning itself.
      - b. This direct experience of an underlying groundlessness and emptiness to human life and its delusionally supportive environs would have to be endured, not denied or evaded.
      - c. A resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) would be required that would be without guarantee of any positive outcome.
- II. Heidegger alludes to unusual and quite noncontemporary world settings as suggesting the kind of world—and thus enchantment—we have lost in our time.
  - A. Heidegger makes reference to the remains of an old Greek temple now in ruins.
    1. For Heidegger, the temple represents a locus and orientation point that drew people together and defined them for themselves in terms of their life cycles and relations to one another.
    2. The temple is construed as harboring in a veiled way the presence of a “god.”
      - a. Heidegger’s notion of the gods is highly problematic and most probably metaphorical.
      - b. A “god” for Heidegger is most likely that which is experienced as transcendent and that can draw humans to it, not on their terms but on “its” terms.

3. The temple is construed as arising from Earth but also as protecting humans from the brutishness and the dangers of the indifferently natural environment.
- B.** Through reference to a pair of peasant shoes, supposedly those of an old woman in a Van Gogh painting, Heidegger points out a different world as well, a world more rural and in ways even “primitive.”
1. The peasant woman is discussed as simply and resolutely connected to the soil and to an annual, agricultural cycle.
  2. The “world” of the peasant woman is understood by her in a very connected, practical, and nonreflective way.
  3. This account bears close resemblance to Heidegger’s own Black Forest life. There is a sharp contrast between it and the sophisticated, cosmopolitan life of the city.
  4. Heidegger stresses the great capacity that art has to reveal worlds and open perspectives for us on alternative, though perhaps altogether lost, kinds of lives.
  5. Heidegger claims that art must “happen to you.” It cannot be experienced in just an aesthetic and rarified way.
- III.** Heidegger claims that meaning has manifested itself in differing ways through the history of the West and that its manifestation in our time has primarily been through the pervasive presence of technology.
- A.** Heidegger claims that meaning and human beings have a relation of mutual need to each other. This need makes the issue of technology’s pervasiveness complex.
1. That ours is a technological age is a consequence of something more than just our human decision to exploit the world as best we can.
  2. Technology is also more than instrumentalism construed as an overwhelming obsession with usefulness and the means-ends distinction.
- B.** Heidegger understands being itself to be withholding itself from us. A consequence of this is that we extract what energy we can from the world—whether in terms of natural resources or capital—in order to stockpile it.
1. It is Heidegger’s claim that we do this extraction and stockpiling almost as a compensation for the loss of an underlying enthralling meaning.
  2. On Heidegger’s account, we turn a dehumanizing corner when we view ourselves as resources more than as people. This insight anticipates some of the promise and peril of biotechnology in our own time.
  3. Heidegger wants to show us our true human place in the world.
    - a. We are meant to be shepherds of meaning; we must care.
    - b. Heidegger believes that we value only that which is fast and that which we can hold in our hands.
    - c. He believes ours is not a time for action but a time for openness.
    - d. We have to acknowledge and endure the voids in our lives.

**Essential Reading:**

Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*.

Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger, Between Good and Evil*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. Why should Heidegger view technology as a threat to us?
2. From what dimensions of human life does Heidegger draw in order to find ways out of the confines of technology?
3. Might Heidegger be a disguised Romantic?

## Lecture Twenty-One

### Heidegger's Politics and Legacy

**Scope:** A guide to living through philosophy cannot avoid considering our lives in the political world. Often against our will, we are enmeshed in political situations. Some philosophers have even claimed that it is in our nature to be political. Heidegger's relation to the political is especially engrossing and distressing for, however great a philosopher, Heidegger was also a National Socialist in Nazi Germany and far longer than he chose to admit. Should this association discredit his philosophy, or are philosophical thought and political life separable? Can the meaning of life be pursued in disregard of both? We will reflect upon key turning points in Heidegger's life as they relate to politics, religion, and psychoanalysis, each of which has made claims to salvational powers. Heidegger has a particular understanding of a people and its language. In fact, he calls language the very house (residence) of meaning, both personal and historical. Heidegger also claims that a specific group may have a special calling. These notions are prevalent and also disturbing.

### Outline

- I. Heidegger's philosophical status took three major turns by the mid-1930s, something quite unusual in the normally, somewhat hermitically sealed world of philosophy.
  - A. Heidegger's early status included the routine, the controversial, and, quite rapidly then, the popular.
    1. Heidegger did routine work, as was expected, and over the course of time became a "prodigy" and prime assistant to the famous German philosopher Edmund Husserl.
      - a. Heidegger got caught up in the phenomenological claim that one must get to the "things themselves," not just to textbooks and abstractions regarding things.
      - b. Heidegger's sense, fueled by a religious background and a reading of key Protestants such as Martin Luther, was that the actual life-work of the concerned person *in* the world must be described.
    2. Heidegger came to take a very negative view of academic philosophy as it was being practiced by the neo-Kantians.
      - a. This philosophy was viewed as conceptual, not experiential.
      - b. This philosophy was also construed as excessively (and nonhistorically) concerned with knowledge problems, not with life problems.
    3. Heidegger came to be viewed in Hannah Arendt's terms as "the uncrowned king of thought."
      - a. Heidegger's sincere intensity drew listeners from all over the German-speaking world.
      - b. Heidegger was construed as pursuing what really mattered and somehow bringing this pursuit to life.
  - B. The publication of *Being and Time* brought Heidegger extraordinary attention and even fame.
    1. At first, Heidegger was turned down for the chair of philosophy at Freiburg for "insufficient publication."
    2. In a rush, what was only the first third to half of Heidegger's major work, *Being and Time*, was published in 1927. The appearance in print of this excerpt led to great anticipation regarding the publication of the rest of that book.
    3. Heidegger gave a baffling lecture to the assembled faculty on "Why there is Something and not rather Nothing?" His concentration on "the Nothing" made him notorious in some circles.
  - C. Heidegger's membership in the Nazi Party and his subsequent acceptance of the rectorship at Freiburg University, essentially a political appointment, caused great controversy and consternation.
    1. Heidegger claimed at one point that he had saved the university from much worse.
    2. Nonetheless, Heidegger adopted much Nazi rhetoric in many of his public addresses and spoke of Hitler as the "leader" and as the embodiment of the "Will" of the German people.
    3. After roughly a year, Heidegger resigned the rectorship and moved away from overt political engagement.

- II. As Heidegger's membership in the Nazi Party did not cease until 1945, when the party was itself outlawed, serious questions remain regarding this matter, as well as regarding his philosophy, politics, and personal life.
- A. The relation of Heidegger's philosophy to his personal life has been interpreted in three basic ways.
    1. Hannah Arendt, once his mistress and herself Jewish, described Heidegger as being politically an *Idiot*, a Greek word meaning someone simply lacking in perception, know-how, and sense in the domain of politics.
    2. Others condemned Heidegger as a rank opportunist, accused of holding the grandiose and deluded view that he would be capable of "spiritualizing" the Nazi Party and thereby becoming its guide in matters of culture and spirit.
    3. Some construed Heidegger as simply a terrible human being who happened also to be a great philosopher. It must be remembered that great people are not always good.
  - B. The politics of Heidegger are said by some to be implicit in the philosophy itself.
    1. Heidegger held to the absence of enduring historical foundations of value, especially in his particular time.
    2. Heidegger's notion of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*) was particularly subject to a voluntaristic interpretation.
    3. Heidegger had a great contempt for the "leveling process" inherent, he thought, in the sort of decisions made by a democratic polity.
    4. Heidegger also had the notion of a historical dispensation, something given to a people as its particular destiny and mission.
      - a. Heidegger put special value on the qualities of the German language as conveying the spiritual, something with which some Frenchmen, such as Jacques Derrida, actually agreed.
      - b. Heidegger understood Germany to be the bearer of culture in the face of crass "Bolshevism" from the East and trivialized consumerism from the West.
  - C. The judgment on Heidegger came in the context of de-Nazification trials.
    1. Karl Jaspers, an old philosophical friend, argued that Heidegger should be allowed to write but not to teach, for he had mesmerizing tendencies and no gift for genuine critical exchange.
    2. Heidegger was accused of fundamental dishonesty and stubbornness, never admitting his complicity in Nazism and hiding behind a story of the history of being.
- III. Heidegger nonetheless had great influence on both theology and literature in his career, and even on the development of therapeutic psychology. These influences remain to a considerable extent even today.
- A. First Rudolf Bultmann, a German Existentialist theologian, and, later, Karl Barth, a Swiss Protestant theologian, were highly influenced by Heidegger's thought.
    1. The early sections of Heidegger's *Being and Time* formed the basis for Bultmann's work.
    2. Heidegger's later antimetaphysical stance influenced Barth.
  - B. What is today called "Deconstruction" would not be possible without Heidegger's early work.
    1. *Being and Time* stresses getting back behind standard formulations.
    2. Heidegger's influence on the French, particularly on Jacques Derrida, was overwhelming.
  - C. Heidegger almost accidentally spawned an alternative to Freudian analysis.
    1. After a personal breakdown, Heidegger was counseled by a psychoanalyst in Zurich, Medard Boss, who later adapted Heidegger's earlier philosophy for therapeutic purposes.
    2. The notion of getting beyond the denying of our death, our finitude, becomes fundamental to this therapy.

**Essential Reading:**

Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger, A Political Life*.

Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*.

Karl Löwith, *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What is at stake in the controversies connecting Heidegger's politics with Heidegger's philosophy?
2. Does Heidegger provide a plausible account of our human situation?

## Lecture Twenty-Two

### The Human Situation—Sartre and Camus

**Scope:** How isolated might we actually be as individuals, and would further or less separation from others more often liberate or estrange us? Is freedom a challenge and an exhilarating goal to reach or is it something to which we might be condemned? Might literature speak to us more directly and effectively regarding pervasive predicaments of human life? Two French philosophers, Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1980) and Albert Camus (1913–1960), raise striking and provocative questions regarding our human situation. What is consciousness actually like? Why would anyone view hell as other people, and might a genuine and credible life only begin on “the other side of despair”? Sartre argues that in important ways we construct the very meaning of our individual existences. The world we inhabit is devoid of significance without this constructing. Camus explores the numbness of conventional rites and rituals and the ways a focus upon the everyday can actually intensify life itself.

### Outline

- I. Although Jean-Paul Sartre was a part of the French Resistance in World War II, he studied and admired Heidegger’s philosophy. Sartre’s philosophy offers guidance in living, in part through distinguishing *who* we are from *what* we are, and by focusing on the *what* question.
  - A. The *who* question often requires a number of further questions regarding “what it is to be human.”
    1. “Who” considerations typically assume a framework. The task, then, is to find one’s place within this framework, such as is offered by organized religion or a large company.
    2. The axial and the (far more secular) enjoyment-with-productivity models have dominated as means of generating frameworks.
    3. In terms of these models, one is either a “soul” or a biological organism capable of planning a complexly instrumental set of activities.
  - B. Sartre provides an example of a radical asking of the “*what*” question.
    1. This question separates itself from metaphysical assumptions about the framework of the universe. We should simply be asking, *What are we?*
    2. This question also separates itself from various psychological theories that claim either to tell us our nature or to offer us guidance from within those theories.
- II. Sartre provides a somewhat unique and controversial account of the nature of our consciousness.
  - A. Consciousness for Sartre is a dynamic field that is continually in play.
    1. Consciousness is always intentional, i.e., it is always directed toward something that is, then, its “object.”
    2. Consciousness has no particular nature but takes on the coloration of whatever it is directed toward.
    3. There is no “ego” or subject that we have direct, explicit experience of and that serves as the foundation and source of our consciousness.
  - B. For Sartre, we are best understood *as* this consciousness. In this fact numerous problems reside.
    1. When I try to become explicitly aware of myself, there is an objectification that must occur, but “I” am not an object.
    2. To view myself, I must take distance from myself. But the (supposed) “I” that then becomes the viewer of myself, I do not see.
    3. Oddly, Sartre claims that “nothing” is what separates me from myself, but that I *am* this nothing. What can this mean?
  - C. Sartre claims that this “nothingness” that we are—our consciousness in its changing, varying foci—creates quite agonizing Existential problems for us.

1. We become aware that we can take up stances as we choose. We are not only free to do this, but we are also condemned to this freedom. We always choose how to be directed, thus how to be, if only by default.
  2. Sartre claims that this creates anxiety for us, an anxiety that is absolutely fundamental and that is a basic reaction to our ineradicable freedom.
  3. Attempts are made by us to escape our freedom by believing that we have a fixed nature and that what we do (and are obliged to do) follows from this fixed nature.
  4. Sartre states that the “fixed-nature” claim is self-deception and that we are totally free and must take responsibility for all our decisions. There are no fixed foundations that could justify our decisions.
- III.** Sartre’s notion of the ways we connect with other people is extreme and the source of potential despair.
- A.** Fundamental antagonisms and irreconcilable differences reside at the heart of relations with others, according to Sartre. He states that:
    1. I find myself in the world in terms of my projects.
    2. Because my essence is determined by my existence, my adoption and pursuit of my projects define me.
    3. I recognize others through their projects, which include a certain (potential) objectification and use of me in their terms.
    4. In these circumstances, there is inevitably a battle for recognition and for the dominant position.
  - B.** Sartre extends his account to relations of love, which appear equally problematic.
    1. Loving and being loved both involve objectification for Sartre, thus a failure of mutuality.
    2. Sartre reflects on sadism and masochism as extreme forms of objectification.
- IV.** Another famous French Existentialist philosopher, Albert Camus, radicalizes the question of whether life has any meaning most dramatically.
- A.** Camus claims that the only fundamental philosophical question concerns whether one should commit suicide.
    1. Behind this question is the concern that a meaningless (absurd) world might not be worth our living in.
    2. Camus claims that life is absurd. A result is that all occurrences play out as if on a stage, devoid of reality or depth. This result turns out to be life’s “truth” for Camus.
  - B.** Camus claims that true integrity involves living with absurdity and remaining open to the problems of absurdity.
    1. Suicide becomes escapist and an act of cowardice.
    2. Hope becomes delusional and equally escapist and cowardly.
  - C.** Camus champions a continuing defiance, a heroic revolt in the face of life’s absurdity.
    1. Living as much as possible in the present is counseled—an anti-axial attitude.
    2. If life is so lived, Camus believes that quantity of life will come to matter.
- V.** A slogan supposedly explains Existentialism: “Existence precedes essence”: that is, what you do makes you who you are.
- A.** Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus agree with this statement.
  - B.** Kierkegaard and Heidegger deny this statement.

**Essential Reading:**

Albert Camus, *The Plague*.

———, *The Stranger*.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*.

———, *Nausea*.



**Supplementary Reading:**

Germaine Brée, *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment*.

Bernard-Henri Lévi, *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*.

Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How would you contrast the views of Camus with those of Sartre?
2. What are some central aspects of the human situation that Sartre addresses?
3. Does either Sartre or Camus offer significant hope?

## Lecture Twenty-Three

### Power and Reason—Foucault and Habermas

**Scope:** What if our lives cannot be understood in separation from various social institutions, and what if these institutions themselves have emerged in the forms that they now have as a result of accidents of human history? Michel Foucault (1926–1984) explores and affirms these theses through an investigation of mental and penal institutions. Such confines supposedly guard rational life from irrational and often destructive incursions into it. But does this protection also shield us from some uncomfortable, though liberating, insights and alternatives? Might reason itself also be a form of confinement? And might power demarcate the nature, reach, and importance of knowledge itself? Can the structure of knowledge undergo radical transformation? Foucault’s views are both sensational and sobering. Jürgen Habermas (1929–) offers an alternative in forwarding the potentially pervasive communicability and inclusivity of our rational nature. If Foucault seeks to carve out space for the oppressed individual, Habermas champions human solidarity.

### Outline

- I. The various institutions that surround, support, and often restrict our activities may bear an intimate relation to our understanding of ourselves.
  - A. The French philosopher Michel Foucault claims that the way institutions operate often involves an oppressive imposition of conceptions of normalcy and propriety upon people.
    1. In society, the prevailing rules express the values of dominant groups and are instruments through which these groups exercise their power and control over others.
    2. The subordinated people are then largely discredited and marginalized. Their perceptions and interests are not accorded legitimacy.
  - B. Foucault’s most famous study is the history of the development of asylums. It is called *Madness and Civilization*.
    1. Foucault claims that in the Enlightenment period—Foucault’s “Classical” Age—madness was a category used to include and lump together the unemployed, the criminally active, the aged, and the physically ill.
    2. In the name of reason—celebrated because of scientific advances—those deemed unreasonable and/or useless were marginalized. Their social legitimacy was denied.
    3. Reason led to social engineering.
  - C. Foucault claims that a transition occurred around 1800, whereby “mentally ill” people were segregated from the rest, and housed and treated as moral outcasts.
    1. In Foucault’s terms, an episteme had altered, abruptly and dramatically.
      - a. An episteme is an ordering principle that defines both knowledge configurations and social arrangements.
      - b. Foucault came to understand epistemes, and the transitions from one to the next, as the appropriate focus of his investigations.
    2. Foucault comes to believe that a tyranny of medical authority later came to replace the moralism of the 1800s.
    3. Foucault believes that these epistemes indicate only change, not advancement or progress.
- II. Foucault was very concerned to champion the outsider, the person who was disadvantaged, if not oppressed, by the power arrangements of his (or her) time.
  - A. Foucault understood language itself often to harbor prejudice and oppression and thereby limit the very means by which various forms of outcast and creative spirits could express their individuality and their opposition to prevailing norms.
    1. Influenced by Heidegger, Foucault was alert to the need to question linguistic predispositions themselves.

2. The purpose of such questioning was in part to open a liberating and free space in which creative activities could take place unimpeded by various stifling norms.
  - B. Foucault also championed the need to transgress established values, often in outrageous ways, in order to call attention to the arbitrary and historically bound character of current social and cultural norms.
- III. Foucault suggests disparate perspectives on issues ranging from penal practices to diverse uses of language in philosophical discourse to the place of self-creation in an often oppressive set of social circumstances.
- A. Foucault reflects on the role of surveillance, not only in prison circumstances but also in society at large.
    1. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Jeremy Bentham, an English philosopher, developed a notion of the Panopticon—an all-seeing device—that is later construed by Foucault as a pervasive phenomenon and a threat to our sense of freedom and unfettered decision making.
    2. Foucault stresses that we are living in a world where we are encouraged to believe that we are always being watched.
  - B. Foucault claims that the fluid, contextual world in which we find ourselves is best illuminated in diverse linguistic ways, including fictional ones.
    1. Foucault is a perspectivist, crediting reality with a fullness that language insufficiently reflects.
    2. Foucault, in this respect, follows in the footsteps of Nietzsche and adopts the notion of language as a set of metaphors.
  - C. Foucault understands self-creation to involve carving out a space in the midst of those complex and shifting power structures and arrangements that pervade our environment.
    1. Foucault claims that “technologies of the self” must be developed to release our energy and to allow us the self-crafting of our lives.
    2. Foucault takes a special interest in human sexuality as a realm where power, knowledge, self-crafting, and individuality have emerged in different ways historically.
- IV. The philosophical importance of Jürgen Habermas, a German philosopher, arises primarily from his conception of communicative reason.
- A. Habermas believes that there must be a *rational* critique of existing institutions.
    1. On Habermas’s view, reason must become global or universal in scope, not just relative to specific contexts.
    2. Habermas seeks to emancipate us from varying forms of distortion and oppression, but he pursues this emancipation as a necessarily universalizable human project of consciousness.
  - B. Habermas believes that philosophy went wrong in emphasizing the isolated subject and that a socially grounded set of growingly shared practices is essential.
    1. Communication is a key concept in Habermas.
    2. Habermas offers a stern critique of Heidegger’s “ocularism.”

**Essential Reading:**

Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*.

———, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.

J. G. Merquior, *Foucault*.

James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. How does Foucault relate the influence of institutions to the existence of individuals?
2. What is Foucault's understanding of power as it directly relates to human life?
3. Why should communication be such a great concern to Habermas?

## Lecture Twenty-Four

### Today's Provocative Landscape—Thresholding

**Scope:** We are said to be “postmodern,” but what is postmodernity? One answer is that it involves the rejection of grand meta-narratives, coherent and compelling stories regarding our human history that claim it to be going somewhere and that we might have a role to play, however small, in the achieving of history’s certain (but not assured) goal. Another account of postmodernity is that it rejects beliefs in reliable foundations upon which human life can stand and understand itself. The most notable of foundations proposed have been God, the objective nature of things, the scientific method, and the structure of human reason itself. Postmodernity has raised doubts regarding the credibility of each of these foundations as guides to living. These postmodern sentiments have engendered strong and opposing responses: a cry for a return to Platonic foundations and the embrace of biotechnology as opening the eventual possibility of an altogether flexible and malleable human future.

### Outline

- I. We are said to live in a “postmodern” world. This world has many implications for human life and for philosophy as one of its potential guides.
  - A. There is said to be no “grand meta-narrative” available for our orientation.
    1. A grand meta-narrative is a story of the development and purpose of human history in which—at least possibly—we as individuals can find a place and play a role.
    2. That there is no such meta-narrative suggests that history is going nowhere except through the play of contending human forces—national, international, corporate, and so on. Accident and luck come to play a large, if not overwhelming, role.
  - B. We have seen four basic meta-narratives:
    1. The Platonic Christian meta-narrative is the idea of life as a journey to another unchanging realm.
    2. Another meta-narrative is Hegel’s view of history as the unfolding of the consciousness of God.
    3. A third is Marx’s notion of a potential revolution that would usher in a new era.
    4. Finally, we have Nietzsche’s idea that there is no “beyond” and that the only meaning comes through creative activities through which we shape a life for ourselves.
  - C. No foundations are said to stand that would reliably support and guide human life.
    1. The notion of another world, a providential “kingdom of heaven,” is doubted.
    2. Nature itself is construed as sufficiently malleable to be subject to (often conflicting and competing) scientific and technological purposes.
    3. Reason is construed as either abstractly and uninformatively “logical” or as embedded in diverse—and again conflicting and competing—social practices.
- II. Our current situation with respect to human life and its guidance through philosophy can now clearly be seen as complex and challenging.
  - A. The professionalization of philosophy led to its separation from those larger and more central issues of human life that are a concern to everyone.
    1. Issues in theory of knowledge regarding proofs of the existence of the external world, and/or of the existence of other people, became paradigmatic.
    2. Advances in the sciences made more and more domains amenable to empirical investigation, which raises the questions as to whether the subject matter of professional philosophy is shrinking.
    3. The nature of the mind and its interior furniture became one of the major (if not *the* major) interests of philosophers.
    4. Even if issues regarding the mind are resolved, however, basic, very human questions unavoidably remain regarding how we are to live our lives and what we ought to do with them.

5. Niels Bohr, the atomic physicist, famously said that clarity and accuracy may not be possible at the same time. One must be sacrificed. Professional philosophy has tended to sacrifice accuracy for clarity.
- B.** Philosophy has borne and continues to bear a complex relation to religion, especially in its institutionalized forms.
1. An important way to distinguish philosophy from religion is that philosophy, at its best, raises questions, whereas religion provides answers.
  2. Answers can sometimes lose their force, however, if the questions to which they provide answers have somehow been lost, muted, or superseded.
  3. Questioning for its own sake, on the other hand, can become all too quick and clever, coming then to exist more as a game than as a serious enterprise.
  4. There is at least some reason to believe that some aspects of religion in its traditional forms speak to concerns that we no longer have, have outgrown, or have lost touch with.
  5. There is a case to be made that we have moved from issues regarding death through concerns regarding guilt to an era in which the presence or absence of meaning in human life has become central.
- III.** Biotechnological opportunities, rapidly passing in our 21<sup>st</sup> century from the status of science fiction to that of actual possibility, have raised major questions regarding what it means to be human.
- A.** A notion of human nature may be needed in order to distinguish between preventive and remedial work with respect to deficiencies, and, on the other hand, enhancement opportunities that might eventually transform the human into something that it has never been before.
1. A Darwinist-type account might render the notion of a “fixed” human nature unviable and thereby moot the distinction between what is remedial and what is enhancing.
  2. Quite clearly, enhancement possibilities will be driven by technological advances, and these will largely be available to the economically privileged.
- B.** It is said by many that medical opportunities might increasingly compete for dominance with traditional theological doctrines as the 21<sup>st</sup> century progresses.
1. Efficiency and enhancement considerations may bring it about that quite artificial means of reproduction, nurturing, and education will become the much preferred means of human development.
  2. Questions will unavoidably be raised concerning whether death might not be avoidable in principle, and whether human life can truly continue to have meaning if it comes under total, technologically manageable control.
- C.** We stand at an extraordinary *Threshold* with respect to our human situation.
1. What elements from our spiritual past call out for recuperation and nurturing?
  2. How might we cultivate openness? And how in a thoughtful way can we reorient ourselves toward an open and increasingly controversial and contended technological and religious future?
- D.** Some have written about the “end of philosophy.”
1. It has been thought that philosophy exists only if you can construe life as a journey traveling to a new and different dimension.
  2. Some have said that the cognitive sciences, linguistics, neuroscience, and so forth will advance so much that traditional technical problems of philosophy will diminish.
- E.** But philosophy can never end.
1. As long as we live, we are going to ask ourselves about the meaning of life.
  2. Insofar as philosophy is a pursuit of the art of living providing (often conflicting) guidance for living, there is a future for philosophy.

**Essential Reading:**

K. Baynes, J. Bohman, and T. McCarthy, eds., *After Philosophy: Ends or Transformation?*

Stephen Erickson, *The (Coming) Age of Thresholding*.

David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry in the Origins of Cultural Change*.

**Supplementary Reading:**

Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*.

M. Matustik and M Westphal, eds., *Kierkegaard in Post-Modernity*.

Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay*.

Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*.

**Questions to Consider:**

1. What are some of the alternative ways of understanding postmodernity?
2. How would you describe the current Threshold at which we stand?
3. How might biotechnology affect our human situation?

## Bibliography

### Essential Reading:

Baynes, K., J. Bohman, and T. McCarthy, eds. *After Philosophy: End or Transformation?* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989. This series of essays explores the limitations of philosophy and its possible future. The essays by Rorty, Foucault, Habermas, and MacIntyre may be particularly helpful. Many but not all of the 14 essays contain some difficult and technical material.

Beiser, Frederick. *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987. This volume provides a helpful, though scholarly, rendering of a crucial period in the development of German Idealism. The accounts of Fichte and Schelling help to explain the genesis of Hegel's ideas.

Berlin, Isaiah. *Four Essays on Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. Berlin is a provocative and vivid writer, especially attuned to the history of ideas. His essay regarding different conceptions of liberty is lively and controversial.

———. *The Roots of Romanticism*. Edited by Henry Hardy. Princeton: Bollingen Press, 2001. Berlin may be at his best tracing those ideas and influences that led to various attacks on Enlightenment thinking and Rationalism more generally. As always, Berlin's scope is broad, and he can be read without a prior technical understanding of philosophical issues.

Bretall, Robert, ed. *A Kierkegaard Anthology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. This collection of Kierkegaard's writings has carefully presented core portions of Kierkegaard's major works. It is best read sequentially, and the material from *Either/Or* is very well excerpted.

Camus, Albert. *The Plague*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert. New York: Vintage International, 1991. Viewed by many as a slightly disguised account of Nazi occupation, this novel poignantly conveys a pervasive kind of a human predicament and ways in which it can be confronted or often only endured.

———. *The Stranger*. Translated by Matthew Ward. New York: Vintage International, 1989. Probably Camus' best novel, *The Stranger* is both short and compelling. It should be noted that Camus' diagnosis of human life is just one, but it may prove a good point of departure for understanding other Existential alternatives.

Erickson, Stephen. *The (Coming) Age of Thresholding*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999. This intriguing (but somewhat expensive and hard-to-find) book by your lecturer for this course addresses the future of philosophy and our present human predicament. Are we again, as in other spiritually precarious times, standing on the threshold of a new era?

Foucault, Michel. *Madness & Civilization, A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 1973. Many take this as Foucault's groundbreaking account of how power determines the structure of institutions and how accidents of circumstance may be crucial to how power works itself out. For those who wish to experience the flavor of Foucault's somewhat unusual style of writing, this may be the best work.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: Avon, 1980. This groundbreaking work firmly established Freud's reputation. Much of the early portions of this volume can be disregarded, for they involve his critical review and dismissal of alternative theories of dreaming and dreams.

———. *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Translated by James Strachey and with a biographical introduction by Peter Gay. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989. These lectures may be the best access to Freud for those who have never directly encountered his writing. Freud is usually far better than his commentators, and most of these lectures are altogether clear and lucid.

———. *The Origins of Religion: Totem and Taboo, Moses and Monotheism, and Other Works*. Translated by James Strachey and edited by Albert Dickson. London: Penguin Books, 1985. These works by Freud are the central ones for understanding his largely negative attitudes toward religion. Freud is a gifted stylist and can be read relatively easily. There is little technical vocabulary and thus the works stand on their own. *Moses and Monotheism* may be the best place to start.

Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press, 1992. This engaging and highly provocative account looks at where history stood at the end of the Cold War. The last major section of the book considers Nietzsche's worry (more than 100 years ago) that we are heading toward a time of moral passivity and consumerism. Fukuyama writes well, and the section of this work involving Hegel is an enlightening read.



Gardner, Sebastian. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason*. New York: Routledge, 1999. A clear overview of Kant's basic ideas as found in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, this work is largely accessible and conveys clearly and helpfully Kant's fundamental ideas.

Gay, Peter. *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, Volume II, The Science of Freedom*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969. Gay provides a helpfully broad and culturally diverse account of the overall development of the issues that captivated and drove Enlightenment thinking.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Translated by Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990. This is a difficult book and is probably best considered only by those with a significant background in the history of European philosophy. These lectures may nonetheless be the best way to place Habermas within philosophical thought. This volume has greatly influenced a number of contemporary American philosophers.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity, An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. Much controversy surrounds postmodernity, what it is, and whether we actually live in a postmodern period. Harvey's approach is both lucid and free of the tendentious.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Translated by H. Nisbet and edited by Allen Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991. This is Hegel's basic work regarding the place and function of right in human morality and ethical life. The editor's introduction is quite helpful, as is the chronology provided of Hegel's writings and life.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row, 1962. This is Heidegger's major work. It lays out his lifelong project in forceful and intermittently clear ways. This work may be the most important philosophy text of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though obviously this claim is much contested.

———. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974. For many, this is Heidegger's most accessible work. Reflecting back on elements in Greek philosophy, Heidegger presents his own concerns with the meaning of life quite well. The first 20 pages or so are a helpful account of how Heidegger understands philosophy to function.

———. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. This volume contains Heidegger's central reflection on technology and its underlying place in our lives. Heidegger's important essay on the Nietzschean claim that "God is Dead" also appears here.

Jones, W. T. *The Romantic Syndrome: Toward a New Method in Cultural Anthropology and History of Ideas*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002. Jones provides criteria by which what is variously referred to as the "Romantic" can be better understood and evaluated. Quite readable, this book is underappreciated and quite insightful.

Jung, C. G. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Translated by W. Dell and Cary Baynes. New York: A Harvest Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, first published in 1933. This is a quite readable set of reflections by Jung on our human predicament as contemporary people. Jung is often somewhat diffuse, but in these writings he blends psychological and spiritual reflections in a largely concise way.

Kant, Immanuel. *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Translated by Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson. New York: Harper and Row, 1960. This is Kant's central and most exhaustive work regarding the relation of reason and religion and the hopes for religion that Kant thought to be plausible after the Enlightenment.

Kaufmann, Walter. *Hegel*. New York: Doubleday, 1965. Kaufmann's book is both insightful and at the same time chatty. In the context of developments in German culture and ideas regarding art and human life, he places Hegel in the broader European cultural scene.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or, Part I*. Translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. Here Kierkegaard provides an account of the kind of life he believes most people to live and few people to escape. Reflections are provided regarding music, seduction, and calculations of enjoyment. The most literary portion is at the end of this volume, *The Diary of a Seducer*, and is Kierkegaard at his best.

———. *Papers and Journals: A Selection*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. London: Penguin Books, 1996. These variegated Kierkegaardian writings, most not meant for publication, offer diverse insights and an appreciation of the relation of Kierkegaard's thinking to his own life. This is a good book for browsing.

Kohut, Heinz. *How Does Analysis Cure?* Edited by Arnold Goldberg. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. An important work in the field of therapeutic practice, this book conveys one of the major alternatives to a traditional approach to psychoanalytic interpretation. Many claim Kohut to be the major alternative to Freud in our time, and this is a good place to capture much of the core of his thinking.

Lowrie, Walter. *A Short Life of Kierkegaard*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958. For those wishing a very brief account of Kierkegaard, the person, and the life he lived in Copenhagen, this book is quite clear and enjoyable.

Magee, Bryan. *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (Oxford University Press), 1997. Magee is an especially clear and engaging writer who presents Schopenhauer in a comprehensive way, but one that also brings very clearly into focus Schopenhauer's understanding of the human predicament and consequent pessimism.

Marcuse, Herbert. *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*. New York: Humanities Press, 1963. A guru to many during the 1960s, Marcuse provides provocative ideas regarding the transition from reason to social criticism in the development of philosophical thought. The account of Hegel slants somewhat in a Marxist direction.

Marx, Karl. *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972. This is one of the better compilations of classical Marxist writings. Most of the core ideas can be found in this book. The selections may be read out of sequence.

———. *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*. Translated and edited by L. Easton and K. Guddat. New York: Anchor Books, 1967. Many make a distinction between an exploratory and plausibly critical Marx and a later, dogmatic and doctrinaire Marx. In this book, many of the elements that characterize the early Marx are found.

Nehamas, Alexander. *Nietzsche, Life as Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985. This is perhaps the best study of Nietzsche that brings the analytic sophistication of American philosophy to bear. Nehamas is a lucid writer who keeps Nietzsche's driving ideas in the center of his discussion.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1966. Many claim that this work is the best entry to Nietzsche's thinking. Written sometimes in brief aphorisms and other times in much longer sections, *Beyond Good and Evil* allows a measure of browsing.

———. *On the Genealogy of Morals (and) Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1969. *The Genealogy of Morals* provides Nietzsche's best account of how our moral life originated and how conceptions of the Good made their earliest historical appearances. *Ecce Homo* is a startling and fascinating work written in the year directly before Nietzsche went mad.

———. *The Portable Nietzsche*. Edited by Walter Kaufman. New York: Viking Press, 1968. This remains perhaps the best collection of various portions of Nietzsche's major writings. Nietzsche's most poetic work, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, is included in its totality and provides literary access to many of Nietzsche's ideas.

Ott, Hugo. *Martin Heidegger, A Political Life*. Translated by Allan Blunden. London: BasicBooks (HarperCollins), 1993. More than any other work, this book clearly and unambiguously presents the history of Heidegger's involvement with the Nazi Party. Ott writes primarily as a biographer, and an understanding of Heidegger's philosophy is not necessary for comprehending the basic narrative of Heidegger's political involvements.

Pinkard, Terry. *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pinkard is one of the better and more lucid expositors of Hegel's philosophy and particularly of the way in which Hegel makes reason a more social phenomenon than did his predecessors.

Postman, Neil. *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993. This is a highly readable account of how technology both helps and can hinder us, how it involves "winners" and "losers," and how an ever-growing technological civilization involves dangers to our imaginative selves.

Reppen, J., ed. *Beyond Freud, A Study of Modern Psychoanalytic Theorists*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 1985. This is a set of 14 probing and largely accessible essays regarding a variety of psychoanalytic practitioners and theorists reflecting on the status and future of psychoanalysis. The essays concerning Bowlby, Gill, Mahler, Kohut, and Grünbaum are of special interest.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness, An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. Translated and with an introduction by Hazel Barnes. New York: Washington Square Press, 1993. This is Sartre's major philosophical work and the one that firmly established his philosophical reputation. To the degree that anyone wants direct contact with Sartre's fundamental philosophy, this is the place to find it. It is, however, a challenging book.

———. *Nausea*. Translated by Lloyd Alexander. New York: New Directions, 1969. This novel conveys in vivid ways the sense that there may be no meaning to be found in the world around us. It is a short novel and a good alternative for those who do not want to undertake a reading of Sartre's philosophical prose.

Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The Will to Live*. Edited by Richard Taylor. New York: Ungar, 1967. This is a collection of Schopenhauer's core writings as well as a helpful, short timeline of Schopenhauer's life. These writings are an economical way of reading Schopenhauer himself and of coming to appreciate his graceful and provocative style.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. This book gives a well-written overview of how our contemporary sense of ourselves has been influenced by various elements in the history of philosophy. The account of various aspects of Romanticism is particularly helpful.

Tucker, Robert. *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964. This is a helpful overview of Marx, what he said and did not say. Tucker casts a wide net and catches numerous connections between Marx and those who either influenced him or were influenced by him.

Wolin, Richard, ed. *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993. An excellent set of diverse and conflicting interpretations of Heidegger's politics and his philosophical thought. Those wishing to grasp the core of the political controversies regarding Heidegger are usefully directed to this volume.

### Supplementary Reading:

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Arendt writes immensely well and is most concerned with reflecting on various aspects of the human situation in our time. Her work combines sophistication with direct appeal to vital issues about which any thoughtful person will be concerned.

Berlin, Isaiah. *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. These essays are helpful in mapping historical movements such as Romanticism. Berlin is more generally concerned with mapping various reactions to Rationalism. His essays are interrelated and to some extent overlap but can be read to advantage separately.

Brée, Germaine. *Camus and Sartre, Crisis and Commitment*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1972. Educated both in Europe and in the United States, Brée provides a valuable backdrop for understanding the development of French Existentialism. She is quite good at conveying both the commonalities and the divergences between Sartre and Camus.

Cate, Curtis. *Friedrich Nietzsche*. New York: The Overlook Press, 2005. This work is an extensive and detailed biography of Nietzsche's life, with continuing reference to Nietzsche's thought. Cate is strongest in his provision of historical data. Some of the inferences that he draws are controversial for Nietzsche scholars.

Engell, James. *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981. This is a careful account of both relations and tensions between human reason and the development of the notion of imagination in cultural thought in Europe.

Fischer, Ernst. *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach*. Translated by Anna Bostock. New York: Penguin Books, 1978. Fischer, though himself a Marxist, looks beyond economic dogmas and presents an engaging if flawed account of culture as seen from a Marxist perspective. It has often been hard for many to find Marxism at all plausible. Fischer may not succeed, but he breeds life into the Marxist perspective.

Fromm, Eric. *Marx's Concept of Man*, and an excerpt (translated by T. B. Bottomore) from *Marx's Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1973. Fromm is accused by many of being merely a popularizer. Though this accusation may be fair, Fromm is nonetheless direct and makes Marxian ideas directly relevant to our understanding of the human situation. The excerpts from Marx's writing are well chosen.

Fukuyama, Francis. *Our Posthuman Future, Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002. Fukuyama writes well and is prepared to take on large and largely unmanageable problems. In this work, he considers the implications of advances in medicine and biotechnology as the 21<sup>st</sup> century progresses.

Garff, Joakim. *Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography*. Translated by Bruce Kirmmse. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. Recently published, this is the most extensive biography of Kierkegaard's life now available in English. It provides a clear account of the crises that drove Kierkegaard's philosophy. There may be more detail in this book than some readers wish to absorb.

Gay, Peter. *Freud, A Life for Our Time*. New York: Anchor Books (Doubleday), 1989. Gay blends historical and cultural information in a way that sheds very useful light on Freud, the person, and Freud, the thinker. Free of jargon, this work will be of special interest to those who enjoy cultural history.

Gray, John. *Berlin*. London: Fontana Press, 1995. Perhaps the best account of Isaiah Berlin's thinking regarding the plurality of human values and the place of liberty in their midst. Gray is able to convey important aspects of many of today's controversies in political philosophy.

Guignon, C. and D. Pereboom, eds. *Existentialism, Basic Writings*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995. Major representatives of Existential philosophy and its concern with personal existence are anthologized in this book. Any of the writers represented can be read separately from the others.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Translated by C. Lenhardt and S.W. Nicholsen. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001. For Habermas, communication has moral obligations and emancipatory potential. He is very concerned with championing democratic values and rational community. This work conveys much of the spirit and strategies of Habermas's thought.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977. This is Hegel's groundbreaking work that brought him to prominence. In it, he places himself in relation to his predecessors and provides an account of the unfolding of the human spirit. Though challenging, the preface provides a dramatic overview of Hegel's thought.

Heidegger, Martin. *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Farrell Krell. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. This is perhaps the best compilation of Heidegger's core writings. The *Letter on Humanism* is Heidegger's attempt to distance himself from Existentialism in general and what he thinks of as merely humanistic thinking. Readers should be warned that many find Heidegger's writing an acquired taste.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by N. K. Smith. London: Macmillan Press, 1964. Kant's watershed work is extremely difficult to read, but this is the bone on which philosophers have gnawed ever since it first appeared. Probably the prefaces and the introduction are most accessible. The *Critique* discusses the function and limits of human reason.

———. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Translated by H. J. Paton. New York: Harper & Row, 1964. An important and more accessible writing of Kant that stresses basic elements with respect to moral life as Kant himself understands it.

Kierkegaard, Søren. *Either/Or, Part II*. Translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. These writings, presented as letters of admonition and instruction to those who live the aesthetic life described in *Either/Or, Part I*, are especially revealing regarding Kierkegaard's notions of commitment and responsibility.

Klein, Melanie. *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*. Translated by Alix Strachey. New York: Dell Publishers, 1975. Klein represents a divergence from classical Freudianism and is claimed by many to be the first important originator of views that are Freudian yet differ from his specific ideas. Klein is not a smooth read, but her ideas are important, and this volume provides much of their core.

Lévi, Bernard-Henri. *Sartre: The Philosopher of the Twentieth Century*. Translated by Andrew Brown. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003. An author who provokes strong negative or positive reactions, Lévi attempts a serious account of Sartre and his influences. Readers will learn quickly whether this book is right for them. It is relatively free of jargon and is an engaging work.

Löwith, Karl. *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*. Translated by David Green. New York: Anchor Books, 1967. Read by many who seek an understanding of the transformation in thinking among philosophers in Europe from an emphasis on "Thought" to an emphasis on "Will." This book may be more helpful to those already acquainted with European philosophy.

———. *Martin Heidegger and European Nihilism*. Translated by Gary Steiner. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. This is a sharply outlined pursuit of the relation between Heidegger and various political and nihilistic developments that are occurring around him. The political dimensions of Heidegger's work receive special attention.

Magee, Bryan. *Wagner and Philosophy*. London: Penguin Press, 2000. Magee's work is of enormous cultural value. It provides an insightful and sweeping account of the influence of Schopenhauer on Wagner and Nietzsche and also of the complicated and important relationship between Wagner and Nietzsche. *Wagner and Philosophy* is

entertaining reading, though a few of its sections are slightly demanding. It is also published in the United States under the title, *The Tristan Chord*.

Malcolm, Janet. *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession*. New York: Vintage Books, 1982. This is an account of the way work was done within the psychoanalytic community in New York only a few decades ago. Malcolm's interviews and reflections offer both gossipy information and clear accounts of the controversies surrounding psychoanalytic methods of treatment.

Matustik, M. and M. Westphal, eds. *Kierkegaard in Post-Modernity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995. This collection of essays works to sort out the relation among Existentialists and between classic Existential thinkers and the world in which they found themselves. The table of contents offers the reader clear choices regarding which particular thinkers to consider. The essays are quite separable from each other.

May, R. *Love and Will*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1969. May has the gift of making issues in depth psychology clear and engaging. No jargon is involved. Though some slight background in Existential philosophy would be helpful, this work can stand on its own.

May, R., E. Angel, and H. Ellenberger, eds. *Existence: A New Dimension in Psychiatry and Psychology*. New York: Basic Books, 1958. The anthologized articles in this collection do a thoughtful job of relating psychotherapy to Existential thinking. The introductory essays by May and Ellenberger provide excellent overviews of this area. Also contained is a famous case conveyed by Ludwig Binswanger, viz., *The Case of Ellen West*. Mysterious and not altogether accessible, this presentation is one of the most intriguing reflections on whether suicide is ever an appropriate life decision.

Merquior, J. G. *Foucault*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985. In a short, quite lucid account of Foucault, Merquior stresses his ideas more than his life. This is perhaps the best concise introduction to Foucault, the thinker.

Miller, James. *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993. Perhaps the best account of the life of Foucault and his importance in both postwar France and the United States. Miller conveys Foucault's ideas and their motivations almost effortlessly, and the work itself helps to make plausible how philosophy might directly connect with life.

Philipse, Herman. *Heidegger's Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. Philipse writes a careful, clearly developed account of what Heidegger seeks in his quest to discover the meaning of being. Also contained is an excellent account of those who have influenced Heidegger's work.

Pippin, Robert. *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989. This is a core exposition of Hegel's understanding of the relation of reason to reality and human consciousness. Pippin is demanding but casts very helpful light on Hegel's place in the history of ideas in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Rosen, Stanley. *Nihilism, A Philosophical Essay*. South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2000. Nihilism has meant different things to different writers. Rosen is an energetic thinker who works to defend foundations, both traditional and metaphysical, from what many perceive as the fashionable corrosive tendencies displayed by nihilistic thinkers.

Safranski, Rüdiger. *Martin Heidegger, Between Good and Evil*. Translated by Ewald Osers. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. Extremely well written and also of high literary merit, this work provides a vivid impression both of Heidegger the thinker and Heidegger as a person in the world. Many claim this is the best and also the least biased account of Heidegger's intellectual life.

———. *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*. Translated by Shelly Frisch. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003. Safranski captures the temperament, phases, and moods of Nietzsche's thinking extraordinarily well. Though it is useful already to know some of the history of 19<sup>th</sup>-century European ideas, Safranski offers a most helpful first approach to Nietzsche in any case.

———. *Schopenhauer and the Wild Years of Philosophy*. Translated by Ewald Osers. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987. Safranski is always an engaging read, combining literary and philosophical ideas with considerable grace. Some may find that a prior understanding of German thought and philosophy is most helpful before this work is undertaken.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *No Exit and Three Other Plays*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert. New York: Vintage, 1989. For those whose orientation is dramatic, these plays provide vivid and stark accounts of Sartre's Existentialism. If only one play is read, it should probably be *No Exit*.

Shamdasani, S. and M. Münchow, eds. *Speculations After Freud: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994. This is a collection of reflections on the relation of psychoanalytic theory to culture as well as some ruminations on the future of psychoanalysis as a potential contributor to cultural analyses. The articles by Kristeva, Richardson, and Scott are of especial interest.

Strawson, P. F. *The Bounds of Sense, An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. London: Methuen & Co., 1966. Strawson's influential book presents Kant's fundamental concepts and their connection to each other. Though demanding, Strawson's writing is insightful and provides an opportunity to observe a professional philosopher at work with difficult concepts.

Tarnas, Richard. *The Passion of the Western Mind*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993. Tarnas provides a highly readable adventure through the history of Western philosophical thinking. More than most, Tarnas relates what are often technical dimensions of philosophy to real issues in human life.

Wicks, Robert. *Modern French Philosophy, From Existentialism to Postmodernism*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003. In this volume, a very helpful overview is provided of 20<sup>th</sup>-century French philosophy and the setting in which it emerged. Many writers are discussed who had striking and controversial beliefs regarding the problems of human existence.

Wolin, Richard. *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism, from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Wolin is gifted and writes clearly. There have been numerous reactions to an alleged suffocation of society, culture, and the individual through an excessive reliance on the mechanisms of rationality. Many of these reactions come from the right side of the political spectrum. This is a useful book for exploring these reactions and what motivates them.

Yalom, Irvin. *Love's Executioner and Other Tales of Psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books, 1989. A set of reflections based on case material, Yalom's work brings to life what the actual practice of psychotherapy is like. His particular concern in these essays is the resolution of transferences, those ways in which ghosts from our past haunt our present.

———. *The Schopenhauer Cure*. New York: HarperCollins, 2005. Himself a practicing psychoanalyst, Yalom is able to present Schopenhauer's remedies for human suffering in a vivid way. This novel is an excellent first read for those who would like to have Schopenhauer's understanding of human existence brought to life. Because much of Yalom's interest has to do with therapy itself, this work is a good bridge to a number of post-Freudian ideas.

———. *When Nietzsche Wept*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993. This novel is largely fictional with respect to its factual information but very insightful in bringing Nietzsche, the person, and his therapeutic ideas to life.

Yankelovich, Daniel and William Barrett. *Ego and Instinct, The Psychoanalytic View of Human Nature—Revised*. New York: Random House, 1970. This is an important and also much undervalued contextualization of large issues regarding the status and future of the enterprise of psychoanalytic practice and theory. The first chapter is well worth reading in its own right.

#### **Internet Resources:**

"Major Figures in Western Philosophy," *Philosophy Pages*, <http://www.philosophypages.com/ph/>. A helpful website that provides an introduction to the major figures in Western philosophy and gives links to their most important writings.

"A Collated Web Index of Significant Historians and Philosophers," *Scholiast.org, Margin Notes for the World Wide Web*, [www.scholiast.org/history/histphil.html](http://www.scholiast.org/history/histphil.html). This Web site provides an overview of the history of philosophy from the Classical Period through the Modern Period.