



# The Reed

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# **The Reed Journal of Existentialism**

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“The self-system, in this sense, is an ideational, linguistic device, in a continual state of modification and creation. We sit comfortably in our armchairs pouring forth conventional symbolic abstractions. In this shadowy monotone we exercise and modify our fragile selves, while our pet cat sits purringly by, convinced probably that we are only purring too.”

— Ernest Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*

## *Letter from the Editors*

The pieces published in this journal present existentialism as a personal philosophy and a socially informed response to injustice and unsureness. They address the ways in which existential thought practically relates to education, community-building, and identity. The works, in all their complexity and variety, profoundly contemplate themes of presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, meaning and non-meaning, temporality of existence, and liberation and oppression. As social beings living in an everchanging world faced with existential threats from all angles, we must appreciate the way each contributor views personal and academic issues with clarity yet remarkable individuality, painting each page with the vibrancy of their subjective experiences. We hope you enjoy their works as much as we have.

The editors of *The Reed* have the pleasure of announcing the winner of The Hong Memorial Essay Prize, in memoriam of Howard and Edna Hong, the founders of the St. Olaf Kierkegaard Library and the translators who brought Kierkegaard to the English-speaking world. This year, we are happy to announce that Jacob Farris has earned the honor of this award for his work, "Freedom and Interdependence: The Existentialist Ethics of Recognition." This piece boldly takes on foundational criticisms of existentialism and embodies the plurality and subjectivity in the meanings of life.

Many thanks to the editorial team for their relentless determination and to the Kierkegaard library for their continuous support. Thank you to the authors who submitted their experiences and impressions this year. Finally, thank you to the readers who continue to keep existential questions at the forefront of their own experience.

Emma Dougherty, *Editor-in-Chief*  
& Alyssa Medin, *Vice Editor-in-Chief*



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RACHEL ELLIS

# Innocent Desire

Smooth, like

My babysitter once told me to eat a stick of butter. And I really, truly, wanted to take a huge bite right off the end, leave behind a crisp half circle of teeth. Feel the warm oil fill up my cheeks and grease my spine. But I knew, once I broke the seal on my curiosity, I'd like it too much and get in the bad habit of sneaking sticks out of the fridge. Nothing would ever satisfy me ever again like knowing my feverish little body could conquer the cold, hard, salty golden brick.

Devouring the one thing that would make me whole was a breed of daring I wasn't allowed to possess. A drive for which my brother was praised and my sister never asked. I fridged my longing for intimating this missing golden obelisk, for now. Back then, I thought these things could be tucked away easily.

JACOB FARRIS

# Freedom and Interdependence

## The Existentialist Ethics of Recognition

The existentialist philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir argue that values do not fall from heaven, but rather we are their sole creators. Because of this, we are each responsible for freely deciding what is valuable. I argue that, despite appearances, this view does not lead to ethical relativism and rampant individualism. On the contrary, de Beauvoir shows that human creation of values is consistent with recognizing our interdependence with and obligations to others. Sartre arrives at his views about values through his phenomenology of two important effects: anxiety and shame. Anxiety is our felt sense of being free to decide our fundamental projects in life, through which we realize that we are responsible for freely creating and reinforcing the values that we ordinarily take for granted as external givens. Shame, on the other hand, reveals the limits of this freedom. Sartre's analysis of the "look of the Other" shows that our self-understanding is indirect, because our sense that we exist in a public world is given only in the experience of being judged by another subject. Shame is possible because our very self-evaluation is mediated by the value judgements of others. De Beauvoir affirms these views about

our relation to values, and uses them as premises in her argument for unconditional moral obligations. Comparing her argument to G. W. F. Hegel's account of mutual recognition can explain the merits of her conclusion that we depend on each other for the justification of our existence as free beings, and that oppression is therefore an absolute evil.

Sartre argues that anxiety is not a mere feeling, but the authentic experience of our radical freedom. He distinguishes between fear and anxiety or anguish in that "fear is fear of beings in the world whereas anguish is anguish before myself."<sup>[1]</sup> Fear is about something else that poses an external danger to my projects, while anxiety is about myself as a free subject and the threat which I thus pose to my own projects. Sartre clarifies this distinction with the example of feeling vertigo on the edge of a cliffside. Vertigo begins with the fear that *something else* will cause me to fall off the precipice. For instance, I may become afraid because "I can slip on a stone and fall into the abyss."<sup>[2]</sup> But in order to fear this possibility, I must interpret myself as "a destructible transcendent in the midst of transcendents," a thing among things in the external world whose future is determined by a causal chain that I belong to.<sup>[3]</sup> In response to these fears, I might then deliberate about the dangers in my situation and reflectively conduct myself in order to avoid falling off the cliff to the best of my abilities. I may think to myself, "I will pay attention to the stones of the road; I will keep myself as far as possible from the edge of the path."<sup>[4]</sup> But this requires a fundamental shift in my perspective, for "these conducts, precisely because they are my possibilities," ones I have an active and individual relation to, "do not appear to me as determined by foreign causes."<sup>[5]</sup>

From this standpoint, I understand my future to be undetermined because it depends on my own reflective decisions about how I shall act. But this means that nothing I decide to do *now*—say, take precautions to avoid falling off the cliff—can determine what I will decide to do later. Therefore, "*nothing*

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1 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel Estella Barnes. Washington Square Press, 1992, 53.

2 Ibid., 54.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

prevents me from precipitating myself into the abyss.”<sup>[6]</sup> For “the decisive conduct will emanate from a self which I am not yet.”<sup>[7]</sup> Anxiety is the affective intimation of these horrifying possibilities that our future selves are free to realize in defiance of our current projects. It is the recognition that we transcend objective being, and so are always more than what our past decisions and circumstances have made of us so far. Thus, anxiety is not fear of an external event that is out of our control, but anguish over the fact that, as free beings facing an open future, we are in a sense out of our own control. Our commitments and projects must be continually revived as a constant decision if they are to last, since no decision of ours at any one moment can relieve us of our responsibility to freely choose how we shall act at each subsequent moment.

But if we are always free in this way, why is the experience of anxiety that Sartre describes so rare? Sartre answers this question through a phenomenological account of the different ways that we can relate to the world. Here “the world” does not mean the universe that natural science studies, but the human world of meanings that we are enculturated into. This world is not composed of atoms but of roles, symbols, tools, practices, etc., which as a whole embodies an understanding of what it means to be human. We can relate to this world either in the mode of prereflective engagement or in the mode of reflective disengagement. When we are immediately engaged with it, “we act before positing our possibilities,” since those possibilities “refer to meanings which necessitate special acts in order to be put in question.”<sup>[8]</sup> In other words, we usually do not have to reflectively deliberate about what to do, because certain possibilities already show up as simply “what one does” according to the background assumptions of our world. It is very difficult to make these assumptions explicit, let alone question them. Our tacit familiarity with the matrix of roles, equipment, and practices that we have been thrown into orients us prior to deliberation towards certain actions and projects that immediately show up as meaningful and appropriate, and which we tend to take for granted in our everyday activities.

Take Sartre’s example of waking up to an alarm clock: “the

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6 Ibid., 56.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 61.

alarm which rings in the morning refers to the possibility of my going to work...to apprehend the summons of the alarm as a summons is to get up...the very act of getting up is reassuring, for it eludes the question, 'is work my possibility?'"<sup>[9]</sup> We usually respond to our alarm clock's ring as though it announces an exigency that comes to one from without. We treat it as if we have not given it that meaning through our free decisions and are not free to give it another meaning (for instance, by refusing to go to work). We only become conscious that we endow the world with its exigencies when we cease to take our routines for granted and disengage from our immediate involvement in the world through self-conscious reflection. By way of this shift in perspective, we come to realize the absurdity of our everyday attitude in light of our radical freedom to constantly decide the meaning that things have for us. But from the everyday standpoint, the meaning that we freely invest in things appears just "the way things are." By taking them for granted and following our routines as if we have no choice, we are relieved of the burden of being self-conscious of our freedom to realize other possibilities and pursue other projects—that is, of experiencing anxiety.

Sartre argues that this is true not only of everyday routines, but also of ethical values. From the prereflective standpoint, "values are shown on [our] paths as thousands of little real demands, like the signs which order us to keep off the grass."<sup>[10]</sup> We experience them as facts that are "out there" which give us objective standards for action, like "sign-posts" that tell us what to do and what not to do. But Sartre argues that this is incoherent if thought through to its end. For the foundation of values "can in no way be *being*," because "every value which would base its ideal nature on its being would thereby cease even to be a value and realize the heteronomy of my will."<sup>[11]</sup> On the contrary, values can only exist in relation to "an active freedom which makes it exist as value by the sole fact of recognizing it as such."<sup>[12]</sup> His argument seems to be this: If values are entities in the objective world like rocks and trees, then they are independent of our will and we must passively accept them. But then they lose the ideal normativity that

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 62.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

makes them values, their status not as an external imposition on our will but a reason that we can give ourselves for actively exercising it. The source of the valuableness of values can only be our ability to autonomously endorse them as such reasons. But this means that values must be denied an existence that is independent of our will. Sartre concludes from this that “as a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable.”<sup>[13]</sup> This is because our fundamental project determines what we find valuable. Before we can endorse anything as a reason to act, we must decide what will count for us as such a reason by making that fundamental choice. And since any evaluative standard must derive from that choice, there can be no standard of justification for that choice itself. To recognize this is to face the anxiety of freedom, to be “anguished at being the foundation of values while itself without foundation.”<sup>[14]</sup> No wonder we usually flee from our radical responsibility to be the groundless ground of values into the security of everyday life.

This argument has often been read as claiming that we are each absolutely free to decide what we personally find valuable. If so, then Sartre appears to exaggerate our independence and underplay the way that values are part of the intersubjective world that we share with others. None of us ever truly decides what is valuable for ourselves alone because we live in a shared world of human meanings that is shaped by all of our evaluations. Moreover, Sartre’s views about values seem to lead to ethical relativism. We can never rationally settle disagreements about what is good and right, since there is only what is good and right “for me” or “for you” according to our personal evaluations. This means that ethical dialogue between me and you can never get off the ground unless those evaluations already converge. The moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre criticizes Sartre on just these points: “for Sartre the self’s self-discovery is characterized as the discovery that the self is ‘nothing,’” such that “whatever social space [the self] occupies it does so only accidentally.”<sup>[15]</sup> MacIntyre argues that a human self entirely shorn of all social relations is an incoherent idea. But if we take ourselves to be such naked selves, then our actions can only be understood as “expressions of attitudes, pref-

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Third ed., Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press 2007, 32.

erences, and choices which are themselves not governed by criterion, principle, or value, since they underlie and are prior to all allegiance to criterion, principle, and value.”<sup>[16]</sup> And this means that the basis of human life and practice could only be the unprincipled arbitrariness of our caprice. Indeed, Sartre himself appears to claim this when he argues that we are the foundationless foundation of all values.

But this reading of Sartre only captures one side of his account of values. While he does argue that we transcend objective being, including our given social relations and any supposedly given values, he also claims that we can never completely escape from objective being. This is precisely the existential ambiguity of human life: we are both the indeterminate negativity of a free subject and the determinate positivity of a body existing within given specific material and social circumstances. The latter is what constitutes the concrete situation in which human freedom must act, if it is to act at all. Examining this side of his existential ontology can show that his views about our relation to values, to others, and to ourselves are substantially more nuanced than critics like MacIntyre claim. For while my values do indeed come from freedom alone, and not from some heaven of moral entities that exists independently of freedom, Sartre does not argue that they come from my freedom alone. Our relation to the Other, who also freely posits values and projects, complicates our relation to our own values. But to grasp why this is so, we must first understand Sartre’s account of our most fundamental experience of the Other.

According to an influential view in philosophy, we each have in our own case direct introspective knowledge of our existence as conscious subjects. But when it comes to other people, we only directly experience their bodies. We must infer that those bodies belong to other conscious subjects, perhaps on account of noticing that they display certain patterns of bodily behavior which we know to be correlated with mental phenomena in our own case. But without any direct evidence, how can we ever truly know that other subjects exist? In epistemology, this is known as the problem of other minds. But according to Sartre, this problem rests on a poor description of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 33.

our lived experience of others. It speaks about our experience of them “as if the primary relation by which the Other is discovered is object-ness...as if the Other were first revealed...to our perception”<sup>[17]</sup> Sartre argues against this view that “the fundamental relation” in which the Other appears is “the revelation of *my* being-as-object for the Other” through which I “apprehend the presence of [the Other’s] being-as-subject.”<sup>[18]</sup> It is not the experience of *seeing* the Other, but of *being seen* by them. Sartre concretizes this with the memorable example of looking through a keyhole to spy on someone. He asks us to imagine that “moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole.”<sup>[19]</sup> He describes what it would be like to be pre-reflectively absorbed in this act as follows:

Behind that door a spectacle is presented as “to be seen,” a conversation as “to be heard.” The door, the keyhole are at once both instruments and obstacles; they are presented as “to be handled with care;” the keyhole is given as “to be looked through close by and a little to one side,” etc. Hence from this moment “I do what I have to do.” No transcending view comes to confer upon my acts the character of a given on which a judgment can be brought to bear.<sup>[20]</sup>

In this way, I would unreflectively follow the exigencies of my situation, and the issue of being personally accountable for this action would never arise. How would this experience change if “all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall,” meaning that “someone is looking at me!”?<sup>[21]</sup> It would take me out of my prereflective engagement with the world, but not in the same way that anxiety does. It would not make me experience anguish over my freedom in the face of my open future, but *shame* over being caught performing an act that belongs to a closed past which I am accountable for. Shame, like anxiety, is more than a mere feeling, because it causes “essential modifications [to] appear in my structure.”<sup>[22]</sup> For shame is “the *recognition* of the fact that I *am* indeed that object which

17 Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 277.

18 Ibid., 280, emphasis added.

19 Ibid., 282-283.

20 Ibid., 283.

21 Ibid., 284.

22 Ibid.

the Other is looking at and judging.”<sup>[23]</sup> Therefore, “I can be ashamed only as my freedom escapes me in order to become a *given* object.”<sup>[24]</sup> This has two important implications. First, it shows that the look of the Other is first and foremost the experience of *being judged* by the Other. Shame is the affective recognition of this judgment, in which I experience myself not as a free subject but as the determinate object of another’s gaze. No matter who else I may now wish to be, in shame I recognize that I *am* indeed a voyeur. In this way, “it is shame or pride,” for pride is another way in which we can experience ourselves as an evaluated object rather than an evaluating subject, “which reveals to me the Other’s look and myself at the end of that look.”<sup>[25]</sup> Secondly, it shows that the basic experience of the Other is actually a way of experiencing *myself*. Sartre concretizes this with the following example: “What I apprehend immediately when I hear the branches crackling behind me is not that there is someone there; it is that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I can not in any case escape from the space in which I am without defense.”<sup>[26]</sup> The experience of the look is the recognition of facticity, that “I have an outside.”<sup>[27]</sup> Because of this, my possibilities are constrained by certain “givens” in my life, such as the fact that I have a body, that I occupy a specific environment, and that I have been thrown into a historical context that I did not choose. I am not just a free subject, but also a public object that is available for the judgements of others and a vulnerable body that can be hurt by them. While my freedom lets me transcend my facticity to some extent, the look of the Other reminds me that I am nevertheless tethered to it. Their gaze reveals to me that my actions take place in a public world outside of my own states of consciousness, and therefore I am not the privileged judge of their meaning.

Ultimately, Sartre’s argument against the existence of a problem of other minds is not that the look of the Other gives us direct evidence of the existence of other subjects. Rather, it is that, in a crucial sense, we do not have direct evidence of *our* own existence. Insofar as we are conscious of our facticity, that

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23 Ibid., 285.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid., 284–285.

26 Ibid., 282.

27 Ibid., 284.

we exist in the public world that is “outside” of our individual consciousnesses, our self-understanding must be mediated by the judgements of other subjects. But this means that we cannot be indifferent to others’ evaluations of our actions and projects. Our very self-evaluation is mediated by their evaluation of us, which is why it is possible to feel shame and pride before another’s gaze. While it is true that only freedom can justify itself, can give itself value and meaning, it does not follow that free subjects can do so individually. On the contrary, since our self-interpretation is mediated by the judgements of others, we can only justify our actions and projects and confer meaning and value upon human existence if we do so *together*.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir attempts to derive a coherent framework for ethics from this insight. She aims to show how existentialism can be true to the ambiguity of human life, the way that we transcend facticity and yet are tethered to it, without collapsing into ethical relativism. She follows Sartre in considering human freedom to be the sole creators of value, for “it is desire which creates the desirable, and the project which sets up the end.”<sup>[28]</sup> But since freedom is “the source from which all significations and values spring,” she argues that “the man who seeks to justify his life must want freedom itself absolutely and above everything else.”<sup>[29]</sup> This is because “at the same time that [freedom] requires the realization of concrete ends, of particular projects, it requires itself universally.”<sup>[30]</sup> In order to act at all, we must posit some particular project which makes that action meaningful. But the value of that project derives only from our having freely chosen it. Regarding our fundamental project as valuable thus commits us to valuing our own freedom as the source of that value, as the end in itself that all other ends are relative to. In this way, de Beauvoir argues that Sartre’s subjectivist account of values leads us to an absolute value that we must all be committed to: the value of our own freedom.

De Beauvoir recognizes that, by making the freedom of individuals to choose their own life-project the ultimate end of ethics, she may be criticized for failing to acknowledge the ethical relevance of our dependence on others and our respon-

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28 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Citadel Press, 1991, 14.

29 Ibid., 23.

30 Ibid., 24.

sibilities to them. But she argues that this is a hasty conclusion: “An ethics of ambiguity will be one which will refuse to deny *a priori* that separate existents can, at the same time, be bound to each other, that their individual freedoms can forge laws valid for all.”<sup>[31]</sup> Indeed, she argues that existentialism, if thought through to its end, leads to an ethics of individual freedom *and* interdependence. For it posits that we must give our lives the purpose that we desire them to have through our freely chosen projects, but those projects both shape and are shaped by a human world that we share with others. Because of this, “no project can be defined except by its interference with other projects.”<sup>[32]</sup> All of my purposeful actions reinforce some values and support some projects while rejecting other values and frustrating other projects. Likewise, others do the same for my values and projects through their actions. Because of this interconnectedness, any one individual’s project is in a sense a decision that they make for everyone, a stand they take on the values that we all should live by. Indeed, I take it that this is what Sartre means in *Existentialism is a Humanism* when he writes the following:

When we say that man chooses himself, not only do we mean that each of us must choose himself, but also that in choosing himself, he is choosing for all men. In fact, in creating the man each of us wills ourselves to be, there is not a single one of our actions that does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be. Choosing to be this or that is to affirm at the same time the value of what we choose.<sup>[33]</sup>

De Beauvoir particularly emphasizes the way that our projects orient us towards an open future in which we will one day no longer exist, when it will then be up to others to confer value upon our projects and carry them on in our place: “Freedom can not will itself without aiming at an open future...but only the freedom of other men can extend [our chosen ends] beyond our life.”<sup>[34]</sup> Once we die, the continued value and pursuit of those ends will depend entirely on others. Our projects thus

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>33</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber, Yale University Press 2007, 24.

<sup>34</sup> De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 76-77.

commit us to willing the freedom of others, and not just our own.

From these arguments, de Beauvoir concludes that the fact that “I concern others and they concern me” (78) is not something contingent to the human condition but a part of its basic structure. It is an “irreducible truth,” such that “the me-others relationship is as indissoluble as the subject-object relationship” (78). She argues that this means that “man can find a justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men” (78). But why exactly does that follow? Thomas C. Anderson identifies the following important underlying premise in her argument:

It is not the valuation of just anyone that a man treasures; he wants his life to be valued and judged meaningful especially by those who truly understand and can appreciate it, that is, his equals or peers...Man wants free recognition freely given by those able to appreciate his life; nothing less than free approval from his peers will satisfy his need for justification of his existence.<sup>[35]</sup>

This argument bears striking similarities to one made by Hegel, a clear influence on de Beauvoir’s ethics.<sup>[36]</sup> To understand why exactly we need our freedom to be recognized by free peers, let us consider Hegel’s argument that self-consciousness requires mutual recognition.

In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel describes the basic structure of consciousness as follows: “consciousness distinguishes something from itself while at the same time it relates itself to it.”<sup>[37]</sup> Consciousness represents its object as both related to it, in that it appears to it, and distinct from it, in that it also exists independently of consciousness. This constitutes the intentional structure of consciousness, the way that it is essentially

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas C. Anderson, “Freedom as Supreme Value: The Ethics of Sartre and De Beauvoir,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, vol. 50, 1976, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpaproc19765010>, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Among other references to Hegel, de Beauvoir writes that, “by affirming that the source of all values resides in the freedom of man, existentialism merely carries on the tradition of Kant, Fichte, and Hegel” (de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 16).

<sup>37</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Terry P. Pinkard, Cambridge University Press 2019, 55.

consciousness *of* something else. But *self*-consciousness has a more complicated structure: it “distinguishes itself from itself as itself.”<sup>[38]</sup> In self-consciousness, consciousness becomes its own object *as opposed to* the subject who is conscious of it, but “[this] otherness is, to itself, immediately sublated.”<sup>[39]</sup> In other words, self-consciousness is the appropriation of the otherness of its object, the recognition of oneself in something else. Therefore, “self-consciousness is desire,” for desire is precisely the movement of positing an object as other than oneself and then appropriating it as oneself.<sup>[40]</sup> For instance, we satisfy our hunger by consuming food and making once independent organic life into ourselves. But in cases like that where the fulfillment of a desire involves destroying the independence of an object, genuine self-consciousness cannot result. This is because “for this sublating [of the otherness of an object as oneself] even to be, *there must be this other*,” and therefore consumptive desire is “unable through its negative relation to the object to sublate it.”<sup>[41]</sup> Since the essence of self-consciousness is the appropriation of the otherness of its object, which requires that the otherness or independence of its object be preserved, it is not possible to find true self-consciousness and lasting satisfaction through consuming objects of desire.

How, then, can we achieve genuine self-consciousness and lasting satisfaction? Is the appropriation of the otherness of an object not an impossible task? Hegel argues that it is not. But it requires a special kind of object, one that “is the negation in itself and at the same time therein self-sufficient.”<sup>[42]</sup> That is, it requires an object whose independence can give us an experience of our own independence, whose otherness can reflect our own selfhood. The only object that can fulfill this function “is consciousness.”<sup>[43]</sup> Unlike objects such as food, another consciousness can call my chosen ends into question, but it can also give me an experience of my own freedom without needing to be consumed by my freedom in the process. For it can, out of its own freedom, recognize and affirm my freedom. Hegel argues that it is only when we see our independence reflected in another’s recognition of it that we can recognize our-

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38 Ibid., 103.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 175, emphasis added.

42 Ibid., 107.

43 Ibid.

selves in an object that remains fully independent of and other than ourselves. Therefore, the desire of self-consciousness “attains its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness” through which “the unity of itself in its otherness comes to be for it.”<sup>[44]</sup> It finds true and lasting satisfaction not in consuming objects but in recognitive relationships such as love and friendship, in which, as Hegel writes in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, “[we] willingly limit ourselves with reference to an other, even while knowing ourselves in this limitation as ourselves.”<sup>[45]</sup>

Hegel’s famous analysis of the recognitive relationship between master and servant is particularly relevant for our purposes. This relation is instituted when one self-consciousness responds to the threat of destruction by another self-consciousness by subordinating its desire to be free to its desire to live and giving itself to the other as an instrument of their will. The consciousness that becomes the master is posited as “a pure self-consciousness,” a free subject that exists for itself and is a source of value, while the one that becomes the servant is objectified as “a consciousness...which is not purely for itself but for another.”<sup>[46]</sup> Both participants in the master-servant relation recognize the same social norms by which they recognize each other: what is essential to their relationship is the master’s will, and the servant is to work to prepare the objects of their master’s desire for their consumption. This is a “one-sided and unequal” recognitive relationship because the servant recognizes the freedom of their master and the value of their master’s chosen ends while the master denies the same recognition to their servant.<sup>[47]</sup> It may seem at first that the experience of oneself as a free subject and evaluator can be occasioned by no better object than by one’s own servant. But Hegel emphatically denies this. This is because the master’s self-consciousness “comes about through another consciousness,” the one that is falsely regarded as “inessential.”<sup>[48]</sup> Therefore, he can only value himself insofar as he values his servant’s evaluation of him, for he experiences himself as a free subject whose chosen ends are valuable only through the servant’s rec-

44 Ibid., 108.

45 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge University Press 2002, 42.

46 Ibid., 112.

47 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 114.

48 Ibid.

ognition of him as such a subject. By treating his servant as a mere tool whose own evaluations do not matter, he devalues that recognition. And since his own self-regard comes about through that recognition, this means that he devalues his own freedom as well. By degrading his servant, he indirectly degrades himself. Unless he comes to recognize the other as a free subject with independent value, he will never recognize himself as a free subject with independent value either. This shows that true self-consciousness must not only be mediated by the recognition of another consciousness, but such recognition must be *mutual*. Both subjects must “recognize themselves *as mutually recognizing each other*.”<sup>[49]</sup>

Hegel’s analysis of the conditions for our self-consciousness of freedom shows why de Beauvoir is right to argue that individual freedom presupposes interdependence with others. For it shows that individual free subjects only become self-conscious of their independence if they participate in what Hegel calls “spirit,” the cognitive community that “constitutes the unity [of the various self-consciousnesses existing for themselves] in their complete freedom and self-sufficiency...The *I* that is *we* and the *we* that is *I*.”<sup>[50]</sup> It also shows why the justification for our existence as free subjects cannot be found except in the freely given recognition of others who we regard as our peers. For we can only justify our existence by positing a particular project that makes our life purposeful, but, as Sartre has already shown with his account of the look of the Other, our own evaluation of that project is mediated by the evaluations of others.<sup>[51]</sup> This means that we can indeed only find a justification of our existence through our relationship with others.

From this, de Beauvoir concludes that oppression is an absolute evil, something that cannot possibly be justified even though all values and justifications are relative to subjective choices. As we’ve seen, freedom is the pursuit of projects that moves “into an open future.”<sup>[52]</sup> But others can, “instead of allowing me to participate in this constructive movement...

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49 Ibid., 110, emphasis added.

50 Ibid., 108.

51 Although, by arguing that we should recognize and value each other’s freedom, de Beauvoir implicitly criticizes Sartre’s view that the experience of the look of the Other is always the experience of being objectified by them.

52 Ibid., 88.

oblige me to consume my transcendence in vain.”<sup>[53]</sup> It is possible for others to close my future and deny my life value and meaning by oppressing me, either by restricting my body and depriving me of my material needs or by dehumanizing me in refusing to recognize me as a valuable free subject. In doing so, they would “[cut] me off from the future” and “[change] me into a thing,”<sup>[54]</sup> reducing me into my mere facticity. Even though de Beauvoir argues that we must respect and support the freedom of others, this particular use of freedom should not be respected, for “we have to respect freedom only when it is intended for freedom, not when it strays, flees itself, and resigns itself.”<sup>[55]</sup> If a freedom decides to contradict itself by performing an act that denies the value of freedom and oppresses free beings, then it is no contradiction of ours to respect freedom by suppressing that act. Indeed, it is not even a contradiction of respecting the oppressor’s freedom, for we have seen in Hegel’s analysis of the master-servant relation that one who denies the value of the freedom of another indirectly denies the value of their own. This means that, contrary to those who view existentialism as a license to do whatever we please, “to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future,” and “the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom.”<sup>[56]</sup> From this, de Beauvoir concludes that an oppressive act such as lynching “is an absolute evil...a fault without justification or excuse.”<sup>[57]</sup> In this way, she shows how Sartre’s ethical subjectivism, if thought through to its end, entails that some acts are absolutely wrong. Moral absolutes emerge from the fact that we are interdependent on each other for the justification of our existence.

Critics of existentialism often argue that it leads to ethical relativism and excessive individualism. But I have argued, on the contrary, that de Beauvoir shows how a coherent ethical framework which transcends the false opposition between individual freedom and human interdependence can be derived from it. This is because our freedom to posit values and

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53 Ibid., 88.

54 Ibid., 88-89.

55 Ibid., 97.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 158.

pursue projects is bound up with a world that we share with others, such that we never truly decide for ourselves alone. As de Beauvoir argues, building off of Hegel's account of mutual recognition, we are committed to valuing not only our freedom, but also the freedom of others; indeed, both of those are ultimately the same thing. Contrary to those who attack existentialism as a license to do whatever we please without ethical constraints, de Beauvoir's existentialist ethics of recognition supports many of our deepest ethical intuitions. It gives us a picture of the good life in which our material needs as factual beings are met, as well as our social needs to have our freedom recognized and supported by others whose freedom we in turn recognize and support. It entails that we are accountable to others for our actions, and therefore should be fair, courageous, and trustworthy. Most of all, it shows that we all have an obligation to oppose oppression and dehumanization and support justice, freedom, and equality for everyone.

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# Three Years

OLGA

RACHEL ELLIS

## Hair and Now

I've been feeling like an elderly dandelion, as of late. Whenever the wind blows too strong or too cold, the chilling sensation at the epicenter of my head is hard to ignore. Maybe I'm just anxious. But this anxiety, too, will cause hair loss, so really it is all the same.

Growing up, I always wondered why guys wore hats so much. The barista wears a baseball cap even now as I write this. Rock climbing bros wear beanies indoors and out. Bandanas, cowboy hats. My hair had always been thin, little patches of my white scalp peeking out like bald eaglets in their aerie. Back when I had to put my hair up in a ponytail to play sports, I spent copious amounts of time gathering it back into the elastic, coaxing strands on the back of my head to please cooperate. Every time, the hair would clump together or puff up on one side to expose a streak of skull below. I've heard that some gymnasts and dancers get bald spots later on in life from yanking back their hair into pristine, tight buns, but I know I have a different root problem. My father and all his testosterone relatives are easily grouped together by their salient shiny sparse scalps. I fear my inheritance, this gleaming crown, is catching up with me. Don't lecture me about genetics, I'm above genetics now.

My mother's father's hair was thinning, but clung on till the end. He passed on luscious brown locks to my male-identifying cousins, uncles, great uncles, and nephews in my

large Catholic extended family. All crew cuts, give or take a few inches. And a few are blonds. I know this because I scoped them out at my aunt's funeral last spring. She had lost a battle to breast cancer but, according to her obituary, "won a place in Heaven." A hair beautician, her gentle hands had transformed all our appearances. Towards the end of chemotherapy, Aunt Patti wore a wig.

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My parents are all for bodily autonomy. They are anti-vaxxers and fight for the physical rights of unborn children. By their example, their children became active, conscious agents in their own health very early on. As young as I could pick up a phone and call, my mother made me set up my doctor and dentist appointments. My dad, a breast radiologist, had helped Aunt Patti navigate through her cancer treatment options. He offered his 2nd or 3rd opinion every step of the way, ordered prescriptions, answered the hard questions, all while asking Patti if this is what she wanted, not what she felt doctors and relatives were pressing her to do. My dad did the same for other relatives and family friends. That's why we have stockpiles of older prescription drugs in our medicine cabinet. Even for our elderly dog Cash (as in Johnny Cash), my dad prepared a cocktail of melatonin, THC (sourced from my uncle), and peanut butter sometimes to ease his old dog anxieties.

Still, there were unspoken lines in medicine we as a family would not cross. No unnecessary chemicals in your body, such as the flu, COVID-19, or HPV vaccines (God's judgment, I supposed, if I got cervical cancer from premarital sex). No birth control, either. Ironically, my parents never forbade gender-affirming healthcare. They begrudgingly tolerated procedures that emphasized society's gender expectations. Getting paid to look at breasts in a dark room every day, my father the mammography radiologist's biggest complaint on that breed of enhancement was that silicone and saline implants obscured budding cancers from the MRI's watchful eyes. Altering secondary sex characteristics in the other direction was never explicitly addressed, probably because my parents never discussed trans identities at the dinner table. On the LGBTQ spectrum, the closest they got was we love your

cousin Ben but he's living a life of sin in Chicago with another man. We've tried reaching out, but he never responds! Wonder why.

. . .

Two years before my aunt's funeral, I was a college freshman. Spring had sprung on the Midwest campus, a time for new life and hope after months of dreary slush. My date and I skipped class one day to take a field trip to the Twin Cities. We both joked how much easier life would be after this appointment to get an IUD situated. The whole way up as the car nosed through the gray snow, my boyfriend's eyes were wide and worried.

I had an inkling of what I was getting myself into when we pulled into the parking lot of the nondescript orange brick Planned Parenthood clinic. I presumed the resulting agony and blood would pale in comparison to monthly ovarian cysts, anyways. My parents had assured me that those cyclical bouts of glass shards twisting in my abdomen were nothing but nudges from my fertility that I should treasure at all costs. The numbers and names on the white plastic insurance card swam and darted before my eyes, but the nurse had seen all this nervousness before, on the daily most likely. She asked my pronouns (they/them/theirs) and actually stuck to them. I signed so many forms and answered the arbitrary "copper or hormonal" question of the day. Everything was really fine and dandy. Maybe my stomach sank a little when I perched on the exam table, feet up in the padded stirrups and back shuffling for purchase on the crinkling blue cover. I eyed the speculum resting on the table next to me. The nurse said they weren't savages here, they heated it up so the plastic wouldn't be shocking.

A warm bird beak. Like the ones on water birds that dive for fish. Herons, curlews, spoonbills. They all flocked in at once.

. . .

When I told my parents what I'd done (this was before I knew the joyful anonymity of HIPPA, EOB, and medical insurance), they were livid. Called me reckless, irresponsible, easily

persuaded by a boyfriend who just wanted a good time. Who knows what horrible hormonal repercussions were in store! Cancer, infection, and (God forbid) infertility. The least I could do was get it done in a safe hospital where my dad worked. Not that he'd be doing the procedure, but the idea was still creepy that my parents wanted to keep my body and medical files always in their sights.

I did, at least, honor my parents' wishes two years later when I started taking testosterone. When I snuck in to get blood drawn to make sure my t shots were doing their job, I always worried about running into my father around the corner. With COVID-19 protocol, you had to have an appointment to get inside, so I couldn't pretend I was just visiting him. In the past, he'd just grab my asthma meds once a month on the way home from work; but now with t lopped into the bunch, I had to be extra careful with ordering and picking up my prescriptions. And of course my mother would ask where I'd been. Thankfully the YMCA was also in that direction, so I'd say "getting jacked" and it wouldn't be a lie. At least now back at school, all the meds are shipped directly here. It's been nine months now. Among other things I am getting jacked and my voice cracks. And maybe my hair's falling out, too. I'm really not that vain about my appearance, I promise. It's just that male pattern baldness will be a lot to explain to parents who thought they had a daughter.

. . .

Long ago when I had longer-than-shoulder-length and slightly thicker hair, I vividly recall getting into some burrs with my friends in the countryside. Our parents loved to talk inside for hours as we three wandered through the green woods, gazed at millions of comma-shaped tadpoles shimmering in muddy shallows, and jumped up and down crumbling clay ravines. On this particular day, we had loped through brambles at the wrong time of the season. Mark and Jeremy were fine, as the burrs slipped easily off the ends of their short hair. Mine was a tangled bird's nest and it took hours for my mother and their mothers to yank the burrs free. After all their hard work was through, I proclaimed I wanted a very short haircut. To be honest, I had envied my friends' efficient, sleek, boyish styles

forever but knew I had to bite my tongue. Now under the guise of burrs, I could go for the chop without too much scrutiny. I held my resolve and, two months later, watched with glee as 5-inch chunks of auburn fell below my feet onto the concrete basement barbershop floor. Afterward, my aunt swept them up, scooped them gently into a Ziplock bag, and gave it to my mother, saying [author's name] would love to have this when she's older to remind her of what a wild child she was. Never saw that bag again but, knowing my mother, it's somewhere safe.

I think that's the same sentiment attached to baby shoes I found digging around in my parent's closet. A taped-on prompt from a baby journal suggested giving brides-to-be their first baby shoes to remind them of the joy they were as children, the joy they would gain birthing children. (A joy I could never fathom).

. . .

Last summer, long after the IUD had settled in, brambles spiked my group's limbs all day long as we weeded, chopped, raked, and sweated over this man's landscaping in the heat of the afternoon. The lawn was balding, lush on the neighbors' edges but brown, crinkly, and sparse in the middle.

"What a nice group of young gentlemen. Who is your leader?" the yard's owner asked.

I looked younger than I was, 21 and a college junior at the time, but I blended in too well with my crew of high school sophomore guys. All dressed the same in our matching tired grins, tans, baseball caps, grungy khaki pants, buckled belts, forest green WisCorps cotton T-shirts rolled up to the armpits, and leather boots crusted with yesterday's work. I told him I was in charge, but didn't have the heart to tell him he was wrong. Or the army veteran at the park, or the nice lady with the cats. Were any of them wrong?

It's definitely not the first time I've accidentally gone cross-dressing:

Yawning in sweatpants and a Rusty Ankle Log Rolling

Tournament 2008 t-shirt and waiting for my sister to finish changing after swim practice, a lady glared at me and said I was in the wrong locker room. Audibly, I replied, "Sorry, I just have short hair!" but I'm not sure she believed me. Perhaps the better response would have been, I don't want to be here and you don't want me here, either. But what can we do about it? I can strip if that makes you more comfortable.

In middle school, I went as the color pink to a Halloween party.

The doctor said, "It's a girl!"

I hated dressing up for weddings, funerals, graduations, church, Thanksgivings, biking to concerts in the park, etc. It got better when I learned about drag. Clothes became a performance I could put on and take off.

Thank goodness for school uniforms. Everyone dressed the same, no quarter-quarter life crisis before the mirror every morning. Polo shirts and chino bottoms. In elementary school you could wear red, white, or navy the color of ocean abysses. And any sweatshirt issued from the school. For a time, I wore at least three layers of tops to school and sweated through all of them.

Next year, I wore one-piece swimsuits to school because wearing a real bra felt like giving up. Worked out fine except in gym class whenever I reached my arms up over my head to catch a dodgeball and flashed everyone with my bright orange patterned tummy like some vibrant lizard. I definitely made some interesting eye contact with the gym teacher and my classmates, but no one ever asked me anything. What would I have said? And I was that kid who went hard in gym class. Because here I had control over this twisted mass of blood, fat, muscles, bones mutating nauseatingly out of my control. Every layup, sprint, and tackle reminded me it should be a joy it was to have a body.

. . .

Since most of my life has been a performance, acting is too easy. I count on one hand the number of times others have cast me in a production, though. The first, a third-grade school

play. Our teacher asked all the kids to write down their top two role choices. Most everyone, unsurprisingly, wanted the lead of Tim. In our readthrough, his line “you can’t kill the messenger” started a fire in our young soul. He was a witty hero, and at that young age every stirring line becomes the foundation for troupes you’ll carry for the rest of your life. To not break all our hearts, our teacher reminded us that “writing down a choice doesn’t mean you will get it.” A wild concept to our budding theories of self to wrap our teeth around.

The most charismatic boy in our class, Kaden, spun these words to mean that the teacher didn’t want us to be greedy. After all, sometimes people who shoot for the stars don’t have the self-consciousness and oomph to fill the shoes of the main character. “You have to be smart,” Kaden said, “don’t put down what you really want.” His words whisked around the classroom like wildfire, a hiss of chatters and frantic pencils. Looking back, I doubt he actually believed it himself. He probably tried to weed out the competition. Kaden went on to shine in show choir and theater in high school and beyond, but I got the part this time.

I couldn’t put down this new role, and in the months after the performance I kept playing as a messenger with my group of friends during recess role play. We had built a castle of evergreen branches and somebody had to run between kings and queens. I felt like this in-between wasn’t acting, but rather a breath of fresh air from the haughty royalty on pedestals always afraid and keeping up appearances. But all my friends saw nothing wrong with choosing a side, and when recess was over I put on my heavy tiara and plastered on a smile.

. . .

I got the IUD to birth the freedom of my inner child, the one who always wanted short hair and to not have to choose between sides that felt as arbitrary as apples and oranges. I’d always hated the consistent reminder I was in the wrong body but relished the pure pain of ovarian cysts. This feeling of my body turning a dagger in on itself was exactly what I felt looking in the mirror, at these strange lumps rising on my chest. Or, I wanted to rip my high squeaking voice from my throat like strings from a violin bow, the horse hairs twanging,

fanning out after a single slice. In other words, climbing up onto that crinkly blue stage to take in the IUD was a role I had been preparing for my whole life. Its implantation was far less invasive than the puberty that pierced my innocent adolescence. There was no acting there on that doctor's chair. I got a taste of my future, the one where I wouldn't need to scan every room to know my audience every time I want to open my mouth, position my limbs, or just exist. In the incessantly grinding bowels of a label making plant, I whored out my hearing to pay for a shrink. Pronouns and tinnitus, I traded one constant ringing in my ears for another, and it paid off. My mustache will speak for itself soon.

. . .

Every time I've eyed my soggy head in the hairdresser's mirror, I'm transported backstage to the theater dressing rooms. In the glaring lights and bustle, I have seconds to decide which character I'll be playing for the next few months. Aunt Patti's "How many inches are we taking off today" really means is it time to cast yourself as a tomboy, the girl who runs with the boys but never goes too far? A bookworm with bangs? Or just trim up the proper girl who's the apple of her father's eye? Every three years after the burr incident, I'd go for the short cut, which my aunt and mother would eventually agree to after some convincing. But once that grew out, I'd wish for, "As short can be pulled back into a ponytail. No bangs please, and layers." Then for a while I was all girl again, all pliable.

To Aunt Patti's funeral, I wore her two-month-old haircut. One by one, relatives walked up to the podium to read lines. The men held back tears, and the women knew that catharsis is part of healing. I was somehow paranoid that my one month on treatment would show through, maybe via a voice crack or stray whisker. All awkward smiles and nods, the pastor melded his personality to fit the family. The relative funeral speakers painted a character of the deceased that was too bulky and impersonal to fit the way each and every one of us had known her. Lost at sea in the waves of crew cuts and crinkled faces, I thanked Patti who, without knowing, let me glimpse myself every time her scissors chopped short.

VICTOR HERNANDEZ

# Feasibility, Necessity, and Rebellion of Collective Authenticity

As Understood Through Heidegger and Fanon

In section 74 of his work *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger expands on the theme of authenticity in a notable and perhaps unusual way. He suggests that in order to fully come back to an unrepressed ownership of its authenticity, Dasein must achieve authenticity in, with, and for its co-historical community, the achievement of which is coined as a ‘destiny.’<sup>[1]</sup> This section is notable as *Being and Time*’s prior discussions regarding authenticity allude to the authenticity of Dasein in a singular sense, not of multiple Dasein joined together in community. Furthermore, considering that inauthenticity—the state from which Dasein’s authenticity must arise out of—is rooted in Dasein’s fallenness to the they-ness of the others, one may question whether section 74’s concept of destiny and collective authenticity is a contradiction. Can Dasein escape inauthentic fallenness to the ‘they’ and truly come to its authentic self if it

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1 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward S. Robinson (Victoria: Must Have Books, 2021), 434–439.

must bring others along on its escape attempt? Would maintaining such community be an instance of chaining oneself to the ‘they’, i.e., another recurring instance of fallenness into inauthenticity? Are liberal interpreters such as Salem-Wiseman correct in asserting that any external, non-individual elements of a Dasein’s pursuit of authenticity always “entrench the dominion of *das Man*”?<sup>[2]</sup>

This paper aims to show that Dasein’s historical thrownness, rather than the individual Dasein in itself, is what should be the main focus in regards to authenticity, and that once this distinction is drawn, the achievement of a collective authenticity is both feasible and indeed what follows *Being and Time*’s main line of argument.<sup>[3]</sup> Furthermore, this paper will also discuss how Frantz Fanon’s philosophy on race and decolonization,<sup>[4]</sup>

2 Jonathan Salem-Wiseman, “Heidegger’s Dasein and the Liberal Conception of the Self” *Political Theory* 31, no. 4. (2003), 540, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591703251146>.

3 This is an important disclaimer that I encourage be read in its entirety. To responsibly write about Heidegger’s philosophy, I must note that in 1933, seven years after writing *Being and Time*, Heidegger notoriously and heinously joined the Nazi party of the then German Reich. There are a variety of contrasting accounts and interpretations amongst scholars on how this is to affect contemporary studies, discussions, and considerations of Heideggarian philosophical texts that preceded this deplorable and shameful period of Heidegger’s life. Such discussion is considered in depth in Julian Young’s book *Heidegger, philosophy, Nazism*, which this paper references. Nevertheless, the philosophy of *Being and Time* is widely recognized as being immensely influential and fundamental to the development of further thought in the contemporary tradition of continental philosophy, phenomenology, hermeneutics, existentialism, Latin American philosophy, psychology, critical theories on race and gender, literature, and even architecture. Because of this, the Heidegger and the philosophy of *Being and Time* is still widely studied and considered in 21st century academic philosophy, including in the philosophy department of Loyola Marymount University, which offered a course on Heidegger in the Fall semester of 2021. Rather than deal directly with discussions that focus purely on Heidegger and his Nazism, my aim in this paper is to demonstrate how Frantz Fanon, a marginalized philosopher of color, gives important philosophical additions to the philosophy of *Being and Time* that provide us a more refined, full, and correct philosophy of authenticity that connects to concrete racial, cultural, and political realities. I believe that these Fanonian supplements contribute to a philosophy of collective authenticity that is anti-Nazi.

4 Fanon is more commonly discussed in relation to the French figures of 20th-century continental philosophy that he was most directly influenced by and often in direct conversation with such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre, the latter of which wrote the preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. The philosophy of such French figures, however, is deeply influenced and indebted to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, and as such, it should come as no surprise for traces of *Being and Time*’s influence to be found in Fanon’s thought, even if they were not

particularly in his essay “Racism and Culture” and book *The Wretched of the Earth*, resonates with the ideas of collective authenticity found in Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. Considerations from Fanon will be used to both demonstrate how they-ness, inauthentic fallenness, and collective authenticity are experienced in the historical context of colonialism, as well as to clarify and develop the feasibility and necessity of collective authenticity itself. Fanon will also be particularly useful for discussing how certain groups become more marginalized than others and why collective authenticity will necessarily elicit a provocation.

### The Historical Thrownness of Dasein

To understand how collective authenticity is possible and non-contradictory, we first need to specify what is being ‘authenticized’ when Dasein becomes authentic. To do this, we need to understand the historicity and thrownness of Dasein. Heidegger emphasizes historicity, or the possession of an active history, as a fundamental component of Dasein.<sup>[5]</sup> Our history is something that we are rooted in, something that our present selves come from. We all, for instance, have a culture from which we come, a childhood and family structure (or lack thereof) from which we evolved, the privileges or struggles of a socio-economic background that we have either benefited from or cut our teeth upon, etc.

All these components of one’s history are things into which we are *thrown*. They are not things which were chosen by Dasein. One never chooses or asks for their culture, their body, their country of origin, or their race. As Young describes it, “Dasein never chooses, but finds itself ‘already in a world.’”<sup>[6]</sup> Such things, however, are inherited by us nonetheless and manifested into one’s history. Thus, one’s history is always one that is constituted by *thrownness*.

This history that Dasein possesses, however, is never merely something that once was, that is now over, and that we merely look back upon from time to time. Rather, it is something

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passed on as directly.

5 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 41.

6 Julian Young, “*Being and Time*: positive implication critiques,” Heidegger, philosophy, Nazism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 61.

*historical*, something that is still very much here with us today in our present lives.<sup>[7]</sup> One's historical thrownness is not like an old sterile history book one can simply shelve away, detach themselves from, and forget about. One cannot simply ditch their thrown history of racial, cultural, and social experiences that brought them to their present moment and act as though they never happened. This is because that historical thrownness determines where we find ourselves in that present moment and thus makes us who we are in that present moment. Our present moments are always contextualized by some history of experience that brought us to that moment. One is never void of such history.

Those historical experiences always shine a light on the world, deciding how it is revealed in one's present experience. For example, for one who has been historically thrown into a racially colored experience in 21st century United States—a historicity in which people of their racial group have been repeatedly exploited, harassed, and murdered by mobs and authorities without justice or repercussions—the present world likely discloses itself as a place viewed with a sense of deep caution, mistrust, fear, anger, and demands for actual justice. In an experience of the present, the history into which we are thrown is always very much right there alongside us.

In bringing us to the present, however, our historical thrownness also projects itself into our future. As Young highlights, one's historical thrownness discloses what is valuable to Dasein, particularly when it comes to what kinds of activities and projects Dasein is intrinsically and genuinely compelled to engage with in its life.<sup>[8]</sup> The kind of lives that we want to live and the things that we aim for in our futures, be it a job or profession that fascinates us, the continuation of a family culture, a social issue that we want to commit ourselves to, or a kind of romantic relationship that we crave, all stem from our past historical experiences that have led us to develop values. Through this, our history is what opens up the visibility of a future to us. As Heidegger affirms, it is something which *discloses* and regulates our possibilities for life and in this sense “is not something which *follows along after* Dasein, but something which already goes ahead of it.”<sup>[9]</sup>

7 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 430.

8 Young, “*Being and Time*: positive implication critiques,” 61-62.

9 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 41.

The fact that our history projects itself into our future does not mean, however, that our futures are simply repeats of our past experiences. There can, of course, be historical experiences that lead us to cherish and become intrinsically attached to a style of life, activity, culture, and/or identity, and which subsequently lead us to value the continuation and growth of such ways of life into the future. But there can also be others that lead us to feel a sense of emptiness, pain, or injustice, in which case we desire to enact change to progress from and overcome such thrown experience.

The overcoming of such voids and pains, however, occurs because one experiences, holds, and recognizes them as their own histories for overcoming. If one fails or refuses to recognize such history, and instead tries simply to ignore and pay no attention to what has brought them to their present, overcoming such a void will be impossible. A triumph over tragedy requires that the desire and will for triumph is projected out of that historical experience of pain and emptiness itself. In being a triumph that is always related to the initial historical experience, the triumph is ultimately united with the tragedy as a single united history of the person that is further developed rather than abandoned.

Fanon demonstrates the importance of Dasein's historicity in *The Wretched of the Earth* when he discusses the importance of colonized poets and intellectuals whose work focuses on the historicity of the pain, struggle, and injustice of their own marginalized experiences.<sup>[10]</sup> The emphasis of such work is not aimed at supporting mere intellectual acts. Nor does Fanon present Guinean poetry with the aim of merely evoking deep sadness in a colonized person and making one feel as though they will never escape repeats of such pain, injustice, and tragedy. Rather, he recognizes that the historical thrownness of the past manifested in these works allows a colonized person to recognize their own experiences of alienation and marginalization in the present moment, and that from that recognition, an orientation towards future political action that overcomes such present subjugation is opened up to a colonized person for them pursue and with which to liberate themselves.

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10 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 162-167.

This intrinsic value and will for one's life pursuits always stems from similar projections of our thrown experience. Dasein, our past, present, and future are all united by the historicity that constitutes us as beings-in-time.

## Authentication of Historical Thrownness

Heidegger maintains that Dasein ends up in a state of inauthenticity when, instead of fully recognizing and owning its own history and the life that it is compelled to pursue as a result, Dasein conforms to and falls for the affirmations, rules and expectations of averageness and genericness asserted by the "tradition" of the "they," which dismisses and covers up the particular and unique historical thrownness that is Dasein's legitimate source and origin.<sup>[11]</sup> Fanon demonstrates that such fallenness into inauthenticity is prominent amongst colonized people who, in attempting to rescue themselves from further subjugation by conforming to the white standards of they-ness under colonialism, attempt to deracialize themselves by walking away from their own culture and customs which colonial they-ness condemns as primitive. Rather than owning and pursuing their authentic selves and ways of life, such colonized people 'fling' themselves into adoptions of the cultural models that this they-ness affirms as acceptable averageness.<sup>[12]</sup>

The averageness that they-ness asserts always neglects and rolls over Dasein's historical thrownness because averageness and genericness never encompass the aspects of uniqueness and particularity that make and distinguish Dasein as individuated by its distinct historicity. There is always some experience of one's historicity that is not a generic universal. In as much as one always has such an aspect of uniqueness in what they are, the averageness of they-ness, in failing to encompass that uniqueness that makes one who they truly are, will deny recognizing and pursuing this part of ourselves.

However, fallenness to they-ness does not outright destroy one's historicity. One's fallenness, in inauthentically rejecting their

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11 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 43.

12 Frantz Fanon, "Racism and Culture," trans. Haakon Chevalier, in *I Am Because We Are: Readings In Africana Philosophy*, ed. Fred L. Hord and Jonathan S. Lee (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 211-212.

queerness in a homophobic society where heterosexual and cis-gender standards are affirmed by they-ness as the appropriate tradition of averageness, for example, does not outright destroy the identity, past experience, and attachment with the experiences of gender and/or sexuality that they have been historically thrown into. A history of something remains whether it is recognized or not, and as such, continues making the person of the present that very thing. History cannot be erased, only covered up. As Young articulates, “inauthentic Dasein actively *represses* its value-tradition and therefore remains in possession of that tradition in the way in which, for Freudians, one remains in possession of repressed, but not extinguished memories.”<sup>[13]</sup> Because Dasein’s history perseveres, albeit a repressed perseverance, there is inevitably a dissonance between it and the averageness of they-ness, a dissonance that Dasein necessarily experiences as a sense of uncanniness and “not-at-homeness” when it is inauthentic. *Being and Time* affirms that this sensation is the call of a Dasein’s conscience to come back to its authentic historical thrownness, and thus, to come back to who it really is.<sup>[14]</sup>

Fanon recognizes such conscience in the experience of the colonized, noting that regardless of how much a colonized person attempts to deculturalize and deracialize itself so as to conform to inauthenticity, they continue to experience racism and feelings of alienation.<sup>[15]</sup> This is in part because systematic exploitation against them continues regardless of how assimilated they attempt to make themselves, but also because the culture they attempt to conform to is not one derived from their own historical experiences. In such a position, they always retain an alien outsider relationship to such culture. In the inevitable confrontation of such dissonance, from their own people, communities, and childhood memories, there always remains a covered-up authentic culture that derives from what the colonized has experienced in their historicity, one that they can rediscover, revalorize, and recultivate.<sup>[16]</sup>

13 Young, “*Being and Time*: positive implication critiques,” 65-66.

14 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 317-322.

15 Fanon, “Racism and Culture,” 212-214.

16 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 158-159.

When discussing colonized intellectuals in *The Wretched of the Earth*, this conscience of abandoned authentic culture and nation is identified by Fanon as the second stage of a colonized intellectual’s return. The re-adoption of such culture and nation and decision to become authentic is identified by him as the third ‘combat’ stage.

To become authentic is for inauthentic Dasein to hear this uncanny call of its conscience, reestablish ownership of its own historical thrownness, and choose to pursue the future bound values and possibilities that it has received from this historically thrown past. Thus, Dasein's historical thrownness, and its opening of authentic possibilities, is what is specifically being revived and authenticized in an achievement of authenticity.

### Historical Thrownness as Experienced by Multiple Subjects

While every Dasein has a history into which it is thrown, it would be wrong to take the historicity of a Dasein as something that is rooted intrinsically and uniquely in the individual Dasein. While a Nietzschean view might suggest that the individual can uniquely decide and create the value that guides them independently within themselves, Heidegger's conception of historicity, as Young notes, views history not as something crafted by Dasein itself, but *received* and *inherited* externally.<sup>[17]</sup> The historicity of Dasein would not be one of thrownness if it were something it itself created and decided on. The aspects that constitute such a history are external to and beyond Dasein, and because of this, have the capacity to be received and inherited by others as well. Thus, what we are made of in terms of our history is never anything that is fundamentally exclusive to us as individuals. The rest of the 'herd' may also have been thrown into such historicity. Dasein can indeed find others who share that experience and historicity and thus have their world disclosed in that same way.

McMullin gives further support for the potential of one's historicity to be experienced by others, noting Heidegger's claim that for all things and experiences that are at hand for Dasein, there is embedded a fundamental reference to "other wearers," of others that could have gone through the same experience.<sup>[18]</sup> That is, whenever one is thrown into an experience, be it of suffering as a terminal cancer patient, enjoying the extravagance of being an outdated British royal, or being a member of Tibetan culture, they intuitively recognize the experience as something that another could have been thrown into and experienced. Dasein

17 Young, "*Being and Time*: positive implication critiques," 62.

18 Irene McMullin, *Time and The Shared World: Heidegger on Social Relations* (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 137-138.

understands in all these experiences that someone else could have been standing in their shoes and experienced such a thrown pain, splendor, or Tibeteness. Such an understanding is embedded within the experience of these things themselves. It is the very reason why Dasein are compelled to express and describe such experiences to others who did not directly experience such things, be it through literature, art, or verbal conversation. It is also the reason why Dasein are able to recognize and experience a sense of resonation with others that were also in the shoes of such an experience. Thus, this intuitive awareness of other wearers further demonstrates historical thrownness as an ultimately independent and externally derived experience that can be shared with others.<sup>[19]</sup>

### What Constitutes a ‘People’ in Heidegger and Fanon

This important point about Dasein’s historicity is likely why Heidegger begins coining it as a heritage of Dasein in section 74, as *heritage* more directly implies the existence of a community of multiple Dasein that are partaking in and thus sharing the heritage experience.<sup>[20]</sup> The use of heritage seems to emphasize that what is found within the individual in terms of its historicity is also present in a community that was thrown in the same way. Thus, as Aboutorabi notes, the Heideggarian concept of a people or culture is not based on unity through biology or genetics.<sup>[21]</sup> Rather, *Being and Time* affirms that a people as a unified group is formed through a shared experience of historicity which unites all participants in a shared experience of the present.<sup>[22]</sup>

This conception of historicity as what truly constitutes a people is one that Fanon is in agreement with in “Racism and Culture,” specifically in regards to what constitutes a racial group of people. Fanon affirms that biological and psychological studies to understand race and racism are primitive and oversimplified

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19 McMullin notes that this is very reminiscent of Husserl’s analysis on the inter-subjective nature of the objectivity of objects.

20 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 435.

21 The irrelevance of biology and genetics when it comes to *Being and Time*’s conception of people can also be derived from section 10 of *Being and Time*, which affirms that what truly constitutes Dasein (implied in the individual sense) will never be found in any scientific study of anthropology, psychology, or biology.

22 Rozita Aboutorabi, “Heidegger, Education, Nation and Race.” *Policy Futures in Education* 13, no. 4 (2015), 416-419, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210315571219>.

endeavors that fail to recognize that the history of colonial enslavement, exploitation, and domination is the underlying foundation of what constitutes being a native and inferiorized race.<sup>[23]</sup> Fanon's criticism here should not be taken as merely an attack against biologists, psychologists, and evolutionists of the 20th and 19th centuries that sought to explain race and justify the enslavement of inferior races through empirical science. This criticism is also aimed at scientists who may attempt to 'nobly' explain race out of existence through biological or psychological reductionist lenses, affirming its nonexistence based on lack of biological differences between people of different 'races,' or of affirming that societal race and racism are merely derived 'mental quirks' and 'psychological flaws' amongst people.<sup>[24]</sup>

What is wrong about such arguments is that they completely ignore the historical experience of subjugation that native people face under colonialism, which gives rise to their collectively felt and experienced historicity of race. Such a subjugation is one that is rooted not in crude, vulgar racism rooted in biology, but in the intents of the colonizer to continue exploiting, dehumanizing, and subjugating colonized people for enrichment and affirmation of cultural superiority. As Fanon notes, under the more modern practices of colonialism, such colonial intentions continue manifesting through less crude and increasingly 'camouflaged' techniques that are nonetheless fundamentally the same, and thus maintain the inferioritization of colonized people in modernity.<sup>[25]</sup>

A scientific study that shows that Indigenous people are genetically indistinguishable from Whites would not end the experience of being Indigenous. Such an identity is rooted not in a sense of being biologically Indigenous, but of having been historically thrown into the marginalization, disadvantage, and exploitation that all the genetically and culturally distinct ethnicities of the Indigenous diaspora face under colonialism.

Some might affirm that we cannot totally dismiss biology or genetics as components that can unite people. Aren't people who are all collectively thrown into having a biological or genetic disability for example, unified as a collective and distinct people by this 'biological experience'? This question essentially answers

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23 Fanon, "Racism and Culture," 206-208.

24 Ibid., 211.

25 Ibid., 209-212.

itself, as in such a case, it is not the mere biology or genetics themselves that are constituting the sharedness in question. Rather, the sharedness in question is in the felt *experience* itself of being thrown into the context and circumstance that biology is forcing upon these heritage members. For example, is it in merely talking about biological and genetic science that such people achieve a sense of collective unity? Or is it in discussing and sharing the concrete lived experiences of marginalization and disadvantage under such conditions and the wills to overcome such conditions that drive such individuals together as a united people? As I acknowledge later in this paper, only those who directly experience this thrownness have the right to answer this question with certainty, but as an outsider to this particular historical thrownness, I am inclined to infer that it is the experience itself, and not the biology itself, that unifies such a heritage group.

### Why An Authentic Collective Group is Not The ‘They’

Such heritage communities are distinct from the ‘They’ in the sense that they still hold distinction and uniqueness in the world. This is because, as for any heritage or historical thrownness, be it of a gender, culture, or race, not all Dasein have been thrown into it, and as such, it is not a mark of mere unremarkable averageness or genericness. When a group collectively affirms such a heritage as their authentic identity, they affirm that they as a collective group are *different* than the generic average of a mainstream societal they-ness, that they have a distinct experience of the world, have distinct values in life, that their collective heritage group is something that defies averageness, and most importantly, that this collective non-averageness should be empowered to speak and live for itself independently of the norms and opinions of they-ness.

In his liberal interpretation of authenticity in *Being and Time*, Salem-Wiseman misses this point in thinking that external and collective calls for how Dasein is to pursue itself necessarily imply themselves as universal ones of a Kantian-like world conscience, one that leads to a fallenness to they-ness.<sup>[26]</sup> This is not the case at all. When one authentically supports and

26 Salem-Wiseman, “Heidegger’s Dasein and the Liberal Conception of the Self,” 540.

pursues a collective heritage that they take as external and shared between many Dasein, they are not affirming that to all Dasein in existence. A LGBTQ pride march, for instance, is not one that is affirming that everyone in society should take up queerness or homosexuality. Rather, this external call is one that is calling specifically to everyone with that distinct historical thrownness to authentically take up this way of being, which is not a proclamation to all people on a universal level.

The fact that such a heritage has a community of Dasein participants does not make the heritage immune from fallen subordination into inauthenticity by the societal ‘They.’ The conveniences and compulsions to conform to averageness that stem from the ‘They’ will still attempt to suppress the distinct heritage and historical thrownness manifested in this community and reduce it to a conforming unauthentic averageness. The fact that the many immigrant heritages that entered Ellis Island were carried by masses of Dasein did not stop the anglo-phizing of surnames, and the washing away, rather than the preserving, of the immigrant heritages, languages, and identities that such Dasein were. The ‘They’ still attacks you even if you are in a group. Since vulnerability to they-ness still exists, a collective heritage community must still seek authenticity through resistance to fallenness.

### Necessity of Collective Authenticity

One may, of course, agree that pursuing collective authenticity is possible, but point out that a mere possibility of doing something does not entail an obligation to do so. For what reason should Dasein be compelled towards pursuing authenticity with others rather than simply achieving authenticity on its own and for itself? After all, don’t we all hate group projects?

However, for a Dasein to fully revive its historical disclosure into authenticity, it must necessarily work towards reviving the dormant historical thrownness of its fellow heritage group members as well. Mansbach, who also interprets *Being and Time* as being communitarian, affirms that “Dasein is wholly itself when the possibilities of Others become its own possibilities, with the same end in view.”<sup>[27]</sup> We must remember that it is not

27 Abraham Mansbach, “Heidegger on the Self, Authenticity and Inauthenticity.”

the individual Dasein itself which is the true target of liberation in pursuits of authenticity. Rather, the target of liberation is Dasein's externally derived historical thrownness itself which is manifested amongst many people in its heritage group. For this historical thrownness itself to be fully liberated, its revival in the entirety of that heritage group must occur. Thus, Dasein becomes capable of authenticity at the highest level when it realizes that the true liberation of its authentic way of being (its own possibilities) means the transformation of the world into one where all people who are like themselves (with the same end in view) are also allowed to freely manifest their shared historical thrownness (the possibilities that are recognized as the same as Dasein's own and thus become its own) in an authentic life.

Furthermore, in his discussion of the 1954 Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu against French colonialism, Fanon demonstrates how single acts and pursuits of authenticity are never fundamentally isolated and contained ones. He acknowledges that such a victory, where the Vietnamese successfully rejected and cast off the political standards of averageness and acceptability in colonial Vietnam, and were able to authentically affirm and pursue the values and political callings of their historically thrown experience, was one that ignited callings of inspirational conscience and yearnings of authenticity in all other colonial subjects who also shared that historical thrownness.<sup>[28]</sup>

Fanon's note on Vietnam highlights how in pursuing authenticity, one necessarily becomes an example of that authentic historical thrownness that inspires and lifts up the rest of its heritage community. As Alessandrini assesses, such examples and demonstrations of authenticity alleviate a kind of "fear barrier" which would otherwise continue sedating the rest of one's heritage community into inauthentic subordination to they-ness.<sup>[29]</sup> It is why one experiences a rejuvenation and feeling of being opened up when an authentic community member is encountered, as the activity of their authenticized historically-thrown way of being kindles and awakens the same kind of historical thrownness

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Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly 40 (1991): 85, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23350704>.

28 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 30-31.

29 Anthony C. Alessandrini, "Any Decolonization Is a Success': Fanon and the 'African Spring,'" in *Frantz Fanon and the Future of Cultural Politics* (London: Lexington Books, 2014), 166-167.

within ourselves. As Alessandrini notes, authoritative regimes are aware of the risk that such collective chains of combustion pose to the powder kegs of suppressed authenticity that they sit upon which is why such regimes try to hide, isolate, and stomp out any initial sparks of authenticity that appear, no matter how small or distant they may be.<sup>[30]</sup>

Additionally, achieving authenticity requires carving out space and allowance in the world for one to pursue and express the uniqueness of their historical thrownness, whether that be a part of the world that is no longer under colonial domination, a space where a religious community can be and feel safe with their authentic selves, or a community where one can pursue their authentic cultural customs without being obstructed; all such openings of space are also necessarily an opening of space to the rest of one's heritage community. The authentication of such heritage community members would open up even more space, and, as Fanon affirms with respect to the authentication of colonized peoples, community members are compelled to care about such further opening: space that is not open is space that is closed off to them— be it a place where colonial and racial domination still lingers, a hellscape of persecution, or a workplace of vicious male domination and privilege, this is a restriction and threat to their own authenticity.<sup>[31]</sup>

Thus, all promotions and achievements of authenticity are always promotions of the authenticized historical thrownness itself in its full and collective manifestation. Admirations towards specific instances of authenticity are never simply towards the individual Dasein of that instance. Rather, a considerable part of such admiration is how that instance contributes towards an empowerment of a collectively-held historical thrownness in its totality.<sup>[32]</sup>

Since the apparent pursuit of one single Dasein's authenticity is always a promotion of a historical thrownness itself, an authentic Dasein would always be helping members of its heritage community to develop authenticity. A Dasein cherishes moments

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30 Alessandrini, "Any Decolonization Is a Success': Fanon and the 'African Spring,'" 169-170.

31 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 179-180.

32 One could perhaps even argue that such admiration is *completely* directed at the collective historical thrownness in its entirety.

of authenticity in all its historical comrades when it recognizes that it can see itself and the historical thrownness that it itself hails from in their eyes. Such a disposition towards its heritage community could explain why an authentic Dasein would be willing to die for them. Such a martyr rests assured in the fact that their historical thrownness, which ultimately encompasses themselves and their world as they experience and know them, will persevere beyond them in the members of their heritage community who are instilled with that same experience of historical thrownness. Thus, a pursuit of a collective authenticity is not only very much possible and non-contradictory, but it is also an inevitable and necessary occurrence in full authentic becoming.

### Possibility of Unity and Solidarity

It is only with such historical comrades, however, that collective authenticity can be pursued, because if Dasein share no historical thrownness, then there is no common experience of the world or way of life to unite their pursuits of authenticity. This is not to say that one is necessarily opposed to or completely indifferent to the authenticity of a historic stranger. One could indeed support the historic stranger's achievement of authenticity through altruistic solidarity, but such help would not be a pursuit of collective authenticity.

A cis-male, for example, could stand in solidarity with a pursuit of authenticity for women, but this specific pursuit in itself does not open up ways of being and life that match onto his historical thrownness. Something else in his historical thrownness that could indeed be potentially pursued in collective authenticity, such as thrownness into a racial group, would not be the target of the liberation at hand (assuming that this march strictly focuses on women's issues). He cannot stand in direct unity for them, both because it is not pursuing a liberation and authentication of his historical thrownness, and because since it does not involve his historical thrownness, the experience and goals that are being pursued are ones on which he cannot rightfully claim to have insight or expertise. Only one who is part of the historical disclosure that a collective pursuit of authenticity is focused on, whether that be of femininity, Indigenoussness,

Judaism, or the working class, can claim to truly understand the experience and pursuits of authenticity that the collective group is aimed at. Thus, such people are the only ones who can truly conduct and lead the pursuit and achievement of their collective authenticity. A non-member could provide support, but only as one in an external solidarity that lets those who are in unity with that historical thrownness lead the way to that liberation of authenticity.

Because of this, collective authenticity is not something that every single person could unite together in pursuit of. It can only be pursued by historical comrades who share a historical thrownness distinct from the generic averageness of they-ness. This would explain why section 74 of *Being and Time* affirms such destiny as “Being-with-one-another in the *same* world,” rather than *the* world in a universal sense.<sup>[33]</sup>

### Fanon on Intersectionality

However, Daseins are, of course, never defined by simply one definite and clear-cut heritage of historical thrownness. Fanon recognizes this as something that some 20th century African intellectuals, in trying to establish the existence of a unified African culture, failed to realize in their pursuit of collective authenticity for the Black diaspora. He notes that when the members of Black historical thrownness came together at the First Congress of the African Society for culture in 1956, They realized that their finer and more particular experiences of historical thrownness ultimately made them different from one another. The Blacks of Chicago, Latin America, Nigeria, and Tanzania all realized that even though they were all Black, they were distinct people through their distinct historically thrown cultures, which were ultimately different collections of values, pursuits, concerns, and goals.<sup>[34]</sup>

Fanon agrees that the constituents of such a heritage group of a historical thrownness, such as Blackness, are indeed always distinct from each other in other factors of historical thrownness such as culture, sex, age/generation, etc. To suggest that this wouldn't be the case with the Black diaspora, and to affirm that

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33 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 436.

34 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 152-154.

Blacks are nothing but their race, would be just as absurd as the racism of white colonizers that proclaims Blacks and other colonial subjects to have no culture and that all Blacks, Arabs, etc. are all ultimately the same.<sup>[35]</sup>

But even with such discrepancies in a group, Fanon shows that this simply demonstrates a presence of intersectionality with respect to historical thrownness, one that affirms that more particular groups of Dasein, as well as individual Dasein, can and must be comrades in many different communities and pursuits of collective authenticity in order to fully authenticize their multilayered sets of historical thrownness. Fanon notes that while colonized nations such as Guinea and Senegal have distinct cultural pursuits of authenticity that they must undertake on their own in distinct groups, they nonetheless still hold a historically thrown unity and comradeship through the same subjugation of white colonialism and exploitation in Africa that they have experienced and must fight together against.<sup>[36]</sup> Fanon simultaneously acknowledges the presence of intersectional distinction while also affirming that it should not be used as a grounds to undermine the dimension(s) in which people are still nonetheless united as a heritage group. As Alessandrini highlights, Fanon realized that misleading thinking on intersectionality is what led to the harmful division of ‘White Africa’ and ‘Black Africa,’ which led to a failure to recognize that all parts of Africa, while certainly not sharing a homogenous Pan-African cultural and racial unity, were nonetheless all colonized Africans that pursued a African political authenticity against European colonialism.<sup>[37]</sup> Intersectional distinction must and should be acknowledged, but at the same time does not and ought not be taken as an obstruction to pursuits of collective authenticity.

### ‘Lone Wolves’

One may question if collective authenticity is possible if a particular experience of historical thrownness is one that only one single Dasein has been thrown into. However, it would seem quite rare, and perhaps even fundamentally impossible

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<sup>35</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 152-154.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 168-169.

<sup>37</sup> Alessandrini, “‘Any Decolonization Is a Success’: Fanon and the African Spring,” 166-169.

for such ‘lone wolves’ to truly exist. After all, even if one were thrown into apparent aloneness in a certain historical disclosure, wouldn’t they have a shared historical disclosure with others who are also all alone in their historical disclosure? Furthermore, doesn’t the label we are using right now, ‘lone wolves,’ one that is plural, already immediately imply in itself multiple and other people who are thrown into that situation, and thus, a heritage community?

But even if a true lone wolf did exist, then the entirety of that specific historical thrownness would be embedded in that Dasein, and as such, that Dasein would constitute the entirety of the heritage community itself. Thus, any individual pursuit of this authenticity would also ultimately be a collective one in the sense that the entirety of a heritage community would be achieving authenticity. Furthermore, since a Dasein’s set of historical thrownness is intersectional, it would very likely encompass a different layer of historical thrownness by which other Dasein have been attuned. Thus, genuine lone-wolfness is at best an extreme rarity that fails to disprove the occurrence and feasibility of collective authenticity.

### Heidegger and Fanon on the Constitution of They-ness, An Incompatibility?

I now want to give focus specifically to understanding the constitution of the ‘They.’ This will lead to important clarifying distinctions between its *particular manifestations* and its *fundamental ontology*, ones which might otherwise be overlooked and lead to mistakenly taking valuable Fanonian observations on the ‘They’ as being incompatible with *Being and Time*.<sup>[38]</sup> This will demonstrate both why in certain societal contexts some heritage communities can end up facing much harder struggles for their collective authenticity through marginalization, and why the ‘They’ itself will never actually be dismantled.

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38 Fanon, of course, never actually uses the terms ‘They,’ they-ness, or *das Man*, all of which are derived from *Being and Time*. As will be made evident in this discussion though, I take Fanon as undoubtedly making valuable observations regarding the idea of they-ness, which are simply more implicit ones that don’t make direct reference to or connection with these terms.

Section 27 of *Being and Time* affirms that if we are to ask who or where the ‘They’ is, we cannot succeed by pointing to any particular Dasein, one’s own Dasein, to a specific group of Dasein, nor to “the sum of them all.” With such a description of they-ness, one may perhaps question whether Dasein have anything to do with the development of experienced they-ness at all. The main distinction that *Being and Time* seems to be implying, however, is that being a constitution of they-ness is not equivalent to you being they-ness nor of they-ness being you. I take this as most clearly implied when he describes they-ness as that “which all are, though not as the sum.”<sup>[39]</sup> In this, *Being and Time* implies that this averageness is constituted through some contribution from each Dasein (all are), and is thus not the result or reflection of any one person or group completely. The reason why it is not a sum is because one cannot see every single individual Dasein contributor and its participation fully reflected in that they-ness that results, particularly because it is a blurred composite without any intra-distinction in which each participatory contribution is diluted, and simply indistinguishable, from the contributions of others.<sup>[40]</sup>

Fanon’s descriptions of the colonial system in “Racism and Culture” portray a much more explicit picture of the constitution of they-ness in the context of colonized people. Fanon describes how the authority and averageness in the colonial world were not brought about by any kind of passive or peaceful conglomeration of Dasein that created an equal blend of native and colonizer in the averageness of colonial they-ness. Rather, the standard of colonial they-ness was established through a bloody and violent “sacking of cultural patterns” where “a new system of values is imposed, not proposed but affirmed, by the heavy weight of cannons and sabers.”<sup>[41]</sup> Under these conditions, the native is completely subjugated and dehumanized by the domination of the colonizing occupant, becoming “an object at the hand of the

39 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 164-167.

40 While Heidegger’s articulation of the ‘They’ in *Being and Time* presents a very critical account of publicness, Dostal, in “The Public and the People: Heidegger’s Illiberal Politics”, highlights that pre-Heideggerian philosophers such as Kant held this kind of publicness as playing a beneficial and important role for morality (528-531). Dostal also highlights how the criticisms and themes towards publicness that *Being and Time* undertakes are remarkably reminiscent of Kierkegaard’s treatment of publicness in 1846’s *The Present Age* (531-534).

41 Fanon, “Racism and Culture”, 208.

occupying nation.”<sup>[42]</sup> The native’s cultural patterns and ways of life are liquidated, lost, and outcast, not incorporated into the standards of the colonial society. In this, the sole way of life that is seen as a ‘civilized’ and legitimate culture is that of the white occupier’s ‘superior race.’ The colonizer, from its pedestal, affirms that without this ‘motherhood’ of white ‘saviorism,’ colonized people would fall into a darkness of barbarism, devoid of any culture.<sup>[43]</sup> Through these colonial descriptions, it’s obvious that Fanon is pointing a finger directly and specifically at colonizers with respect to they-ness constitution. Does this put his decolonial thought at odds with *Being and Time*’s establishment of the ‘they’ as being rooted in any specific group of Dasein?<sup>[44]</sup>

### ‘Weak’ and ‘Strong’ Fannonian Arguments on Heritage Community Marginalization

One might try to make these seemingly contrasting views compatible by suggesting that a weaker argument is being made in Fanon, one which permits the acknowledgement that all Dasein contribute to the constitution of they-ness (which would make it ultimately wrong to attribute they-ness entirely to a specific group), but which explicitly highlights that this does not fundamentally entail each Dasein having an *equal* level of influence on they-ness.<sup>[45]</sup> After all, it would be absurd to suggest that marginalized heritage communities of a societal context contribute to the standards of averageness just as much as dominant heritage communities, such as the capitalists, celebrities, white colonizers, binary people, or cis-males of our own societal context. This would thus open up the possibility of considerably, *but not completely*, lopsided they-nesses, one

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42 Ibid., 208.

43 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 148-149.

44 Such questions can, of course, be formulated the other way around, and instead question whether *Being and Time* is compatible with Fanonian decolonial politics. I do not mean to implicitly take up the suggestion or argument that accordance with *Being and Time* is the bar which Fanonian philosophy must meet in order to be of validity and value, or vice versa. I simply frame such questions in this consistent way for the sake of clarity through consistency.

45 As Dostal notes in “The Public and the People: Heidegger’s Illiberal Politics,” the potential that Fanon identifies for publicness/they-ness to be maliciously dominated by a powerful select few was something that recognized by Hegel and Marx as well (535-536). This is also reminiscent of the concerns of philosophers such as Kant, Voltaire, Diderot, and Paine over the influence of secret societies such as the Freemasons on the politics of the Enlightenment (531).

that would demonstrate why marginalized communities, in having their historical thrownness disproportionately ostracized by they-ness, face much higher challenges in their pursuits of collective authenticity than non-marginalized communities whose historical thrownness, while, of course, not endorsed as the standard of averageness, is still given more basic recognition as being a *legitimate* culture, gender experience, sexuality, faith, etc., by the composite of they-ness that is faced.

The stronger argument, however, which seems to be more in line with the strong language and descriptions Fanon puts forth, would affirm that some Dasein and heritage communities can indeed become *completely* excluded from the constitution of they-ness, that marginalizations of complete lopsidednesses can indeed occur, and that they-ness *can* be attributed in its entirety to a specific group of Dasein.<sup>[46]</sup> With this in mind, are we forced to retreat to the weaker argument in order to keep Fanonian thought in line with the ontology of *Being and Time*?

### Particular Manifestations of They-ness as Distinct From Its Fundamental Ontology

I would argue, however, that there is not any contradiction between the strong Fanonian argument and the conception of they-ness presented in *Being and Time*. This becomes clear if one recognizes two things. First, that understandings on the constitution of they-ness can be directed to either how they-ness can manifest itself *as a concrete particular* in societal contexts, or on what they-ness is *in an ontologically fundamental and existentielle*<sup>[47]</sup> *sense*. Second, Fanon's colonial recognitions and

46 Of course, the considerations from our discussion on intersectionality will highlight that even if a specific group is dominating they-ness in a lopsided way, this they-ness would nevertheless still not encapture each of the intersectional composites of each individual member, and as such, such group members would still ultimately have to resist fallenness to this 'They' in order to be authentic. White people, for instance, in being *the* dominant colonizing group that Fanon is making reference to, each still have a fallenness to resist and authenticity to pursue since none of their historical thrownnesses are ones of pure and generic whiteness. Such lopsided domination and privilege, though, even if it doesn't completely eliminate the struggle for authenticity, nevertheless seems to quite obviously make it less of an issue in the sense that for a dominating group, at least part of their overall historical -thrownness, is never subverted by the 'They.'

47 Term used in *Being and Time* to signify an essential feature of Dasein. Existentials are simply what it means to be Dasein, and are just constant and unavoidable

articulations of they-ness refer to this *former* type understanding, while *Being and Time* is focused entirely on the *latter*.

The strong Fanonian argument can be completely right in recognizing how *particular societal manifestations of they-ness* can be lopsided to points of complete exclusion by dominating groups such as colonizers, and how the pursuit of collective authenticity becomes a much more harrowing task for communities and people whose historical thrownness has been completely denied of any basic influencing or recognition.<sup>[48]</sup> But it would be wrong to suggest from this that those dominating groups are themselves responsible for *they-ness itself in a fundamental sense*, and that if a redeeming and equalizing justice is served against such dominators, they-ness itself as an existentiale problem, as well as the recurring threat of falling into inauthenticity, would be dismantled for Dasein. Dominators never created the existentiale of they-ness and fallenness themselves. Rather, they simply carry out their domination through existentiale realities already in place. It is for this reason that even for Dominators who dominate to a brutal completeness, we always fail, as *Being and Time* affirms, to articulate they-ness itself by pointing at them.<sup>[49]</sup> Dasein's being-with-others in the world, which Dasein will never be able to detach from, is what inevitably solidifies they-ness itself as a fundamental existentiale, and it is our universal participation in that being-with-others, be it participation as complete dominators, as pure and non-influential victims to they-ness, or as somewhere in between, that makes the overall fundamental structure of the 'They' itself something "which all are."<sup>[50]</sup>

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features in our existence.

48 Egan, in "Das Man and Distanciality in *Being and Time*," notes that in a stratified society, *das Man* can manifest itself in many different ways within distinct sections and roles of the society (upper-class vs. working class, attendees at an academic lecture, vs. party attendees as a college party, etc.) (295). One could reasonably argue, however, that the magnitude of global reach that colonial domination has established is one which dominates all (or an overwhelming amount) of such sections and roles in global society.

49 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 164.

50 Ibid., 153-168.

To give some more clarity to this point, the 'They' can only be what it is in as much as it has victims which it can sedate into fallenness. To suggest that such victims are not essential in this way would be akin to suggesting that a totalitarian dictatorship would be possible on a deserted island. In as much as victims are essential to they-ness in this way, since everyone is a victim to the 'They', then regardless of whether they are excluded from influencing the actual averageness of they-ness, they are still

Revisions to the particular manifestation of they-ness at hand in a societal context may, of course, lead to a less lopsided ‘They’ that ceases to disproportionately oppress the marginalized. But a generic they-ness, be it a more just and ‘diversified’ one, will always still ultimately remain, and as such, ultimately retain the challenge for collective authenticity.<sup>[51]</sup> Political revolutions, no matter how magnificent they become, *will never become ontological revolutions* that change what Dasein is. With this, one could perhaps view us as modified versions of Sisyphus, ones who can perhaps lessen the load of our boulders, but who will still ultimately face an indefinite struggle of pushing them in order to possess our authenticity.

Through these undertaken distinctions, we can now see why the distinct articulations of they-ness found in Fanon and *Being and Time* are indeed compatible ones that both provide important understandings on different aspects of the constitution of they-ness. Fanon’s insights allow a recognition of an exclusionary lopsidedness in they-nesses manifested in social contexts. It is one that reveals how marginalized communities, in facing much more opposition and burden in pursuit of their authenticity, should be recognized as being in a considerably different position than non-marginalized ones and their own less strenuous pursuits of authenticity find themselves in. One can stand with Fanon in recognizing and fighting for these important points while also simultaneously recognizing that Dasein will always have to face they-ness itself as a permanent existiale that is rooted not in any lopsided domination, but in our own ontology.

### Can Dominators be Collectively Authentic?

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ultimately contributing constituents to the ‘They’ itself in its fundamental sense. In other words, being non-influential to something is not the same as not being associatively attached to it. Additionally, being-with-others as a universal existiale also means that regardless of the particular averageness being manifested by the ‘They’ a present societal context, all Daseins, at an ontological level, have the capacity to implant their historical -thrownness onto they-ness’ standards of averageness in a dominating way. It is in this second sense as well that the ‘They’ itself as a fundamental existiale is present in all of us, and as such, is something that we all are.

51 With these scare quotes, I don’t mean to suggest an emptiness or triviality to diversity. Rather, this is meant to emphasize that the genericness of a particular manifestation of they-ness, even if influenced by a diverse range of people, will itself never be a diverse one, as by the very nature of a they-ness, it will always fail to encompass the particular and unique historical throwntnesses of Daseins and their heritage communities.

With this feasibility of lopsided and dominated particular manifestations of they-ness in mind, however, one may ask whether the very dominating groups, whose elevations to the pedestal of mediocracy leads to the disproportionate oppression of marginalized heritage communities, can be collectively authentic in their activities of domination. One may perhaps have in mind contemporary groups that affirm their right to pursue ‘white pride.’ Similarly, one may consider the monstrous Nazi regime that Heidegger attached himself to, one which exclaimed to be letting ‘the pure Aryan Race’ be what they truly were as a people.<sup>[52]</sup>

As a first observation, such cases entail the affirmation that the activity itself of dominating the averageness of they-ness is a part of the alleged community’s authentic way of being. In the case of Nazism, this would be the affirmation that the collective authenticity of Aryans entails their establishment of themselves as a superior race that dominates the ‘They’ averageness of society, culture, and politics, and which completely exploits and liquidates all other heritage communities to the point of mass genocide. While proponents of ‘white pride’ may claim to be fundamentally different, as Monahan discusses in his consideration of the revivals of white-nationalism and ‘pride’ in the 2010s and 2020s, the concept of whiteness itself is bound up in supremacy. As he discussed, whiteness was a colonially generated concept that instilled European ethnicity and culture as the generic and vanilla standard of global averageness. It is for this reason why white is not considered a color by our present socio-racial context, and why non-whiteness is always considered an ‘exotic’ and ‘colored’ deviant from averageness. Thus, a ‘prideful’ promotion of such whiteness, because of what whiteness in itself stands for, always has an embedded appeal to maintain the hateful and biased colonial order that it is founded upon.<sup>[53]</sup> As such, such ‘pride’ is inevitably an activity of further instilling and maintaining a domination of averageness.<sup>[54]</sup>

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52 Young, *Heidegger, philosophy, Nazism*.

53 Michael J. Monahan, “Racism and “Self-Love”: The Case of White Nationalism.” In *Critical Philosophy of Race*, 9, no.1 (2021): 9-11, [muse.jhu.edu/article/777467](https://muse.jhu.edu/article/777467).

54 As Monahan discusses, this toxic element of white ‘pride’ is reminiscent of Rousseau’s conception of a problematic *amour propre*, in which one’s esteem and love for oneself is bound up in a drive to be better than, and thus, superior to, others around them in a kind of “one-upmanship” (4).

Such affirmations of authenticity by dominators demonstrate a deep obsession with either establishing or maintaining such domination of averageness, one that signifies an inability to conceive of or be comfortable with one's collective authenticity as functioning without such domination. They cannot bear the thought of ethnically/culturally European people living in a world in which not every actor on TV looks like like them, in which the works of Van Gogh and Chopin must stand side-by-side with non-Western works, or where beloved Western ideals of 'liberty' and 'freedom,' often in capitalistic senses, must become neighbors with the ideals of freedom found in other nations of the world. This ironically signifies an immense *fragility* and *weakness* in such supposedly 'authentic' dominators, as the only way they can supposedly be themselves is if lopsided standards of averageness hold up their insecure senses of historical thrownness like a crutch. It is through such obsessions and addictions with the pampering of averageness that 'authentic' dominators turn out to arguably be *the least authentic of them all*, in the sense that they exhibit an unwillingness to actively and independently hold up their historical thrownness in an active and authentic way against a 'They.'

Strong, healthy, and genuine senses of collective authenticity would entail no such obsessions or addictions. As such, collective authenticities such as those of Irish pride, Italian Heritage, Southern hospitality, or Germanness, which simply aim to authenticize their heritage communities, and hold no obsessions with dogmatically enforcing their historical thrownness as the generic standards that all must follow, can be beautiful and unproblematic authenticities.

### Fanonian Violence as Successful Deviation from 'Idle-Talk'

As a final note on the accomplishment of collective authenticity, I will discuss how Fanonian violence relates to *Being and Time's* conception of the *idle talk* that chains a Dasein to they-ness. Idle talk is one in which no actual discourse occurs, as such talk is that which has already been 'deposited' and established in the common and average intelligibility of the 'they'-ness. The notion of idle talk, however, should be understood as applying not merely to language but to human interaction and expression overall.

As Hirsch notes, it avoids ever offending by dictating a code of conduct that appeals strictly to universal values of averageness that have already been established.<sup>[55]</sup> Such talk closes off any change or development. It closes off the possibility of novelty, as novelty would provoke and go against the pre-established rules that guide such conversation.<sup>[56]</sup> A Dasein that idly talks participates in mere averageness, and consequently, idle talk is a state of inauthenticity.

Fanon recognizes the concept of idle talk in affirming that the liberation of colonized people from colonial they-ness necessarily requires them to defy and break the standards of acceptable interactions and politics that were established by their white colonizers. He recognizes that the evils of racism can never be overcome by appealing to and depending on the political and cultural logic of white colonial overlords. He observes that there are many claims in modernity that colonizers are interested in addressing racism and granting their colonial subjects liberty, but that such claims are fundamentally empty and deceptive.

Fanon highlights that in cases where colonial overlords ‘emancipate’ a colonial nation, there is seldom any actual change to the economic and political systems that colonized people live under. This is because such claims and interests are coming from a cultural and political logic that ultimately gave rise to, and which is committed to maintaining the capitalistic structures that maintain colonialism, exploitation, and racism. Colonial overlords are happy to grant a colonized people ‘emancipation,’ but always on the condition that the colonized elite that will take over abide by the implanted rules and systems of the colonizer and stay under the thumb of its political, economic, and cultural approval.<sup>[57]</sup> Such conditions continue benefiting the colonizer’s traditions by continuing the subjugation of the ‘emancipated’ people. Haddour highlights that such elites of the colonized are deplorably inauthentic members of the colonized community who, rather than developing their own authentic economies and politics, embark to get rich quick by inauthentically conforming

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55 Elisabeth F. Hirsch, “The Problem of Speech in *Being and Time*,” In *Heidegger’s Existential Analytic*, (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978) 356.

56 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 211-214.

57 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 21-25.

to and adopting the politics, capitalism, and cultural standards of their ‘previous’ colonial overlords.<sup>[58]</sup>

Fanon affirms that actually liberating oneself from the domination of the colonial world is never an agreeable and rational confrontation of viewpoints. In breaking away from the domination of the colonizer, colonized people cannot justify themselves through the logic and standards of the colonizer, as working through such logic and values would constrain one within the pre-set standards of politics and capitalism that the colonized world has set as the rules for global idle talk, within which nothing authentically distinct is genuinely expressed or brought about that could liberate the colonized.<sup>[59]</sup> Any genuine and authentic breaking away is a *provocation* that *rejects* the idle talk.<sup>[60]</sup> Because of this, authentic acts of liberation by colonized people will always be seen as a “enemy of values” through the politics and culture of their colonial overlords which will ascribe evil and ‘violence’ to such genuinely decolonial politics.<sup>[61]</sup>

Fanon’s observations supplement consideration of ‘idle-talk’ by showing why forms of rebellious provocation are an inevitability for achieving the actual change necessary for collective authenticity. Be it of a minority culture, a queer pride, or a religious faith, a collective historical thrownness will always be limited if it restricts itself to defining and justifying itself

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58 Azzedine Haddour, “*The Wretched of the Earth*: the anthem of decolonization?”, in *Frantz Fanon, Postcolonialism and the Ethics of Difference*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 161-165.

59 As Gordon affirmed in “Frantz Fanon, Fifty Years On: A Memorial Round-table,” when one attempts to respond to and refute a challenge to their humanness, a common mistake is to assume and take up the standards of humanness that the challenger has established, and to prove that one is able to meet them. Examples of this could include colonized people attempting to prove to their colonizers that they too are able of developing and running capitalism, colonized people proving that they can excel in the same kinds of sports, arts, and activities of the colonizer’s culture, or women proving to men that they can take up the kinds of roles and positions that men grant esteem, worth, and power to. Gordon highlights that a key element of Fanon’s philosophy and political thought is to avoid this kind of, as Gordon coins it, “epistemic colonization” (308-309).

60 As de Warren discusses in “The Apocalypse of Hope: Political Violence in the Writings of Sartre and Fanon,” Sartre viewed such authentic liberation as one which recognizes the status-quo conditions as the “impossibility of change,” one which is “the very object which has to be transcended if life is to continue”(49). He notes that in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre exemplifies this idea in the 1789 revolutionary storming of the Bastille (48-50).

61 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 5-6.

through the ‘proper’ logic of the acceptable averageness from which it aims to authentically pivot. It must instead *define itself independently of such restraining rules*. In doing so, as Fanon quotes, it will always come off as foreign, strange, provocative, strange, and/or unacceptable through the lenses of idle talk.<sup>[62]</sup>

As Ciccariello-Maher discusses, this act of a heritage group defining itself independently was held by Fanon as a creation of a new human being. Fanon believed that such creation, in its uprooting of a societal-order that once denied an oppressed people, and its provocation of the embedded resistance from those who seek to maintain their privilege under the status quo, would inevitably be a violent one.<sup>[63]</sup> This ‘violence’ that is spoken of, however, is widely encompassing, and often encompasses acts of resistance that, while often countered by authorities in the same brutal way that violence is responded to, might not be considered violence at all by those who are in unity or solidarity with the heritage group. Ciccariello-Maher notes that even acts of simply appearing in public, such as the black-youth led flash mob phenomena in Philadelphia, which provoked the curfew and public-gathering laws that authorities had set against their commitment to demonstrate against racial injustice, are already held and treated in themselves as violent, anarchic, uncivil, and unacceptable behaviors by authorities, and are brutally responded to as such.<sup>[64]</sup> With this, one can recognize many other examples, such as the ‘disgusting’ taboo that authentic queer public displays of affection may evoke amongst societies of heterosexual standards, or the unacceptable incivility of those who provokingly defy dress codes or standards, which would also ultimately acts of violently provoking the established idle talk of the ‘They’ status-quo. Heritage groups must have the courage and tenacity to face this state of being a provoker, one which the flourishing of their authenticity necessarily brings about.

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62 Fanon, “Racism and Culture”, 214.

63 Gordon, Lewis R., George Ciccariello-Maher, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “Frantz Fanon, Fifty Years On : A Memorial Roundtable,” In *Radical Philosophy Review*, 16, no.1 (2013): 315, <https://doi.org/10.5840/radphilrev201316125>.

64 Ciccariello-Maher, “Frantz Fanon, Fifty Years On : A Memorial Roundtable,” 316.

## Conclusion

Reflecting on Heidegger's *Being and Time* and the works of Fanon, this paper has demonstrated historical thrownness as the main focus of authenticity, and through this, the feasibility and necessity of pursuing authenticity collectively. In considering the constitution of they-ness, it has also recognized how certain communities can become much more marginalized than others, and due to this, face much more harrowing challenges in their striving for authenticity. Finally, in relating Fanon's thought to *Being and Time*'s idle talk, provocation was recognized as an inevitability of genuine achievements of collective authenticity. With this, one ought to recognize that freeing ourselves to pursue our own authentic callings is an activity that requires us to march hand in hand with our fellow heritage comrades. The full accomplishment of such, be it oftentimes a difficult and provocative one, is what will allow a historical thrownness to shine and project itself to its full authentic magnificence.

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# Untitled

KATE HELIN-BURNETTE

MERCEDES HESSELROTH

## Player One

Join me, here     where the water  
tastes like mud but still reflects the light.  
Wine won't raise the dead but  
it could revive my spirit.  
Each petal pulled equals a wasted life,  
or at least the alternate lives and  
selves I could be becoming  
if not for the curling sky.  
What a pretty dress  
but what of the girl who inhabits it?  
The visages of my ancestors reach  
up toward heaven, in thirst.  
What it must be to face the thing you want  
not yet in the form you want it -  
to understand the shift that separates  
resolve and relief.  
My mouth does not hang open in desire,  
does not confront that which it will consume.  
Rains threaten to shatter down;  
I spread the earth between my toes, beckoning.

MADELINE BRENCHLEY

# Endangered Gifts of Boredom

## Higher Education as Flight From Thinking

### Introduction

Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin, an unlikely pair, both make the argument that in the modern day, there is something wrong with society. People have become thoughtless, forgetful, and unable to speak eloquently about the value and meaning of their own existence. For both thinkers, this flaw involves a seemingly insignificant character: boredom. For Heidegger, the modern condition is characterized by productivity-oriented individuals—“calculative thinkers”—who flee from boredom, filling up their time with other, seemingly more important things. And yet, precisely this avoidance of boredom—this flight from thinking—ultimately leads the modern person to feel dissatisfied with their lives. For Benjamin, the vanishment of boredom is not as explicitly intentional. However, the negative effects felt in its absence are strikingly similar to Heidegger’s analysis: in the absence of boredom, individuals perpetually consume pre-evaluated and overly detailed “information,” which, like in the pursuits of the calculative thinker, ultimately leaves Benjamin’s modern individual feeling unim-

pressed with their lives and with the world around them; the modern person is forgetful in their lack of boredom.

Analyzing the negative effects that boredom's absence produces, as well as the creation-enabling effects that boredom may have, I use Heidegger and Benjamin's ruminations about the human condition to critique the state of higher education in the modern day, demonstrating that (1) some trends in higher education encourage methods of schooling that run contrary to "boredom," encouraging students to spend their days using "calculative thinking" to perpetually consume generic, "verifiable" and "understandable" information, (2) accepting their role as calculative thinkers, and subjected to an onslaught of "information," students are unable to listen to, interpret, and retain the things that others communicate to them, and (3) without having the time to listen to, interpret, and retain the communications of others through what could otherwise be meditative thinking rooted in boredom, students are also unable to interpret their own lives as unique, meaningful, and interconnected to a larger whole. Ultimately, I show that students must denounce the growing popularity of education trends that value efficiency and verifiable information insofar as those trends stifle their ability to derive meaning from the experiences of both themselves and others. Instead, students should be exposed to an education that values "storytelling"—course material itself should be open for interpretation rather than defined as unwaveringly accurate—and students should be enabled to become attuned to frequent boredom, thereby unlocking the power to fashion their human experiences into something both personally and universally meaningful.

### Heidegger: "Calculative Thinking" in its Escape from "Boredom" and "Nothingness"

In "What is Metaphysics?" Heidegger begins by problematizing "the sciences." The sciences, he explains, attempt to dismiss the relevance of metaphysical pursuits in claiming that the solution to the question of "Being" does not matter. They claim that "what should be examined are beings only, and besides that—nothing."<sup>1</sup> But, Heidegger claims, this premise is faulty.

1 Martin Heidegger, "What Is Metaphysics?" in *Basic Writings*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 95.

Science itself acknowledges that there is something besides matter and human beings in their own statement: “and besides that—*nothing*.”<sup>[2]</sup> And so, Heidegger asks, “What about this nothing?” To further elaborate on the question “what is metaphysics?” and to convince science of the importance of accepting metaphysics as a way of life, as a *questioning* of Being, Heidegger goes on to elaborate on both the question of nothingness and the question of metaphysics itself.

Heidegger explains that for anything to exist as a question, its answer must first be able to be conceptualized, in a broad way, by the questioner: “In order to find something must we not already know in general that it is there? Indeed!”<sup>[3]</sup> So in asking the question itself, we come face to face with the fact that “nothingness” is, indeed, something. He goes on to say that “the questioner as such is present together with the question.”<sup>[4]</sup> Each questioner, in other words, already fundamentally knows the answer to the question they ask; there is no way to separate the two. This premise, paired with the necessary *somethingness* of nothingness, helps us realize that the question of nothingness is necessarily present as a substantial and essential component of the questioner himself. While tied to the individual, “nothingness” is simultaneously an original and universal *something* that underlies all of existence. Since the question of “nothingness” exists for everyone as a fundamental and universally accessible *something*, Heidegger deduces that it is the original point in which every being can relate to and be subsumed in something more fundamental and universal than themselves. He explains that, in asking the question of nothingness, an individual being dissolves their individuality and, in doing so, becomes one with the “whole” of nothingness. In other words, “the nothing is the complete negation of the totality of beings,” whereby an individual loses their own sense of uniqueness.<sup>[5]</sup>

Now, this feeling of nothingness is not always present. Humans do, in fact, consistently feel uniquely individual, differentiated from others and from things. What, then, causes us to ask the question of nothingness? For Heidegger, in order

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2 Emphasis added.

3 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 98.

4 Ibid., 93.

5 Ibid., 93.

to ask the question that dissolves all differences and personal characteristics—to ask the question of nothingness—we must become “attuned in a fundamental mood.”<sup>[6]</sup> One example of these fundamental moods is Boredom. He explains that the feeling of nothingness “erupts when one is bored.”<sup>[7]</sup> When a person is attuned to the mood of boredom, they come face to face with that “nothingness” which “removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference.”<sup>[8]</sup> Heidegger’s explanation of boredom as a fundamental mood in “What is Metaphysics?” is brief. However, in an address that he gave titled “Messkirch’s Seventh Centennial,” he revisits the mood of boredom. Here, too, he describes the connection between boredom and nothingness: “Everything has as much or as little value as everything else, because a deep boredom penetrates our existence to the core.”<sup>[9]</sup> The mood of boredom brings us face-to-face with the question of nothingness—that feeling of total undifferentiatedness.

He goes on to explain that in the modern day, people have developed the urge to flee from boredom to escape from the uncomfortable feeling of nothingness that it provokes. In reaction to boredom, they fill up their time with incessant tasks or forms of entertainment. He writes, “He must kill long periods of time by whiling them away through pastimes. Whatever passes the time is supposed to get rid of the boredom, or at least let it be covered over and forgotten.”<sup>[10]</sup> Here he is referring to the sudden onset of new forms of entertainment which have suddenly appeared in Germany: television and radio. In another public address titled “Memorial Address,” given over a decade after the “Messkirch’s Seventh Centennial” address, Heidegger seems to pick up right where he left off. Though, in this address, his message is more urgent: to occupy oneself perpetually with mindless entertainment (which in the earlier lecture he called an attempt to cover up boredom) is not healthy. In this lecture, he refers to activities that conceal boredom as “thoughtless.”<sup>[11]</sup> These thoughtless individuals

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6 Ibid., 93.

7 Ibid., 99.

8 Ibid.

9 Heidegger, Martin. “Messkirch’s Seventh Centennial.” Trans. Thomas J Sheehan (n.d.), 51.

10 Heidegger, “Messkirch,” 49.

11 Heidegger, Martin. *Discourse on Thinking*, trans. John M. Anderson and E. Hans Freund. (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1966), 45.

submerge themselves in fantasy worlds: “Chained to radio and television,” they flee from any state of mind that compels them to genuinely contemplate their own lives as they exist in the present.<sup>[12]</sup> Heidegger goes on to broaden his criticism, explaining that it is not only these types of time-killers that are guilty of thoughtlessness; rather, “*man today*,” the average person in the modern day, is engaged in some sort of “flight from thinking.”<sup>[13]</sup> Incessantly, they, even the members of Heidegger’s audience, cover up boredom and the uncomfortable nothingness that accompanies non-distracted—non-sedated—thought.

As Heidegger is describing the “flight from thinking” running rampant in the modern day, he seems to anticipate the reaction from his audience—the reaction from those audience members who may be thinking “but hey now, I don’t kill my time with television! No, *I* spend my time working hard in pursuit of knowledge and goals!” Yes, these individuals too, he explains, are in flight from thinking. Their flight resides precisely in their perpetual attempt to fill their time with useful projects. Indeed, they do work, and yes, it is even true that they *think*. But the type of thinking they do is, in fact, a sort of flight. Their fleeing activities are what Heidegger calls “calculative thinking.”<sup>[14]</sup> Calculative thinking, he explains, always aims at incessant progress which results in “ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities.”<sup>[15]</sup> Instead, it values thought only so long as it efficiently and perpetually produces consolidated, true, and useful answers aimed at some future. The calculative thinker is in an ever-progressing movement forward. They do not remain still. They do not have the *time* nor the *reason* to be bored. Moreover, calculative thinking always asks itself about the utility and usefulness of the information it intakes—it does not value ambiguous or purposeless information. When a calculative thinker reconsiders the experiences they have and the things they observe, they “take them into account with the calculated intention of serving specific purposes. Thus, we can count on definite results.”<sup>[16]</sup> The calculative person is always

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12 Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 48.

13 Ibid., 45.

14 Ibid., 46.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid.

in pursuit of information that can provide them with concrete answers and solutions, rather than ambiguity or stagnation. Ambiguity, they feel, is counterproductive.

Here we are again reminded of Heidegger's earlier thoughts in the "Messkirch Seventh Centennial" where he similarly describes the modern person as concerned with incessant progress, disdaining stagnation: "Something very striking: the man of today does not have time for anything more, and yet, when he has free time, it immediately becomes too long."<sup>[17]</sup> Similarly, by perpetually filling up their time in a rush towards the future, the calculative thinker described in the "Memorial Address" banishes boredom; fleeing from thinking, they thereby flee from the question of nothingness. In this way, calculative thinking is not thoughtful about what truly matters, in Heidegger's opinion: it does not value taking the time to ask itself about the *meaning* of the present moment—it does not value boredom.

### Benjamin: The Extinction of "Boredom" and the Infestation of "Information"

Before explaining the various negative effects that can arise from calculative thinking, let us turn to another thinker who, like Heidegger, points to a growing scarcity of "boredom" in the modern day: Walter Benjamin. In "The Storyteller," Benjamin explains,

Boredom is the dreambird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away. His nesting places—the activities that are intimately associated with boredom—are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the countries as well.<sup>[18]</sup>

Here, Benjamin suggests that the ever-growing scarcity of boredom is the result of a "rustling in the leaves." Whatever this rustling is, it is not made explicit. However, it is contrary to stillness thereby driving away boredom. Without that boredom, the "egg of experience" cannot come to fruition. Later in

<sup>17</sup> Heidegger, "Messkirch," 49.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1985), 91.

the paragraph, in a seeming attempt to elaborate on the idea of “the egg of experience,” Benjamin seems to rephrase the “egg,” which is cradled in the nests of the boredom dreambird, as the “gift of storytelling” which is similarly “cradled” in a web.<sup>[19]</sup> The gift of storytelling, it seems, cannot come to exist without boredom. This moment in the text highlights the thesis of Benjamin’s essay: storytelling, as a mode of communication holding immense human value, is a dying art. Before explicating the concept of storytelling, let us trace out Benjamin’s analysis of a new communication method which has arisen in its stead. Taking the place of storytelling almost entirely and indicating the palpability of just how endangered boredom has become, “this new form of communication is information.”<sup>[20]</sup>

Benjamin explains that “information” is valued for its non-ambiguous character: “Information, however, lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime requirement is that it appear ‘understandable in itself.’”<sup>[21]</sup> In this way, information sounds precisely like that which Heidegger’s calculative thinking aims to engage and produce. To clarify his concept of “information,” Benjamin gives the example of global and local news, whereby the reader digests verifiable and clear information about the world around them. With the consumption of news, the reader is not required to think carefully or come up with their own understanding of current events. Instead, they are spoon-fed information that is clearly explained and pre-evaluated by some seemingly omnipotent and unwavering reporter. This news story which is “shot through with explanation” is a key example of information—it is entirely unambiguous.<sup>[22]</sup>

One other characteristic of “information” is that it enables productivity—it serves capitalist motives. One form of this type of information exchange is the “press,” which is one of the middle class’s “most important instruments in fully developed capitalism.”<sup>[23]</sup> By digesting information produced by the press, the middle-class individual does not have to waste time contemplating the meaning or validity of their experiences because the information they consume about the world around them is already verifiable, easily accessible, and unambiguous.

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19 Ibid., 91.

20 Ibid., 88.

21 Ibid., 89.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 88.

Instead, they can work long hours and focus their energy on “progress.” With information, one is never bored. One is never bored, rather, because with information there is no need to be. Here we are reminded of Heidegger’s calculative thinking which flees from boredom, citing understandability, efficiency, and progress as its aim.

Now that we have explained the concepts in detail, let us be clear: Heidegger’s “calculative thinking” and Benjamin’s “information” both rise to prominence as boredom recedes. The similarities between Heidegger’s analysis of “flight from thinking” and Benjamin’s analysis of “information” are twofold: (1) the listener flees from occupying a state of boredom and (2) the information consumed is initially presented as unambiguous. In these two ways, and keeping in mind that Benjamin points to capitalism as an underlying motivator propelling the popularity of information, I argue that higher education in the 21st Century is trending towards the tendencies that Heidegger and Benjamin have expressed concerns about.

### American Higher Education: A Flight from “Boredom” Into “Information” and “Calculative Thinking”

Both Heidegger and Benjamin’s analysis of information and calculative thinking, I argue, are relevant concerning many methods and fields within higher education today. These trends imply a fundamental problem: both higher education trends and the students that engage in those trends are in flight from boredom. In 2004, Utah Valley University established a Student Success & Completion Committee that rallies forth messages encouraging students to participate in 15 credit course loads, deeming such a path quick and “successful.” When a student visits the webpage for this initiative, they find a message explaining: “15 is the number of credits students need to graduate on time. Most students don’t realize this. We’re changing that!”<sup>[24]</sup> Here, the “15 to finish” initiative defines a successful educational path as that which is completed “on time.” On the other hand, any path which does not finish “on time”—any path which takes *too long*—comes with a variety of disadvantages. In his “Messkirch’s Seventh

24 “15 To Finish.” Utah Valley University. Utah Valley University. Accessed May 6, 2021.

Centennial” address, Heidegger states that “A long time means boredom.”<sup>[25]</sup> Following Heidegger’s insight, we can see that in discouraging an educational path that takes *too long*, the Student Success & Completion Committee, in reality, discourages *boredom* itself.

The webpage goes on to make its case against a course load structure that does not achieve an “on time” graduation: “Extra years of college can cost you thousands, both in what you pay and what you lose from not having a job. So, taking 15 credits a semester (or 30 a year) saves you money and lets you make more. Cha-ching!”<sup>[26]</sup> Put more concisely, saving time will save you money, and therefore “15 is a cash machine.” It is clear that UVU, at least, conceives of education as a means to a pressing end—employment and money. The webpage further implies that education—the process itself—should not be the core concern for the students. Rather, *finishing* college is the highest priority: “Taking 15 credits a semester (or 30 a year) dramatically increases your chances of reaching graduation. And hey, isn’t that sort of what this is all about?”<sup>[27]</sup> The value of education, as the achievement of a degree, is placed in a far-off future that one must rush towards.

Now, the Student Success & Completion Committee surely does value education for the thinking and learning that it allows students to engage in, right? This is true only insofar as learning is equivalent to Grade Point Averages, or GPAs. The webpage states, “Students who take 15 credits a semester (or 30 a year) tend to get higher GPAs. So, when it comes to getting better grades, taking 15 is a no-brainer.”<sup>[28]</sup> Students here are encouraged to consume course material, to “think,” only insofar as that thinking leads to a good grade and, ultimately, a good degree. Or, as Heidegger would put it, they are encouraged to think only insofar as that thinking aims at a “specific purpose” with “definite results.”<sup>[29]</sup> It is clear that, for Heidegger, this rushed and results-oriented method of education—an education lacking boredom—would fall into the realm of “calculative thinking.”

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25 Heidegger, “Messkirch,” 51.

26 “15 To Finish.”

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 46.

If the students engaged in “15 to finish” course loads achieve higher GPAs, we must now ask ourselves: if calculative thinking allows for the achievement of a high GPA—supposedly indicating an *understanding* of said material—what type of course material is this calculative thinking engaged with? Benjamin explains that “information,” which has arisen in step with the decline of boredom, is characterized by its “prompt verifiability” and that it always appears as “understandable in itself.”<sup>[30]</sup> Even more so than Benjamin’s “press,” the ‘text-book’ appears as the pinnacle of “information.” Particularly in STEM fields, course material is unambiguous, verifiable and “shot through with explanation.” There are right and wrong answers and the student’s textbook portrays the concepts as such. But even outside of the realm of STEM, “information” has infiltrated higher education. We know this not by analyzing the course material itself, but by instead pointing to the well-known trend whereby course material is regurgitated: test-taking. To some degree, any course material that is consumed with the aim of regurgitation—any information that is condensed in order to be memorized and withstand testing—falls into the trap of “prompt verifiability” that Benjamin outlines as one of “information’s” primary qualities.<sup>[31]</sup> Insofar as most higher education courses test their students and grade those students’ answers as either correct or incorrect without leaving room for individual student interpretation, they are, indeed, proponents of “information.” As such, they run contrary to the type of ambiguous communication that arises in connection with boredom.

We should be clear: calculative thinking, in its pursuit of degrees, jobs, definite pursuits, and verifiable information, is not, in itself, a bad thing. Heidegger states that calculative thinking “has its own usefulness.”<sup>[32]</sup> In the realm of higher education, its purpose is to provide college students with real-world credibility to compensate for their hard work in college. After all, efficiently producing a marketable degree and a high GPA, a college path prioritizing efficiency is a “cash machine,” as UVU puts it. However, there is an enormous risk in valuing higher education as a means for calculative thinking. When a student subscribes to the idea that college is a means to an end—when

30 Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 89.

31 Ibid., 89.

32 Heidegger, “Memorial Address,” 46.

they choose the most efficient education path that simultaneously escapes ambiguous course material—they give up *boredom*.

But what's the big deal? Why shouldn't students prioritize information and calculative thinking—career stability, GPA, and efficiently achieved degrees—instead of boredom and ambiguity? For both Benjamin and Heidegger, when an individual escapes boredom by consuming information with calculative thinking, there are negative effects. Benjamin explains that information that comes pre-packaged with explanations and verifiability deprives itself of lasting significance. Since the individual does not have the opportunity to interpret information for themselves, they are unable to retain the meaning of that information long term: "The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment."<sup>[33]</sup> A lack of ability to retain the meaning of the past is a common experience for the individual who, perpetually consuming new information, is never bored. For this individual, Benjamin writes, nothing is "noteworthy."<sup>[34]</sup> Heidegger, too, cites the modern condition, in which individuals have developed an increasing propensity to flee from boredom, as resulting in forgetfulness: "For nowadays we take in everything in the quickest and cheapest way, only to forget it just as quickly, instantly."<sup>[35]</sup> With calculative thinking, the individual does not actually retain the information they consume. Ultimately, without boredom, nothing can be internalized, and thereby everything is forgotten.

### The Gift that Boredom Gives: "Meditative Thought" and "Storytelling" as Interpretive Powers

So it is clear: to avoid apathetically forgetting the meaning of the things they learn, students must not deny the importance of boredom and ambiguity. But what can boredom and ambiguity provide students with? What would it entail for them to truly think and truly listen in a way that allows for lasting retention and meaning?

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33 Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 90.

34 Ibid., 89.

35 Heidegger, "Memorial Address," 45.

Here we return to Heidegger's concept of the question of "nothingness" that we find in our attunement to boredom. Heidegger explains that as we come face-to-face with our nothingness through attunement to boredom, we can engage in meditative thinking. In his "Letter on Humanism," Heidegger explains that through meditative thinking, the boredom-attuned thinker does not run from the question of nothingness. They do not occupy their mind with short-lived and contextually relevant calculations, nor do they simply absorb facts and externally given theories about the world, or "information," as Benjamin might say. Rather, meditative thinking is a "belonging to being."<sup>[36]</sup> It is, in other words, an affirmation and an engagement with the question of nothingness that belongs to being. Out of their attunement to boredom, the meditative thinker confronts the question of nothingness and, instead of running from it, their meditative thought attempts to interpret the undifferentiatedness that it belongs to. In allowing for this process, one that takes time and stillness, the thought of the individual who has relinquished their individuality "listens to being." Rather than turning to information or calculative thinking for answers, meditative thinking searches for answers by *listening* to the fundamental truth of Being of nothingness itself; it listens to and meditates about the Being which underlies the whole of existence. By affirming the nothingness that it inhabits through listening, meditative thought learns. *Listening* to Being allows thought to realize "what it is according to its essential origin."<sup>[37]</sup> In other words, in listening to Being, meditative thought realizes that it, too, shares in the essential origin of Being. As such, and through engaging in the nothingness of that Being, it preserves its own essential truth, meaning, and significance. In short, through meditative thinking and through confronting the nothingness that boredom reveals, thought itself grasps its own foundational importance and truth.

Meditative thinking—listening, and belonging to Being— not simply a passive grasping of truth. Rather, by allowing themselves through attunement to boredom to come face-to-face with nothingness through meditative thought, they learn from

36 Capuzzi, Frank A., and Martin Heidegger. "Letter on 'Humanism' (1946)." Chapter. In *Pathmarks*, ed. and trans. William McNeil, 239–76. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.) doi:10.1017/CBO9780511812637.012), 241.

37 Ibid., 241.

Being that their own type of Being—belonging to Dasein—is that which “transcends.”<sup>[38]</sup> In “What is Metaphysics?” Heidegger writes, “Only in the nothing of Dasein do beings as a whole, in accord with their most proper possibility—that is, in a finite way—come to themselves.”<sup>[39]</sup> In other words, as a result of becoming subsumed in nothingness and realizing their own fundamental relationship with Being, the meditative thinker unlocks the ability to reemerge from that nothingness with a rejuvenated differentiation—to re-emerge as an individual being with selfhood and freedom. Heidegger writes, “without the original revelation of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom.”<sup>[40]</sup> Put in these terms, boredom, as a type of attunement that allows for nothingness to be revealed and thereby allows for human freedom, is humanity’s greatest gift: through affirming the importance of boredom through meditative thought, individuals are enabled to emerge from nothingness into their own selfhood again. In doing so, they emerge with a newfound understanding that their own Being is, in a way, the gift of selfhood-unfolding. While they reestablish their own individuality from this realization, they simultaneously realize that the gift of their selfhood is fundamentally *rooted in* nothingness—they are rooted in belonging to the undifferentiated whole of existence. Moreover, their selfhood is a gift that is only *unlocked through* meditative thought; it is a gift that cannot be grasped without confronting nothingness through attunement to boredom.

Benjamin, too, sees the value of boredom as a way to unlock a certain power. For him, this power is “storytelling” which, as we will see, has striking similarities to the unfolding of selfhood that Heidegger believes we may unlock through meditative thought grounded in boredom. For Benjamin, as for Heidegger, boredom is a necessary component for enabling storytelling. He writes that without boredom, “the gift for listening is lost.”<sup>[41]</sup> Thereby we may deduce that *with* boredom, the gift for listening is unlocked. Listening, he goes on to explain, is an essential component of storytelling.

However, there is one caveat. The listener cannot listen to any

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38 Heidegger, “What is Metaphysics?” 103.

39 Ibid., 108.

40 Ibid., 103.

41 Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 91.

old piece of information. In fact, “information,” as was demonstrated earlier in the paper, is fundamentally immemorable. We recall that Benjamin characterized information as that which in no way stands out as “noteworthy.” Aside from boredom, “information” lacks one key characteristic that would make it memorable: ambiguity. On the other hand, Benjamin explains that when a bored person listens to a *story*, they are listening to a description of human experience that lacks some level of detail. He gives the example of an account that Herodotus tells of Psammenitus, an Egyptian king. The story he details does indeed provide some level of plot, characters, and conclusion. However, the overarching *meaning* of the story is not provided. Rather, Herodotus “offers no explanation. His report is the driest.”<sup>[42]</sup> This sense of ambiguity is what characterizes a story as such. Unlike with information, when a listener hears a story, “It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.”<sup>[43]</sup> Precisely this ambiguity, allowing for the listener’s interpretive power of boredom to engage itself, is what allows for a story to be meaningful and memorable for them. In short, the memorability and meaning of a story are unlocked by the listener through simultaneously (1) occupying a state of boredom, wherein one can listen and (2) using that gift of listening to interpret ambiguous stories rather than information.

Through listening and through boredom, the storyteller absorbs the experiences that are shared with them. The combination of these processes of being bored, listening to ambiguous stories, interpreting those stories, and thereby remembering those stories is precisely the pattern that allows an individual to grow into a storyteller themselves. Benjamin explains that “storytelling is always the art of repeating stories.”<sup>[44]</sup> But, these stories are not simply regurgitated. Rather, in boredom, the storyteller listens to the experiences of others as well *their own* experiences. Therefore, when they tell a story they have heard, the storyteller interprets both their own life and the experiences of others into the story as they tell it. As Benjamin writes:

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42 Ibid., 90.

43 Ibid., 89.

44 Ibid., 91.

In fact, one can go on and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid useful and unique way.<sup>[45]</sup>

As a result of listening and learning through boredom, like Heidegger's meditative thinker engaged with the nothingness of Being, Benjamin's storyteller defines their life as something unique while simultaneously preserving the essential interconnectedness of all human experience. Interpreting both the ambiguous experiences of others and their own ambiguous experiences, the storyteller unlocks the power to find a simultaneously unique and universal meaning in all things.

Precisely this interpretative, creative power that boredom unlocks is that which is being undermined by the flight of higher education into calculative thinking and information. Without boredom, students do not retain the "information" they consume, nor do they attach any personal significance to it. They must feel that nothing is meaningful in their education because their education is simply a means to an end. If they do regurgitate information, it is certainly not in the form of storytelling. Rather, they perpetuate the spread of information—instead of crafting a unique meaning out of their experiences.

## Conclusion

The current trend of higher education which values calculative thinking—conceiving of college as a rush to the finish and a means for consuming "information"—is a sign that boredom is, indeed, endangered in the lives of college students. Moreover, the rapid spread of information and the devaluation of communicating experiences leaves students without the opportunity to interpret and retain the things they are exposed to. Without stories to listen to and interpret, and without the boredom required to do so, students have not unlocked the ability to craft meaning out of their lives. To enable students to access the power of storytelling—to access the ability to interpret their lives as unique, meaningful, and contextualized

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45 Ibid., 108.

within a larger whole—higher education must encourage students to become attuned to boredom.

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# Pathogen

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# The Sentinal and the Nomad

The sand spills from my hands and rejoins the collective awaiting below. In a vain attempt to gain some understanding, I permit it to cascade from this crude, calloused cup to the heap beneath to allow for my mind to grasp something that is familiar to me. Something like the passage of time. Whether it passes too quickly or creeps sluggishly through the deep and sprawling crevices that etch my fate into my palm I cannot tell. I have lost my bearing. I struggle to recall if I ever had one to begin with. Was I always adrift or was I once tethered to something? If I was, how did I lose what should have been so important? If I continue to be without it, was it that important to begin with? Was there ever something I was striving for? Pain pangs through my brain. It is not worth the effort anymore.

My eyes close, sick of the sight of sand sifting silently into itself. I lay back, letting gravity take hold of me. I feel warmth slowly envelop me as each notch in my spine is planted firmly in the ground. Each pulse of electrons coursing outwards, connecting me to what lies below. I am swaddled by the earth and sit in rest for a moment, losing my thoughts to the assault of sensations as I can feel every grain of scorching sand searing my skin. I choose to stay for a while. As I lay it seems as if my body is melting into the ground— or it into me. Perhaps there

is no real difference. As our temperatures cross and become one, I forget where the ground ends and I begin. I no longer feel as if there is any meaningful distinction between myself and the world around me. My sense of self is slipping. I must recollect my thoughts, find a bearing with which to tether myself to reality else I will stay, adrift, a grain caught up in these aimless currents of wind within this sea of sand.

My muscles scream as they pull me out from my resting place, forcing me back out into the world. Heat crashes into me and reverberates; a new sensation to remove my suffering from the forefront of my mind. Looking to extend this fleeting nuance, I examine my surroundings. Where my palm was once a moistureless mass of flaked skin, sweat now coats the surface. My clothes have been lined with grains that, caked onto my clammy skin, appear relentless in their pursuit of our fusion. With one succinct swipe I quell this uprising and watch, satisfied, as the particles descend, searching for solace with their brethren below.

An ant tramples through my line of sight, overtop of the recently reunited, and scurries out of view again. My head turns to keep this fellow in focus, and it comes into view once again as it heads towards a dip in the tumultuous landscape. It journeys below, spelunking into this unknown land. Unfortunately, it appears to be inexperienced, its youth having barred it from that treasured wisdom that one achieves throughout a lifetime, and almost immediately loses its balance, tumbling downwards to the depths of the pit. It scrambles to regain its footing; eventually it pays off and the struggler is able to find its balance once more. Turning to exit the pocket in the sand, the bottom opens, and pincers emerge, taking the ant down into nihility. A loud noise escapes my mouth as I burst into laughter. The ant, struggling to survive, found itself in the midst of its nadir, at the bottom of a nest, and, unable to escape its fate, lost its life. My mouth dries as I struggle to maintain the laughter.

Fortunately, my new acquaintance does not stay unavenged for long. As my eyes remain fixed upon the scene, a wren, having presumably been a fellow spectator to this gruesome display, quietly plucks the murderous fool from its den, and playfully

picking at its exterior, carries it into the great void above. I wonder if for a moment the creature came to love its fate as it left behind everything it knew soaring into the cool, beautiful air, free from the constraints of its den, recognizing for the first and final time the splendour that it had robbed itself of before perishing at the hands of Lady Fortune. Perhaps for one final moment, it felt satisfaction. Whether or not it deserved it is beside the point.

Seeking to remove this all too cruel display before me, my eyes are directed past the wren. As the light of the sun fills my eyes, I find myself unable to perceive what it is that they are trying to direct me to. How unfortunate it is that the greatest source of life and light so easily casts those who look upon it into darkness. In one final act of defiance, I pry my eyes open to witness what it is that is guarded by such a powerful sentinel. My eyes open and for the first time, I see the sky. The expanse of the world around me makes me retract, how can something so freeing be found so tantalizingly close to this weak land that gives way to the merest pressure from my feet. The sheer magnitude and strength of this freedom before me seems to have the opposite effect, it is pressing itself into me, and I cannot help but give way, crushed by the weight of the sky.

I peel my gaze from the blazing sun, searching for something to lock onto besides the sheer potentiality of the world. The wren suits this purpose nicely. I watch it glide weightlessly, dancing upon each gale of wind that passes by, writing poetry in a language that only it can comprehend. As it soars towards the horizon, it leaves my sight behind, freed from the final constriction placed upon it, lost to the boundless.

I am left looking ahead at the desert before me. As it rests, it reflects a slight hue of orange, mirroring the sun, harmonizing both worlds in a beautiful expression of unity. A gentle breeze brushes the barren badlands like wheatgrass, layering the shimmering gold sand over itself, rippling with a hostile tranquillity. The ebb and flow of each dune presents an endless mountainous landscape. Occasional divots provide a faint hint of life within the desolation. Prints of a lizard that may have scurried from a predator while every shift caused by the struggle led to the collective collapse of the heath. Suddenly

squalls pick up the loose sediment, skipping about from dune to dune, following the will of the wind, until it is gently settled where it will patiently await its next journey. Something else catches my eye. It is too far off to make out completely, however it looks to be a patch of lush green flora. Almost too small even to grab me as a memory, it threatens to flit through my mind as quickly as it had come: a statue of Daedalus. I focus my eyes to ensure that my senses are holding true to their master. The sight, although muddled by a layer of scorching haze, remains. With flora comes water and with water, hope.

In a moment, I have found something to tether to, something to strive for. I resolve to follow this hope until I have attained it or died trying. For how could I be satisfied with my fate if I simply lay here knowing the truth that is just barely within my reach? Ripping my feet from their tombs in the sand, my body rages in rebellion. Pushing the ache of my creaking muscles to the recesses of my mind, collecting myself for the journey ahead, I begin to march stoutly on.

The sun refuses to relent its scorching tyranny. Its rays penetrate deep into me, exhausting me further with every step. I know that there is nothing personal in this constant onslaught. I am not worth so much as a moment of focus from the power of the celestial sphere above and perhaps I am better for it. However, I cannot help but think that there is nothing tender about this indifference. It is still cruel and sharp and unrelenting. What did Meursault see as he was looking out at a universe that did not care for him? What comfort could one find in that? And why am I unable to find it? Why am I left struggling in the cold indifferent heat? Wouldn't it have been better if there was something to look to? Something to blame? No. I am left with the sun who does not care and yet here I walk, unable to push it out of my mind; cursed with the knowledge that I will leave no impression upon it while I will be left burnt and blistered. The sun beats on.

As I fumble up and down the dunes towards the hope before me, I think of the open ocean. The brave confrontation of dangerous waters, waves crashing violently against the bow of a boat never sturdy enough to feel at ease. The sea provides a sense of purpose and adventure. An adversary for the hero of

the voyage. There is a battle waged and won at every successful journey on the waves. I suppose there is something comforting in the knowledge that the ocean, given the chance, would sweep me away into the cold, salty abyss, unaffected by any attempt to thrash and fight in the face of its great power. The desert crumbles at every feeble, faltering step I take toward the greenery. Every action, no matter how weak and pathetic, results in a change that alters the landscape. The desert gives way to its traveller; a red sea collapsing under its own crushing weight. Perhaps it might overtake me. Perhaps I may soon become one with but another layer of this golden field on which I walk, with nothing to blame but myself. The sun beats on.

The greenery begins to take shape. I can make out what looks to be palm trees casting a wonderful shade down upon the flora. There are ferns and beautiful flowers that waft a magnificent, sweet scent, effortlessly making its way to my nose on the dry desert wind. Birds chirp and the faint rustling of leaves can be heard from what must be a rich ecosystem living in this succulent secret oasis in the middle of an arid wasteland. Shimmering within the middle of the greenery, shielded by the abundance of life, lies a small pond, reflecting the bright blues of the sky above like a sheet of polished glass. My pace quickens now that the oasis has begun to share with me its true contents in detail. With every stride, I am emboldened, rewarded with an even greater view of what lies before me. Thoughts of all else are cleansed from my mind as my body instinctively races to that which will finally give me comfort; a broken compass finding itself pointing true north once more. Tears form in my eyes and begin to boil under the sweltering heat of the sun above, attempting one final effort to halt me in my journey, nearing its fateful conclusion. They streak down my cheek, dropping to the body of sand below and coagulating with the desert. These tears are all that I will allow the desert to take from me.

As I reach the greenery that I had once seen as a fleeting memory, I am awestruck. The birds that were chirping now take perfect form in front of me. They encompass every colour one may have seen in their lifetime and even some that one could not imagine existing. The slight wind of the desert

pushes and pulls the palms as they creak in resistance, terrified to be blown away from this paradise. Lizards climb nimbly upon the bark of the trees, explorers of an unknown world scaling higher and higher to take in the view of a long-lost utopia. Sweetgrass and moss speckle the ground, providing soft relief for the gentle tiptoeing of the rodents scavenging for various nuts and berries that can be found upon lush bushes throughout the oasis. As man taking his first step back into Eden after being forced to wander such a treacherous landscape for so long, returning to the transcendent warmth of the arms of God, I step into the oasis. Showered with a mist of droplets from the canopy, shielded by the wide swath of palm leaves, I take a breath of fresh clean air. Eager to quench my thirst and return to the splendour once I have been satisfied, I sprint towards the luscious watering hole, the fountain of youth and harbinger of hope. Unable to keep my balance, I collapse into the soft, mossy ground, plunge my hands into the dull pond before me and raise them to catch the cascading droplets in my mouth.

The sand spills from my hands and rejoins the collective awaiting below.



