# Idealism and Existentialism, by J. Stewart

a. <u>People / Organizations</u>:
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b. <u>Quotes</u>:
  - "Hegel was a naïve Enlightenment thinker, who stubbornly insisted on the power of reason" - Author (pg. 2)
  - "**Every individual truth or value must be understood in a larger context. Only with this overview of the complex network of interrelations of truth claims, individuals, institutions and historical events is it possible to understand the true nature of such claims and to give a complete account of objectivity**" - Author (pg. 69)
  - "**Any theory of ethics must have both a theoretical and a practical aspect.** On the one hand, it must lend itself to being applied in practice, and any theory that tails to do so can be rightly criticized as too abstract. On the other hand, however, any given ethical action must also be informed by some ostensible ethical principle. <u>There is thus a dialectic of theory and practice in all ethical thought.</u> To be sure, theory must be informed by practice and the real world, but practice must also be informed by theory. Kierkegaard's considerations do not do much to resolve this dialectic if his rejection of Hegel's ethical theory amounts to simply a rejection of all theory as such" - Author (pg. 92-93)
    - *cf. J. Habermas, Theory and Practice*
    - *cf. B. Harcourt, Critique and Praxis*
    - *cf. N. Lobkowicz, Theory and Practice*
  - "<u>**The problem with the modern world is the potential for a dangerous relativism, where everyone has their own private truth and there is no consensus about right and wrong.**</u> This leads to a sense of alienation from the other and from the social sphere as a whole" - Author (pg. 123)
  - "comedy is a medium that subjects all human institutions to criticism" - Author (pg. 150)
c. <u>General Notes</u>:
  - Introduction (pg. 1)
    - "**The history of Continental philosophy is often conceived as being represented by two major schools: German idealism and phenomenology/existentialism**. These are frequently juxtaposed in such a way as to highlight their purported radical differences. The idea is that there was an abrupt break in the nineteenth century that resulted in a disdainful rejection of idealism in all its forms. The result was the introduction of a new kind of philosophy that was closer to <u>the lived experience of the individual human being</u>" (pg. 1)
      - "At times the key break is located in the transition from Hegel, purportedly the last idealist, to Kierkegaard, purportedly the first existentialist. According to this interpretation, the history of philosophy in the first half of the nineteenth century has been read as a grand confrontation between the ambitious but sadly naive rationalistic system of Hegel and the devastating criticisms of it by Kierkegaard's philosophy, with its emphasis on actuality and existence. While **Kierkegaard champions the individual and human freedom, Hegel, by contrast, emphasizes the universal and rational necessity**. While <u>Kierkegaard insists on the absolute irreducibility of the individual, Hegel presents his view in the form of a grotesque, impersonal, abstract monstrosity called "the system," which mercilessly destroys everything in its path, including the individual</u>" (pg. 1)
        - "This is a nice dramatic story to tell undergraduate students and to rehearse in introductory textbooks but in the end, instead of providing a useful framework for further studies, it gives rise to a series of misunderstandings and outright myths about the Hegel-Kierkegaard relation, and thus about the development of philosophy in general. The history of European philosophy is only rarely characterized by seismic shocks, tectonic shifts, and eruptions of a simple either/or nature. Even as thinkers criticize their predecessors, they invariably, perhaps unwittingly, adopt something positive from them. This might involve a common understanding of a specific philosophical problem, or a common methodology on how to confront it; but in any case even the most radical critic inherits something of the philosophical spirit of the times, and shares a wealth of background information and presuppositions with others thinkers from the same period" (pg. 1-2)
    - "**The goal of the present work is to challenge this caricatured view of the radical break between idealism and existentialism** by means of a series of specialized studies of specific episodes of European thought" (pg. 2)
    - "in the *Phenomenology of Spirit...*<u>Hegel is surprisingly critical of what he takes to be the Enlightenment's deep misunderstanding of religion</u>. Further, **he uses the metaphor of Enlightenment reason as an illness that takes over the human spirit** at a specific point in history. This same metaphor is then traced in several subsequent thinkers who are generally associated with <u>the irrationalist tradition, i.e. Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camus and Sartre</u>" (pg. 2)
      - "one can see that <u>Hegel, far from being the naive proponent of Enlightenment reason, in fact foreshadows the existentialist tradition's suspicion of rationality</u>" (pg. 3)
      - "An overview is given of the different ways in which the *Phenomenology* in particular has often been regarded as an unsystematic text. The main argument given for this view is that, during its composition, Hegel changed his mind about the nature of the book and the philosophical work it was intended to do. As a result, different strands pointing in different directions remain in the final product" (pg. 3)
    - "It is well known that **Schopenhauer engaged in a ruthless polemic against Hegel** and other followers of Kant, claiming that he alone was the true heir of Kant's transcendental idealism" (pg. 4)
      - "**Both thinkers are critical of the view of religion as something transcendent or pointing to another world or an unknown beyond.** Instead, in their respective analyses, both Hegel and Schopenhauer attempt to demonstrate the truth of religion in terms of its significance for the lives and values of the concrete religious believer" (pg. 4)
        - "Once again, despite their use of different philosophical language and their different interpretations of the individual myths, and despite their different preferences for specific religions (Hegel preferring Protestant Christianity and Schopenhauer preferring Buddhism and Eastern religion), <u>the two thinkers nonetheless share a fundamental view according to which the truth of religion lies in its philosophical meaning</u>, which is not generally accessible to the common religious believer" (pg. 4-5)
    - "As a positive doctrine intended to overcome the problem of abstraction, Kierkegaard presents a handful of concepts, including appropriation" (pg. 5)
      - "It is argued that he ultimately fails to offer a philosophically satisfying solution with the doctrine of appropriation, although it may well be adequate at a personal level for the individual Christian, who is Kierkegaard's intended reader. <u>In the end Kierkegaard's account of appropriation looks rather similar to standard concepts in the ethics of Kant and Hegel</u>" (pg. 5)
    - "the existentialist thinkers and those often considered to be their precursors all have at least the outlines of a theory of ethics in the form of a theory of authenticity and responsibility. Seen negatively, **the existentialists are in agreement that there is some positive ethical value to be found in seeing through purported religious truths or philosophical systems, and exposing them as false**. Having disposed of traditional values and modern philosophies in this way, <u>the existentialists then seek some positive ethical value in the authentic and free choice that one is faced with in a meaningless world</u>. Thus, **resolute and authentic choice becomes the model for existentialist ethics**. Different versions of this are sketched in the

thought of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Camus, Sartre, and de Beauvoir. It is argued that the tradition of existentialist ethics derives key features from Kant's theory of the will and ethical action. Finally, it is claimed that this existentialist tradition of ethics can be compared with the ancient tradition of virtue ethics in the sense that the existentialists have a conception of virtue with the model of free choice and authenticity. Similarly, they have a conception of vice with the different theories of how human beings attempt to escape their freedom and sink into inauthenticity. Thus, **the existentialists do in fact have a theory of ethics, and indeed it is one that has significant points in common with both Kant and ancient virtue ethics**" (pg. 6-7)

- "it is well know that the concept of existential freedom is absolutely central to Sartre's philosophical project" (pg. 7)
- "According to Merleau-Ponty, Sartre's theory of a completely self-transparent consciousness is a conceptual impossibility, since it is the very nature of perception to be incomplete and thus ambiguous. **There are always hidden sides of things that we do not immediately see; this holds true not just of objects in the world, but also of our own consciousness.** Moreover, Sartre's theory of a transparent consciousness has the undesirable result of implicitly positing a fixed ontological subject, which runs counter to his explicitly stated anti-essentialism. Finally, it is argued that Merleau-Ponty's critique is in large part justified, and his theory of human consciousness ultimately represents a more satisfactory explanation of the phenomena in question" (pg. 8)
  - *'stuff' may be hidden; but, the ultimate question here is 'where' is such stuff placed to-be "out-of-sight"?*
- "While each of the chapters in this volume has its own specific thesis, collectively they address in one way or another the complex relation between the traditions of German idealism and existentialism. What these discussions show is that **existentialism was not the radical break with the past that it is often thought to be.** While this is the story that many members of this latter tradition like to tell themselves and that many later histories of modern philosophy have uncritically adopted, the truth is that there are many significant points of overlap between the key representatives of the idealist tradition, that is, Kant and Hegel, and the many figures of the existentialist or pre-existentialist tradition" (pg. 8)

- Chapter 1 - Hegel and the Myth of Reason (pg. 11)
  - "The *oeuvre* of Hegel, like that of many thinkers of the post-Kantian tradition in European philosophy, has been subject to a number of mis-readings and misrepresentations by both specialists and non-specialists alike; these have until fairly recently rendered Hegel's reception in the Anglo-American philosophical world extremely problematic. These often willful misrepresentations, variously referred to by scholars as the Hegel myths or legends, have given rise to a number of prejudices against Hegel's philosophy, primarily, although by no means exclusively, in the English-speaking world. Among the caricatures that have enjoyed the widest currency are the following: that Hegel denied the law of contradiction, that his dialectical method of argumentation took the form of the thesis-antithesis-synthesis triad, that he saw the end of history in his own philosophical system, that he tried to prove *a priori* the number of planets, that he was a reactionary apologist for the Prussian state, or worse, a proto-fascist, and finally, that he was a kind of pre-Kantian metaphysician or "cosmic rationalist" who believed, like Schelling and some of the romantics, in a metaphysical world soul" (pg. 11)
    - "Allegedly, Hegel was wholeheartedly and naively under the spell of all-powerful reason. According to this myth, not only does Hegel's philosophy purport to demonstrate reason in history, but it also affirms it normatively. By gaining an insight into the rationality in history, we are then reconciled with the world as it exists. The normative side of Hegel's account, with its unqualified acceptance and approval of reason, appears on this view particularly naive and vulnerable to criticism. Nietzsche's analysis of how unrelenting Socratic rationality destroyed Greek tragedy by demanding that it live up to reason's own ideals of intelligibility and self-reflectivity, and Foucault's analysis of the subtle and ubiquitous forms of contemporary power relations that have resulted largely from the pernicious employment of instrumental reason, are seen as two corrective accounts of Hegel's unreflective and over-enthusiastic view of reason." (pg. 12)
      - "I would like to show that this simplistic view of Hegelian philosophy vastly underestimates and, indeed, ignores Hegel's own criticism of reason and its purportedly positive effects. What I ultimately wish to suggest is that **Hegel is very aware of the pernicious aspects of reason**" (pg. 12)
  - "The tendency to see in Hegel a naïve proponent of the Enlightenment has doubtless been largely due to a widespread misinterpretation of his famous claim, "*What is rational, is actual, and what is actual, is rational.*" The common understanding of this famous Hegelian maxim, made famous by Rudolf Haym's interpretation, is that everything that exists or that is "actual" has its own logos and internal justification. Thus, existing practices and institutions would seem to be above reproach. This would apparently imply an extreme conservatism and a callous, Panglossian theodicy since in this maxim one could find justification for oppressive institutions and needless human suffering. On this view, totalitarian states with all their abuses would be rational simply because they exist" (pg. 12-13)
    - "**The historian is only able to see a given law in its particular social-historical context and thus can never critically judge it; however, the philosopher, for Hegel, is able to examine the specific laws against an independent criterion, i.e. that of the concept of right itself.** Thus, he clearly could not have held that whatever law or state exists is, by mere virtue of its existence, just and right. His general claim that there is reason in history ought not to be construed as meaning that every single historical event is rational; likewise, his claim that the state as a concept is rational does not mean that every single existing state is rational" (pg. 14)
  - "In his philosophy, **the "Idea" is a two-sided concept**: on the one hand, it is the form or abstract concept of thought, but on the other hand, it is also the concrete content in which reason, implicit in thought, is embodied in reality. Insofar as reason is both in the abstract concept and in the concrete actuality, it is synonymous with the Idea. This rather abstract notion of reason in Hegel then comes in the following way to be associated with the conception of reason that we are more familiar with, i.e. reason understood as reflection or critical self-consciousness: **the task of philosophy, for Hegel, is not to posit utopias or some world beyond our own, but rather to examine reality or what is the case, and to find the reason that is in it**. In order to discover reason in the manifold of concrete contexts, the philosopher must understand this variety conceptually" (pg. 14)
    - "The task of the speculative philosopher is then for Hegel by means of reflection and criticism to examine reality and deduce its implicit rationality. Through this critical reflection the philosopher is also then participating in that rationality. Thus, rationality also takes on the meaning of critical observation or reflection for Hegel. In this sense, **Hegel's conception of rationality resembles Socratic rationality,** which applies the dialectical criticism to all institutions and beliefs to see if they rest on a rational basis" (pg. 14)
  - "Clearly, Hegel's account of, for instance, the lordship-bondage dialectic or the unhappy consciousness has had a profound influence on existentialist philosophy and psychology. **His dialectical methodology** and his view of the situatedness of human knowledge have also found positive resonance among the existentialists" (pg. 15)
    - "I do not wish to go into detail about Hegel's account of how the Enlightenment misses the point of religion and continually erects a straw man that it uses as a ready foil for its criticisms. [Certain] passages [in the 'Spirit' chapter of the *Phenomenology*] show merely that Enlightenment rationality is limited in its approach to **Christianity** and **fails to see religion's truth in falsity**, so to speak" (pg. 16)
      - "**Hegel clearly recognizes the destructive power of rational thought and reflectivity on cultural institutions…**" (pg. 16)
        - *such is why 'reason' or 'thought' is identified as comprising a 'negative' property (or, way about itself) - and, it's dialectical in the sense that it negates through positing.*
      - "Hegel portrays philosophical reflection as a destructive influence on various aspects of society and culture at large. **When reason examines specific institutions in the social order and demands that they give an account of themselves, it invariably finds many of them to be wanting in rational justification.** From the perspective of reason, the institutions in question seem arbitrary and are no longer viewed as legitimate. At this point the institutions lose their cultural meaning and gradually fall into desuetude. Reason and reflective

thought are thus destructive forces in traditional societies. Hegel sees this dynamic of awakened rationality as destroying traditional beliefs and customs in the Greek world" (pg. 16)

- ◆ "**Religion is simply a part of the <u>passive</u> and "<u>unresisting</u> atmosphere"** which reason interpenetrates since <u>the former does not perceive the imminent danger that rationality presents to its most dearly held beliefs and institutions</u>. But gradually reason, like a perfume, diffuses itself silently and insidiously into all aspects of culture" (pg. 17)

- ▪ "Just as self-awareness comes about only after the original sin, so also awareness of the destructive nature of reason comes only after the damage has already been done. Here <u>the remedies to save religion from the onslaught of reason are ineffectual</u> since religion attempts to defend itself by using the tools of reason, thus giving away the game from the start. **Religion attempts to justify itself with rational argumentation and scientistic reason in order to show that it can hold up under the test of this scientistic rationality,** yet this betrays that the attempt at defense or treatment has come about entirely too late since even the defenders of religion have already unknowingly come to accept the basics of Enlightenment rationality and its methodology and criteria for truth as their standard. Thus, <u>the disease is only aggravated</u>: far from erecting an effective defense, <u>the defenders of religion unknowingly ally themselves with the enemy</u>. **By using reason as its standard, religion destroys itself** since <u>at its heart are mystery and revelation</u> which are by their very nature irreducible to logical categories and rational explanation. Reason has by this time so permeated our way of thinking that we cannot imagine anything else as a viable option. As Hegel puts it, reason "has laid hold of the marrow of spiritual life." Thus, **the spiritual life of religion cannot be rescued since it has become unable to defend itself**, having been so infected by the foreign principle of thought. <u>Reason here is clearly portrayed as something subtle, insidious and destructive</u>, and this account stands squarely in opposition to the myth of Hegel's unqualified advocation of reason outlined above" (pg. 18)

  - □ "Hegel also uses the biblical image of the serpent to describe the status of reason after the capitulation of religion. For the disabused, religion remains but a hollow husk lacking any substantial meaning, alive only in memory and history books: "Memory alone then still preserves the dead form of Spirit's previous shape as a vanished history, vanished one knows not how. And the new serpent of wisdom raised on high for adoration has in this way painlessly cast merely a withered skin." Here **reason frees itself of religion and superstition just as the serpent sheds its skin. Religion is merely a dead form of spirit that falls away when it is no longer of use**. This image suggests that in fact religion and reason are in a sense the same thing, i.e. the same serpent with a new form. This new form of religion then simply replaces the old form" (pg. 18)

- ○ "The metaphor for reason or reflectivity as an illness and a disease links Hegel with the more recent thinkers in the European philosophical tradition who unambiguously place emphasis on the pervasive and deleterious force of rationality. <u>This illness metaphor has been a dominant one in the philosophical and literary schools of existentialism and phenomenology</u>. I wish simply to trace this image in a handful of thinkers in order to show that they make use of this metaphor in the same way as Hegel does, i.e. to represent the destructive or pernicious force of reason" (pg. 19)

  - ▪ "The infection had become fatal. Rationality and science thus destroyed Greek tragedy and became a threat to all immediate forms of art, which aimed to overcome this individuality and wallow in a primeval universality and harmony. Scientistic, Socratic rationality, which was a disease among the Greeks, then spread into a plague for the Western world as a whole…" (pg. 21)
    - □ "**for Nietzsche, scientistic rationality in the West has not been used to improve humanity's lot but rather, like a growing plague, has been an increasingly destructive force**" (pg. 21)
  - ▪ "<u>the disease is the awareness, brought about by critical reason</u>, of <u>the indifference of the world to our hopes and values</u>, and the existential task is to live unflinchingly with this awareness" (pg. 22)
  - ▪ "Nausea, like the plague, is a disease of consciousness that comes on secretly and unexpectedly, arising insidiously and perniciously for Roquentin. <u>One feels the nausea when contemplating the banality of the facticity of our existence</u>. When **one, via reason and reflection, realizes the lack of transcendent meaning or the nothingness in the world around oneself**, the disease sets in. The disease of reflectivity leads to the realization of the contingency of human existence and to the existential requirement of positing human values in place of any divine meaning. Roquentin's rational reflection on the nothingness of existence hinders his ability to act in the world" (pg. 22)

- ○ "The use of this dominant metaphor throughout the existentialist tradition provides a point of contact or overlap between this tradition and Hegel's thought with respect to the conception of reason. **Hegel's portrayal of reason as a malady and a destructive force clearly reveals his awareness of its darker aspects**, and this awareness, on the one hand, associates him with the existentialists and the self-avowed irrationalists and, on the other, distances him from the caricature of the naive *Aufklärer*. The continuity of Hegel and these later thinkers in the European tradition is most obviously seen in the common use of the illness image to portray the spread of reason. <u>Hegel can thus be seen</u>, not as the great enemy of the irrationalist tradition and the bitterest opponent of Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer, but rather <u>as an important forerunner of the existentialist tradition</u>, on this issue as on many others" (pg. 23)

- ▪ Chapter 2 - Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as a Systematic Fragment (pg. 24)

  - ○ "With respect to the question of systematic philosophy, Hegel is a typical representative of the entire German idealist tradition, which aimed at offering a systematic and exhaustive account of the cognitive faculties" (pg. 26)

    - ▪ "In addition to the examples set by Hegel's immediate forerunners in the German idealist tradition, <u>the model of a rigorous philosophical system among the philosophers of Hegel's day was that of Spinoza's *Ethics*</u>. In Hegel's time, **Spinoza's philosophy had become something of a fad in German literary circles and was influential for, among others, Herder, Lessing, Goethe, Fichte and Schelling.** In fact, some German intellectual figures were brought into difficulties with the religious orthodoxy for their purported affiliations with Spinozism and its pantheism. <u>Written in the form of a geometrical proof, the *Ethics* was an attempt to apply the rigorous methodology of analytic geometry to metaphysical questions.</u> According to Hegel's view, the geometrical method was not appropriate for philosophical questions; however, **he thought that Spinoza's belief in the importance of a rigorous systematic philosophy that demanded proofs with the power of necessity was fundamentally correct**. Moreover, Spinoza's monism was also extremely attractive to the generation of post-Kantian philosophers who were trying to resolve the paradoxes of the dualism of representation and thing-in-itself that seemed to arise naturally from Kant's theoretical philosophy"(pg. 27)
      - □ "like his forerunners, Hegel believed that the very notion of truth was necessarily bound up with its systematic form" (pg. 27)

  - ○ "the idea underlying [systematic philosophy] is fundamentally the same: individual parts of the system have their meaning only in their necessary relation to the other parts, and thus as parts of a larger whole" (pg. 27)

    - ▪ "Hegel's methodological investment in this view is demonstrated in the *Phenomenology*. <u>He portrays the notion of a systematic philosophy by means of an organic analogy</u>. **The development of a plant at its different stages is necessary for the plant as a whole, and no single stage represents the plant's entire history"** (pg. 27-28)
    - ▪ "Just as when a plant grows and develops, each of its individual stages is necessary for the succeeding stages, <u>so also individual concepts in a philosophical system have their meaning in the context of other concepts from which they were developed</u>. Just as the different stages of its development change the plant's appearance so radically that it appears to become another "contradictory" species, so also contradictory concepts can contribute to the development of a single philosophical system. What this simile makes clear is that **the system, for Hegel, involves the sum total of the individual parts as they develop organically.** Thus, just as the plant is not merely the sum total of its parts at a given moment in its development, but rather the organic whole of its developmental stages, so also <u>a philosophical system is the complete development or unfolding of individual concepts</u>" (pg. 28)

- □ "the systematic whole is essentially bound up with the notion of truth itself, and cannot be surrendered from it" (pg. 28)
  - ○ "This conception of a network of interrelated beliefs implies a certain kind of philosophy, namely, one that examines the totality of beliefs, concepts, institutions, and so on, instead of concentrating only on certain individual isolated ones. The kind of philosophy that examines the whole is what Hegel, following tradition, calls "speculative philosophy." He contrasts it to what he calls "dogmatism," which treats concepts individually and thus abstracted from their organic unity…" (pg. 28-29)
    - ▪ "speculative philosophy removes concepts from the isolation of abstraction and puts them in their appropriate systematic context where they can be properly analyzed" (pg. 29)
      - □ "Speculative philosophy involves examining the whole universe of thought, which invariably involves contradictions. Instead of insisting on one side of a contradiction or the other, or stopping once a contradiction has been reached, it observes the dynamical movement in pairs of opposites, and looks beyond the immediate contradictory terms towards a higher truth that arises from the dialectical development of the contradiction" (pg. 29)
  - ○ "Hegel conceived of his philosophy as a system…" (pg. 29)
    - ▪ "The systematic structure consists in the dialectical movement, which posits the truth first on the side of the object, in its many different forms, and then on the side of the subject, in its many different forms, and then finally in the unity of the two. This dialectical movement is traced with unflagging consistency through ever more sophisticated contexts. This is the systematic structure that Hegel intended to make apparent in the different analyses. Once the reader grasps these parallels and this dialectical movement, the seemingly heterogeneous discussions within the text are seen to be organized in a regular and systematic manner" (pg. 39)
  - ○ "This conclusion that the *Phenomenology* is a fragment but yet also a system will doubtless strike some as paradoxical and untenable. However, there is no intrinsic contradiction in the notion of a systematic fragment. **The idea is simply that there is a systematic structure present behind the scenes.** To be sure, this structure is at times skeletal, but that does not undermine Hegel's systematic intent. It merely makes it more difficult to perceive and understand. **The work is a fragment with regard, not to the structure itself, but to the development of the individual analyses and dialectical arguments.** Due presumably to the hasty composition of the second half of the work, some of the analyses that appear there are not fully worked out and thus remain in fragmentary form. They only receive their full analysis years later in Hegel's lectures. This understanding of the *Phenomenology* as a systematic fragment helps to do justice, on the one hand, to the intuition that the text does not always work out all the details, and, on the other hand, to Hegel's explicit claims for a system, claims which are usually cast aside as a result of that intuition" (pg. 40)
- ▪ Chapter 3 - The Architectonic of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (pg. 41)
  - ○ "After the virulent criticisms of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and much of the analytic tradition, systematic philosophy has for the most part gone into eclipse in contemporary European thought. The main target of these criticisms was often the daunting edifice of the Hegelian system, which dominated so much of nineteenth-century philosophy. Despite a small handful of scholars who try with might and main to salvage this edifice, the general belief among scholars today is that at bottom Hegel's philosophical project as a system is simply bankrupt and entirely indefensible" (pg. 41)
    - ▪ "**Hegel believed that truth could only be expressed in terms of a system**, and he explains this in numerous places, insisting that the particular parts of the system are meaningful only inside the systematic context in which they appear. "A content has its justification," he writes, "only as a moment of the whole, outside of which it is only an unfounded presupposition or a subjective certainty." A truth in a philosophical system has its truth value only in relation to the other members of the system, and an atomic thesis asserted without relation to a wider system cannot rely on such a system to provide a context and thus to support it, since apart from such a system it stands without relation to other concepts and theories which give it meaning in the first place. For example, a tile in a mosaic, seen on its own in abstraction from the other tiles of which the mosaic is composed, is in a sense meaningless, i.e. one could not discern the picture of the whole mosaic with knowledge of the single tile alone. The tile has its true meaning only in its relation to the rest of the tiles and to the mosaic as a whole. **Likewise in philosophy, according to Hegel, the truth and meaning of the individual propositions depend upon the context in which they are found in the system as a whole**" (pg. 42)
      - □ "If truth can only be expressed in the form of a philosophical system, then we do Hegel a disservice by randomly excerpting parts of his system that we find interesting and relevant to our contemporary philosophical agenda while ignoring the role they play in the system as a whole. This approach misunderstands the spirit of Hegel's systematic enterprise and dismisses his own clear statements of explanation and intention in this regard. By excerpting individual analyses out of their systematic context, one loses the very meaning of those analyses. If we are going to talk about Hegel at all, we must also talk about the Hegelian system. Although perhaps we will not be able to understand the most opaque parts of the Hegelian architectonic, it is more advisable, given Hegel's conception of philosophy, simply to admit this in the first place rather than to give up on it, and Hegel with it, altogether" (pg. 43)
  - ○ "Hegel begins the *Phenomenology* with his account of "Consciousness" which consists of three discrete conceptions of objectivity all sharing the fundamental realist belief in an independently existing external world of objects that are ontologically prior to human subjects and their capacity to know" (pg. 47-48)
    - ▪ "The challenge in the "Consciousness" chapter is to give a complete account of the determination of objectivity with reference to the object sphere alone; however, in the course of the dialectic this conception proves to be inadequate and collapses under the weight of its own internal contradictions. **What consciousness learns is that even in its most basic attempts to conceive of an object as, for example, a thing with properties or an unseen force behind the appearances, there are certain universal concepts involved which are not, strictly speaking, to be found in the empirical manifold or in the object sphere**. These concepts can only be accounted for by an appeal to the human capacity for thought, and thus the human subject is drawn into what was originally an attempt to conceive of the object as an independent ontological entity. As a necessary presupposition for the determination of objectivity, the subject sphere must be taken into account as well. This then leads to the "for-itself" sphere of "Self-Consciousness" where the categories are reversed and the self-conscious subject is given ontological priority, with the world of objects thought to be dependent on it. These two units, "Consciousness" and "Self-Consciousness," run parallel to one another in their respective spheres of in-itself and for-itself" (pg. 48)
      - □ "The task of the "Self-Consciousness" chapter is to fulfill the original goal - to give a complete account of objectivity - but this time with reference to the subject sphere. This too proves to be inadequate since, as was learned in the dialectic of the "Unhappy Consciousness," the self-conscious subject there operates with the conception that it is an isolated atomic entity. **The dialectic, however, shows that self-consciousness is in fact ontologically bound up with other self-conscious subjects.** Thus, an account of the interaction of one self-consciousness with other self-conscious subjects must be given in a way that demonstrates how the social whole serves to shape the determination of objectivity in the course of this dialectical interaction among self-conscious subjects. This is the task of the "Reason" chapter" (pg. 51)
    - ▪ "In this third and final section of the "Reason" chapter, self-consciousness finally comes to realize what we, the philosophical audience, have known all along, namely, the unity of subject and object. What self-consciousness learns from "Virtue and the Way of the World" is that **the world is not an evil, external other that stands in contradiction to the individual subject or the moral sphere**: self-consciousness, 'being now absolutely certain of its reality, no longer seeks only to realize itself as end in an antithesis to the reality which immediately confronts it'. On the contrary, the world is in harmony with the individual, which it allows to fulfill its needs cooperatively with others'. **The individual is now able to identify with the external sphere and to see itself in it by means of its work and activity. In this self-recognition in the world of objects, the**

**various dualisms such as universal and particular come together.** Here there is 'the interfusion of being-in-itself and being-for itself, of universal and individuality'. Self-consciousness, in viewing the world, implicitly views itself since it sees its own individuality expressed in the external sphere: '…it starts afresh from itself, and is occupied not with an other, but with itself'" (pg. 57-58)

- □ "finally, here this dialectic seems to come to an end since **the subject-object split is apparently overcome**" (pg. 58)
  - ◆ "in "Revealed Religion" the subject-object split is overcome in the concept of revelation. <u>In revelation human beings recognize themselves in God, and through this recognition become reconciled with the world</u>. This reconciliation comes about in the revealed religion, i.e. in Christianity, where God is revealed on earth as a human being. **Here God is no longer something transcendent and otherworldly but, instead, is a particular man living in this world.** This account contains, on Hegel's view, a deep metaphysical truth expressed in terms of a story. **The truth of the subject-object unity and the individual self-awareness is expressed by the Christian account of God as revealed. Philosophical or scientific thinking in its turn understands this same truth in a different way**" (pg. 67)
    - ◇ "The goal of this account was to show the ultimate unity of all the various factors, at first thought to be unrelated, in the overall truth process. **One thus sees the great unity and interconnectedness of the subject with the object, of the subject with the community, of the community with other historically related communities, in short of everything with everything else** in the broadest sense" (pg. 68)
    - ◇ **"The dialectic has shown the totality of the interconnectedness of all forms of subject and object in the attempt to give a complete account of the subject-object Notion.** The dialectic has thus demonstrated the truth of a certain sort of epistemic monism in which everything is necessarily related to the whole, and the whole thus corresponds to the ultimate account of the Notion. This is therefore the actual content that the dialectic has produced" (pg. 68)
  - ◆ "The question is now how to interpret this account of the monistic unity of the world. For Hegel, there are two possibilities: <u>the religious interpretation or the philosophical interpretation</u>. **The religious interpretation understands this monistic truth with stories, symbols and metaphors, or what has been translated as "picture-thinking." In the figure of God, the religious interpretation personifies the great monistic unity of the universe. For the religious consciousness, these most abstract truths must thus be seen through the veil of simplified concrete examples drawn from normal human experience. The philosophical consciousness, by contrast, sees these truths for what they are, and is able to extricate them from their metaphorical form.** Thus, although the monistic content of both interpretations is the same, the difference exists in how that content is understood" (pg. 68-69)
    - ◇ "The absolute Notion is thus the Notion that encompasses all other Notions within itself. It is the complete or exhaustive Notion. In other words, Absolute Knowing is the panoptic overview of all previous Notions. Hegel thus makes clear that Absolute Knowing is not the knowing of any particular fact or ultimate piece of wisdom, but rather merely the grasping of the various forms of thought as a whole. Here one finds at the end of the *Phenomenology* a powerful statement of Hegel's holism. **Every individual truth or value must be understood in a larger context. Only with this overview of the complex network of interrelations of truth claims, individuals, institutions and historical events is it possible to understand the true nature of such claims and to give a complete account of objectivity"** (pg. 69)
- ○ "The philosophically provocative point that these parallelisms implicitly indicate is that the conceptual logic that governs the development of the object-Notion and the subject-Notion is the same logic that governs world-historical forces. In other words, **the moments of in-itself, for-itself and in-and-for-itself and the dialectic of universal and particular are not categories which apply only to a particular and limited subject matter; instead, they are universal categories or "universal determinations" which govern all human thought and which as such can be found in any subject matter**. Thus, the logic which governs one's understanding of a Notion of a particular, apparently isolated object is the same as that which governs one's understanding of the various epochs of world history with their manifold interrelations and complexities. Precisely this point, which is essential for Hegel's idealism and monism, is overlooked when individual arguments of his philosophy are analyzed in abstraction from their systematic context." (pg. 69-70)
  - ▪ "This analysis, however, does show that Hegel in fact had a systematic structure in mind when he wrote the book. One can always dispute the question concerning to what degree he adhered to this structure in any given analysis, but it would be absurd at this point to claim that such a structure simply does not exist. Moreover, one need not find Hegel's structure here philosophically compelling in order to use it to understand the individual analyses that he gives. But the risk that one runs by ignoring his systematic pretensions entirely is of not understanding him at all" (pg. 70)
- ▪ Chapter 4 - Points of Contact in the Philosophy of Religion of Hegel and Schopenhauer (pg. 73)
  - ○ "Schopenhauer's philosophy…is more directly in harmony with the true spirit of Kantian philosophy" (pg. 73)
    - ▪ "I want to argue that although they have entirely different presuppositions and draw entirely different conclusions, Schopenhauer and Hegel nevertheless share the same fundamental conceptions of religion" (pg. 73)
  - ○ "…**Hegel was the first to try to interpret the meaning of religion in terms of its secular significance**. That was, in any case, the way in which he was interpreted by the left Hegelians. In the "Unhappy Consciousness" section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, **Hegel shows how the attempts of the unhappy consciousness to posit an autonomous transcendent God prove to be contradictory. In the end, the unhappy consciousness comes to realize that the truth of religion does not lie in the beyond in a transcendent God, but rather in the practices and beliefs of the Church**. What Hegel wants to demonstrate with this analysis is that <u>the truths of religion have no independent metaphysical or ontological value</u>. In fact, **from a metaphysical point of view, the beliefs of religion per se are quite simply false**. However, those beliefs are true in a deeper sense. **Insofar as they influence the thoughts, acts and practices of the religious believer, they become an important element of what might be called "social truth." They become a part of the fabric of living truth in the daily lives of the members of the religious community**. Thus, for Hegel, <u>the truth of religion is a human affair and a human truth, bound up with practices and values of human society</u>" (pg. 74)
    - ▪ "He claims religion contains another deeper truth in addition to the truth that it represents in the lives of the believers. For Hegel religion also represents a profound philosophical truth with symbols or myths, and in this point lies another similarity with Schopenhauer. **For Hegel, religion is the penultimate stage on the road to Absolute Knowing in the *Phenomenology*; in other words, <u>it is the next closest approach of consciousness to philosophical truth</u>**. In fact, Hegel claims that religion has the same content as philosophical knowing, i.e. absolute knowing, but that it understands it in a different way, namely, metaphorically" (pg. 75)
      - □ **"The ultimate content of philosophical knowing for Hegel is the grand unity and interconnectedness of the subject with objects,** of the citizen with the community, or the community with other historically related communities - in short, **of everything with everything else in the broadest sense**. This unity is, moreover, seen as a dynamic process of division, alienation and reconciliation with the whole" (pg. 75)
    - ▪ "For Hegel, <u>religion interprets the monistic truth of philosophy with stories, symbols and metaphors, or what Hegel calls "picture thinking"</u> (Vorstellungen). In God, religion personifies the great unity or monism of the universe. Likewise, what the philosophical observer sees as the dynamic threefold dialectic operating with the in-itself, for-itself and in-and-for-itself, the religious consciousness interprets as the Trinity of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. The universal dialectic of unity, division and reconciliation is understood in the religious interpretation as humanity's original harmonious condition in the Garden of Eden, its Fall from grace with Original Sin, and its chance for reconciliation through

Christ. **For the religious consciousness, these most abstract truths must be** <u>seen through the veil</u> **of simplified concrete examples and images drawn from normal human experience**. <u>The philosophical consciousness, by contrast, sees these truths for what they are</u>, and is able to extricate them from their metaphysical form" (pg. 75)

- "Schopenhauer also sees philosophical truths veiled behind the pictorial and symbolic language of religion. For instance, **one great truth of religion that is captured metaphorically is the universal suffering at the heart of the human condition**. Given <u>the finitude and frailty of human existence</u> as well as the insatiable strivings of the human will, it is for Schopenhauer a deep metaphysical truth that suffering is omnipresent in the world. This truth is expressed metaphorically by both Eastern and Western religions. For Schopenhauer, the Biblical story of the Fall interprets suffering in the world as a result of a crime or error. Humanity must endure hardship because it is sinful as a result of the transgression of Adam and Eve" (pg. 75-76)
  - "Thus, the metaphysical truth of the universal suffering in the world is contained in metaphorical form in the story of the Fall. For Schopenhauer, the philosophical key to this truth is to be found in his account of the will, but <u>religion represents this same core thought</u> **in popular guise**. Hence, although Hegel and Schopenhauer interpret this myth in different ways, they still nevertheless see it as representing important philosophical truths. Another great truth that religion expresses is to be found, according to Schopenhauer, in the doctrine of the veil of Maya. <u>Humanity sees through this veil only the fleeting phenomenal appearances of this world as separate individual entities, and does not penetrate to the inner truth or substantial unity of the universe that lies behind them</u>. **Our knowledge is thus finite and limited to mere appearances**. Likewise, Christianity denies the ultimate reality of the mundane and points to <u>an omnipresent God, a unity behind the scenes</u>. These doctrines in their various mythical representations capture the philosophical truth of the Kantian division between phenomena and noumena or representation and thing-in-itself for Schopenhauer. Limited to knowledge of what is given in space and time and what is governed by causality, we can thus never penetrate to knowledge of the thing-in-itself. For Schopenhauer the true identity of the will with all its phenomena is the philosophical truth behind the identity with the universe that is found in Buddhism" (pg. 76)
- "thus, **for Schopenhauer as well religion expresses truth in the form of symbols and stories, whereas philosophy understands it for what it is in itself**" (pg. 77)
  - "both Hegel and Schopenhauer see religion as representing an essential philosophical truth about the world" (pg. 77)

- Chapter 5 - Kierkegaard's Criticism of the Absence of Ethics in Hegel's System (pg. 79)
  - "**As an idealist, Hegel believes that it is the Idea that constitutes what is most real. The Idea, however, does not exist merely in our minds but is incarnated in different forms in the world, where it develops.** This is Hegel's way of expressing the long-held philosophical view that serves as the foundation of the sciences, namely, that <u>there is a rational structure in the universe which the human mind can understand</u>. Thus, **the goal of philosophical knowing is to examine what exists in order to find the rational elements.** When the issue is seen in this way, it is clear that there is a distinction between, on the one hand, everything that exists, which may or may not display some rational element and, on the other hand, genuine actuality, i.e. the existent things that are invested with some kind of *logos*. The latter is thus a subgroup of the former, and the two are not synonymous" (pg. 79)
    - "<u>For something to be *real*, it must display some element of the rational Idea. This is what Hegel means with the claim that the actual is the rational.</u> Things which do not show some such rationality of course still exist but are not proper objects of scientific inquiry, since the very goal of science is to identify such rational elements. It is this Hegelian understanding of the concept of actuality that Kierkegaard seems not to have grasped" (pg. 80)
  - "I wish to argue that <u>Kierkegaard does not share the general view of ethics held by Kant, Fichte, Hegel and others</u>. **German idealism understands philosophy as the analysis of abstract concepts and thus gives to epistemology a central position**. Kierkegaard rejects this conception in favor of the tradition of ancient philosophy conceived as *Lebensphilosophie*, which ascribes to ethics a role of centrality and conceives of it in a very specific manner" (pg. 81-82)
  - "According <u>to Hegel, ideas about ethics and morality display a certain rationality and are thus proper objects of scholarly investigation</u>. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* from 1807 and the posthumously published Lectures on the *Philosophy of History*, he explores the different conceptions of ethics manifested in specific historical communities, such as the Greeks and the Romans. His analysis attempts to follow the development of the rational ideas of ethics as they evolved over the course of history in their connection with other elements of society, such as religion and government. For Hegel, these relations develop gradually and come to constitute the ethical life of a people. His thesis is that this development is dictated by the Idea of freedom which slowly emerges in human history. **The goal of the philosopher is then to recognize the rational elements, which correspond to this idea, in existing reality**. However, his conception of ethics is not purely historical" (pg. 82)
  - "<u>Kierkegaard's "existential" view of ethics precludes reducing it to a scientific explanation or grounding it in rationality</u>. For Climacus, every attempt to justify a given action must necessarily fail, since there is always a gap between the reasons and arguments given for an act and the demands of morality. This gap can only be spanned by a free decision of the individual. **Climacus distinguishes between the realm of science, which he refers to as "objective thinking," characterized by a concern for evidence, justification and discursive reason, and the realm of religious belief and ethics, or "subjective thinking," which is the sphere of individual choice.** While objective thinking is appropriate for the subject matter of science, it is a misunderstanding to apply it to the objects of religious belief or ethics. <u>No degree of rigorous logic or scientific knowledge can ever prove or disprove the existence of God to the individual. Likewise, no degree of objective knowledge can determine the morally correct response to a given situation.</u> The objects of subjective thinking do not lend themselves to quantifiability or precision, but remain a matter of individual choice. The realm of objectivity is the realm of necessity, whereas that of subjectivity is the sphere of human freedom. **Climacus' main criticism seems to be of people who use the methods of objective thinking to justify their beliefs or actions,** i.e. things that properly belong to the other sphere. <u>He regards such justifications as self-serving and inappropriate</u>" (pg. 85-86)
    - "**By distinguishing the realm of the objective from that of the subjective, and making the former inapplicable to ethics, Climacus rejects the conception of ethics held by Hegel and the German idealist tradition**. <u>For Hegel, Kierkegaard's conception of being aware of one's existence may be valid in and of itself, but it is not and cannot be the object of scholarly inquiry or what Hegel calls "science."</u> Science entails examination of the Idea that is universal, and does not apply to an individual's existence or self-understanding, which by its very nature is particular. Thus, when Climacus says that Hegel has no ethics, he is not denying that Hegel had a theory of ethics in the *Philosophy of Right*, but complaining that Hegel did not give an account of the individual, *qua* individual, in that person's self-relation or existence. This, however, clearly falls outside of what Hegel considers to be science" (pg. 86)
  - "It is clear that Kierkegaard and Hegel have completely different conceptions of ethics. **While Hegel conceives of ethics as a part of science and thus as specific abstract subject matter which displays the Idea, Kierkegaard conceives of it in a much less academic sense as a kind of philosophy of life**" (pg. 87)
    - "Kierkegaard came to reject purely philosophical accounts of ethics, and worked toward a Christian account" (pg. 88)
      - "The Christian message forms the foundation of Kierkegaard's general view of ethics, and is important for his notion that secular accounts of ethics are fundamentally inadequate. <u>Kierkegaard returns again and again to the question of what it means to exist as an individual human being.</u> For him, the basic facts of existence are sin and death. The ethical demand that this enjoins is that one keep one's sinfulness and mortality in focus at all times, along with an awareness of the basic Christian message about the possibility of redemption via the forgiveness of sin. These are, for Kierkegaard, the fundamental facts of life that carry with them a general demand for how one should live

one's life. The goal is to appropriate the awareness of these facts and this Christian message in one's daily actions. He criticizes modern Christians for having become so absorbed in the trivialities of their daily lives that they have lost sight of these fundamental facts. Similarly, the Hegelian philosophers have become distracted in their passion for the past and have thus lost the larger perspective about what is truly important. They forget their sinfulness and mortality, and thus the requirements for their individual redemption. This is one of the dangers that Kierkegaard perceives as facing his age. Kierkegaard, however, gives no fixed formulas about how to appropriate the Christian message in the individual case. This is the non-discursive or non-objective aspect of it. Instead, he develops concepts such as repetition, appropriation or reduplication in order to capture the challenge involved. **The philosophical question that this raises is whether Kierkegaard's views amount to yet another theory of ethics that is too abstract to offer useful guidance in specific situations. This is precisely what Kierkegaard criticizes other ethical theories for**. Let us consider, for example, his account of repetition, which represents one attempt to overcome this difficulty. The concept of repetition involves appropriating a general principle or idea, and repeating it by means of a specific action. Kierkegaard is engaged in the oldest problem in philosophy - the problem of reconciling universality and particularity. In ethics the question takes the following form: **how does the individual ethical situation match up to the abstract moral law? This is a notorious problem with Kant's moral theory**. Hegel and others criticized his categorical imperative as ultimately empty since it is too abstract to offer clear and determinate guidance in particular situations. Radically different and even mutually exclusive moral perspectives can still pass Kant's test of universalizability without falling into a self-contradiction. Thus, the categorical imperative remains indeterminate without further tests or principles to eliminate some of the competing possibilities for action. The concept of repetition appears to suffer from the same shortcomings, but Kierkegaard is not worried about it. His view seems to be that all general ethical principles must be interpreted by the individual; indeed, this is the heart of the notion of appropriation. One must determine how the principle fits the individual situation, and then embody it in one's action. One must take responsibility for one's own moral life, and cannot slavishly follow a fixed rule or indifferently determine one's action on the basis of a utility calculus. Indeed, as Sartre argues, to appeal to such rules would be to seek an excuse and to flee from one's own freedom and responsibility. **There is thus an absolute or transcendent gap between the ideal realm of ethical principles, and concrete action.** Thus, Kierkegaard is not concerned with the indeterminacy of the moral law since it merely puts the focus back on the individual moral agent and his or her freedom to interpret and act on it. The problem that arises here is that this seems to lead to a kind of subjectivism. Indeed, **if the only moral requirement is to freely appropriate the moral law as one sees fit and take responsibility for the results, then the door appears wide open for willfully evil actions.** That this is a genuine implication of Kierkegaard's position is confirmed by the fact that in *Fear and Trembling*, which appeared the same day as *Repetition*, Kierkegaard tries to argue for allowing for cases in which the individual counts as an exception to universal morality. As Hegel has pointed out in the *Philosophy of Right*, **this opens up the possibility of evil masquerading in the guise of the moral conscience.** Thus, Kierkegaard's position on the old ethical problem of reconciling the universal with the particular can lead to problematic results. One could argue that, as a Christian, he is not interested in philosophical problems. However, the question then arises why he rebukes philosophers for being overly abstract and thereby irrelevant in their statements about ethics. There seems to be some pretension of resolving the philosophical problem better than the philosophers themselves. Thus, he criticizes Hegel's concept of mediation and posits his own notion of repetition as an alternative" (pg. 88-89)

- ◆ *E. Husserl, in volume 1 of Logical Investigations, says "Individual relativism is such a bare-faced and (one might almost say) 'cheeky' scepticism, that it has certainly not been seriously held in modern times. It is a doctrine no sooner set up than cast down, though only for one who recognizes the objectivity of all that pertains to logic. One cannot persuade the subjectivist any more than one can the open sceptic, a man simply lacking the ability to see that laws such as the law of contradiction have their roots in the mere meaning of truth, that from these it follows that talk of a subjective truth, that is one thing for one man and the opposite for another, must count as the purest nonsense. He will not bow to the ordinary objection that in setting up his theory he is making a claim to be convincing to others, a claim presupposing that very objectivity of truth which his thesis denies. He will naturally reply: My theory expresses my standpoint, what is true for me, and need be true for no one else. Even the subjective fact of his thinking, he will treat as true for himself, and not as true in itself.' That we should, however, be able to convince the subjectivist personally, and make him admit his error, is not important: what is important is to refute him in an objectively valid manner. Refutation presupposes the leverage of certain self-evident, universally valid convictions. Such are those trivial insights on which every scepticism must come to grief, insights which show up sceptical doctrines as in the strictest, most genuine sense nonsensical. The content of such assertions rejects what is part of the sense or content of every assertion and what accordingly cannot be significantly separated from any assertion" (pg. 78)*

- ▪ "**Kierkegaard's conception of philosophy resembles what is sometimes called *Lebensphilosophie*, or philosophy of life. His conception has much in common with the ancient Greek schools of Stoicism, Epicureanism and Skepticism.** For these schools, a theoretical representation of external reality was always secondary or subordinate to what one might call the fundamental questions of the good life. This conception of philosophy has generally disappeared from mainstream modern philosophy, where it has been replaced by conceptual analysis, which is interested in knowledge or a veridical picture of reality for its own sake. That Kierkegaard understands philosophy as *Lebensphilosophie* and thus has more in common with the ancients than with modern philosophers is evidenced in a number of ways" (pg. 90)
  - □ "Kierkegaard thus sought to emulate some aspects of ancient Greek thought with respect to ethics, and Socrates provided him with a model. It will be noted that this is less an academic enterprise than a question of living. Many of the ancient Greek philosophers never wrote anything" (pg. 92)
- ▪ "When Kierkegaard criticizes Hegel for having no ethics, it is clear that he understands ethics differently from Hegel and other modern ethical theorists such as Kant and Mill. He understands ethics rather as the ancients understood it, i.e. as a way of living. Seen in this light, Kierkegaard appears as a reactionary or an anachronism in modern philosophy, which he regards as being corrupt and having missed the point of what true philosophy is about, i.e. how to live one's life. If this view is somewhat sympathetic, it is not without its problems" (pg. 92)
  - □ "**Any theory of ethics must have both a theoretical and a practical aspect.** On the one hand, it must lend itself to being applied in practice, and any theory that fails to do so can be rightly criticized as too abstract. On the other hand, however, any given ethical action must also be informed by some ostensible ethical principle. There is thus a dialectic of theory and practice in all ethical thought. To be sure, theory must be informed by practice and the real world, but practice must also be informed by theory. Kierkegaard's considerations do not do much to resolve this dialectic if his rejection of Hegel's ethical theory amounts to simply a rejection of all theory as such" (pg. 92-93)
- ▪ Chapter 6 - Kierkegaard's Criticism of Abstraction and the Proposed Solution: Appropriation (pg. 94)
  - ○ "One of Kierkegaard's best-known criticisms of Hegel's philosophy is that it is overly abstract, and fails to take into account the realm of actuality and existence. The picture that Kierkegaard seems to want to convey is that of a philosopher out of touch not only with the world around him but, more importantly, oblivious to the most significant issues of human existence, such as life, death, frailty, suffering, sin and devotion" (pg. 94)
    - ▪ "[Kierkegaard distinguishes between] "objective thinking (or knowing)," which is characterized by discursive reason, science and logic, from "subjective thinking," which is characterized by inwardness and passion.** Here the emphasis is not so much on action itself but on the

conditions for it, i.e. subjective thinking: Kierkegaard now acknowledges that subjectivity is a form of thinking but considers it to be a special kind, which is fundamentally different from the discursive, rational thinking that characterizes philosophy and the sciences" (pg. 95)

- "Given that his mission was to rescue this religious sphere from its perceived encroachment, Kierkegaard had to work out a way to do so while avoiding the problems of abstract thinking that, to his mind, characterize most of the modern philosophical tradition, and especially German idealism" (pg. 96)
    - "Throughout his authorship, he attempts to work out a number of concepts that he claims are closer to the realm of existence and actuality than the abstract categories of philosophy. His goal is, with the help of these so-called "existential" categories, to lead us away from philosophical abstraction and to point in the direction of what is required for us, as individuals, to achieve authentic faith (and real-world ethical action)" (pg. 96)
- Chapter 7 - Kierkegaard's Recurring Criticism of Hegel's 'The Good and Conscience' (pg. 120)
    - "**'The Good and Conscience' is probably best known for Hegel's critique of different forms of individualism, subjectivism and relativism, which he often tends to associate with then current forms of Romanticism**. Hegel has a sweeping story to tell about the development of human history. It will be worthwhile to dwell a moment on this story before turning to *Philosophy of Right* in order to gain some appreciation for his understanding of the role of the rise of individualism or subjectivism in the grand scheme of things. The locus of truth can be regarded as something outward or something inward. In other words, according to one view, **the truth is some fact of the matter out in the world; it is true in itself and wholly indifferent to one's perception, understanding or opinion of it. According to the opposite view, the truths of the external world are only illusory, and the real truth is to be found in the human heart or the mind of the individual.** The truth is not some universal out in the world, but a particular bound up with a specific human being. Taken on their own, these are simply two logical possibilities about the origin of truth, which correspond better or worse to our intuitions about the truth in different areas. **Most of us probably incline towards the former view in matters of science and towards the latter view in matters of art, ethics or perhaps religion**. In any case, it is probably fair to say that for most of us our intuitions are in some way divided here" (pg. 121)
        - "For Hegel, these two logical possibilities correspond to two main periods in the development of world history. According to his account, traditional societies and cultures are characterized by the view that the truth dwells in the outward sphere, i.e. in their customs, laws, religion, and so on. His model for this is the ancient Greek world. The Greeks, according to Hegel, lived in harmony with their public customs and religion. The truth was an objective, seemingly verifiable fact that could be found in their practices, ceremonies and traditions every day of their lives. These practices had divine sanction and were, in the minds of the people, completely continuous with the natural world. Given that they were regarded as objective facts, the possibility was never seriously entertained that these things might be contingent or arbitrary. One went to war or got married because such things were sanctioned by the gods. Hegel's favorite example in this context is Sophocles' tragedy, Antigone, where the tragic heroine appeals to the absolute truth of the laws of the gods in order to justify her actions, which are in contradiction to human law. Thus, while we nowadays tend to think of laws or customs as mere arbitrary conventions, for the Greeks these were, so to speak, fixed natural laws. They were conceived as simple facts about the universe, and the personal opinion of individuals played no role in this whatsoever" (pg. 121-122)
            - "According to Hegel, **Socrates was one of the first people to call into question this order of things. He demanded that the customs and traditions of ancient Athens justify themselves by means of discursive reason, and he refused to grant his assent before this justification was given**. He went around Athens asking people to defend their beliefs and ground their views, leading them to despair when they could not do so consistently. Most troubling for the Athenians was that Socrates seemed to posit a new criterion for truth by appealing to his well-known "daimon," the voice in his head that warned him against doing certain things. In the Greek world this was particularly offensive due to the fact that there was a very ancient practice of consulting public oracles when important decisions had to be made. In this way the politicians and generals could assure themselves that their decisions were in harmony with the will of the gods and the natural order. **With Socrates this was entirely inverted: he claimed to be in contact with a god directly and privately.** The locus of the divine was not a public sanctuary or temple, but the inner recesses of the mind of a single man. Thus, the content of the divine message could not be publicly accessed or scrutinized. When Socrates appealed to his daimon to justify his actions, which were perceived as contrary to accepted custom and practice, he was effectively saying that his personal views were higher than the time-honored customs and traditions of the state; his personal deity had more authority than the gods of Athens. Thus, one of the charges leveled against him was that he worshipped gods different from those accepted by the state" (pg. 122)
                - "Socrates introduced the notion that the individual had the right to determine what was right and wrong in contrast to the traditional view that this was something already established in the public sphere, with the individual's view of the matter being irrelevant. Socrates invents "morality" in the sense of subjective freedom, i.e. the recognition of the individual being the locus of moral truth" (pg. 128)
            - "According to Hegel, **Socrates set into motion a long historical process whereby the locus of truth gradually shifted from the objective sphere to the subjective one.** Thus, the defining characteristic of the modern world is the principle of subjective freedom. We moderns no longer believe the truth to lie in external customs, traditions, laws, or similar institutions. Rather, we tend to regard them merely as the arbitrary constructs of limited minds, created for specific purposes at specific points in time. On the contrary, **the true modern locus for truth is the individual human spirit**" (pg. 122)
                - "This is what is considered infinite and divine. The modern goal is thus often conceived as liberating oneself from the shackles of custom and tradition in order to discover the truth that lies within oneself" (pg. 123)
        - "Hegel places the Romantic movement and its different versions of subjectivism in this context. He takes it to be a typical example of modern thinking, with its emphasis on the individual and its rejection of traditional customs and values. **The story of modern philosophy begins not with the world, but with the subject.** Hegel thus analyzes Descartes' famous *cogito* argument in terms of this shift. Similarly, this principle was developed in more detail by Kant with his famous "Copernican turn" in philosophy, according to which our representations are no longer thought to conform to pre-existing objects in the outside world: instead those objects must necessarily conform to the representations produced by the categories of the human mind. This principle was made even more extreme by Fichte with his theory of the self-positing ego which, like Descartes' cogito, begins with the human subject and deduces the world from that point of departure. According to Hegel, the Romantics follow in this tradition. Specifically, they take Fichte's epistemological principle of the self-positing ego and turn it into a principle of ethics and action. They take Fichte's theory as giving them license to reject all the customs, traditions and laws that do not suit them. **They believe that they can construct or create their own world out of their subjectivity, and that the world as they find it has no validity whatsoever**. Thus, an abstract epistemological point becomes a principle of praxis and life in the hands of the Romantics" (pg. 123)
            - "Hegel's own view is that what is needed is a reconciliation of these two historical positions. It is neither desirable nor possible to return to the ancient world and to live immediately in harmony with custom and tradition. The price of such a harmony is the repression of the individual and human freedom. We need critical reflection about our customs and traditions. However, there is something praiseworthy and desirable in this view, in the fact that there is a substantive truth in the public sphere that is recognized by everyone. It is this which we should attempt to preserve. **The problem with the modern world is the potential for a dangerous relativism, where everyone has**

**their own private truth and there is no consensus about right and wrong.** This leads to a sense of alienation from the other and from the social sphere as a whole. However, the positive thing about this modern view is that it emancipates the human mind by affording it the right to judge for itself what it takes to be right and wrong. It is wholly correct that one should be critical and reflective about the world we inherit from the past" (pg. 123)

- ◆ "In the Greek world, no subjective moment is recognized as valid. A thing is true or valid in itself, or an action is right or wrong in itself, and one's knowledge of it is irrelevant" (pg. 124)
  - ▪ "Thus, **for Hegel, the goal is to unify these two views: to create a public order that is generally recognized as true and rational, but at the same time to allow individuals the opportunity to grant their assent by means of their own critical evaluation of the concrete customs and traditions. In short, the truth is both in the outside world and in the inwardness of the individual simultaneously; the truth exists in the customs and traditions in the public sphere, but these must be recognized as rational by each individual.** This is Hegel's formula for overcoming the repression of the ancient world and the alienation of the modern. Hegel formulates this concisely by saying that the "right of the subjective will" to recognize the good must coexist harmoniously with "the right of objectivity," i.e. the right of the validity and truth of the external world. Hegel explains, "since action is an alteration which must exist in an actual world and thus seeks recognition in it, it must in general conform to what is recognized as valid in that world." This will prove to be a key point for the dialogue with Kierkegaard that we wish to reconstruct" (pg. 124)
    - □ "The three main sections of the *Philosophy of Right* - "Abstract Right," "Morality" and "Ethical Life" - systematically treat increasingly complex social forms, beginning with an account of the isolated individual, and then progressing to an account of individuals in interaction with others in the social sphere and the state, and finally culminating in an account of the interaction of nations with one another in history" (pg. 124-125) https://historyofeconomicthought.mcmaster.ca/hegel/right.pdf
      - ◆ "Hegel famously draws a distinction between "morality" (Moralität) and "ethical life" (Sittlichkeit). The latter represents the broad sphere of custom, tradition, habit, religious belief, legal practice and handed-down ethical notions that constitute the fabric of every society. It is, of course, this sphere which is ultimately of most interest to Hegel since it contains its own inherent **rationality**, which **can be discerned by the philosophical eye**. Only when this rationality is unpacked can one begin to see the logos in existence. By contrast, **morality is characterized by Hegel as an abstract approach which focuses on the individual.** Morality goes to work to formulate abstract laws of conduct as if they had to be created *ex nihilo*. It thus ignores the fact that we live in families and societies and always already have a deeply ingrained sense of right and wrong from these sources. Morality tends to regard the individual in isolation from his or her social environment and context, in abstraction from the surrounding culture and society. Thus, morality unknowingly abstracts from the lived ethics that is already given in the real world. It is natural for Hegel to analyze morality before ethical life given the structure of the work, which treats its subject matter in increasing levels of complexity and sophistication. Thus, he begins in the introduction with a theory of action, which concerns only a single abstract individual; then in "abstract right" he treats the interactions of single individuals in abstraction from any wider social framework. All of these accounts then presuppose the full human being in relation to the family, the state and the social order, which are all treated in the section 'Ethical Life'" (pg. 125)
        - ◇ "This is the context for Hegel's analysis of different forms of subjectivism in "The Good and Conscience." These forms have their justification in their role in the development of the concept of right, which includes a recognition of the rights of the individual. However, these forms are, on their own, finite and erroneous when taken as something absolute. The danger that Hegel is keen to point out is the tendency to absolutize the individual will and place it in opposition to the universal…" (pg. 125)
        - ◇ "the truth of ethics is to be found in the social sphere of rational institutions, laws, duties, mores, and so on, of a people. These are by their very nature universal, making a claim on every individual. To act ethically thus means to act in accordance with the universal. Hegel points out that the locus of moral action in the will is the rational element which recognizes this universal" (pg. 126)
          - ▶ "**Hegel is thus quick to deny that any feeling, humor or whim could serve as a lasting basis for ethical action. It is only the rational element which can guarantee that the individual acts in accordance with the universal**" (pg. 126)
  - ▪ "**Hegel's general view [is] that the truth can be known by speculative human reason**. As is well known, Hegel consistently rejects any notion of an unknown transcendent beyond in whatever form that may take, for example unseen forces of physics, the Kantian thing-in-itself, or Jacobi's God. **Hegel's claim is of course that human reason can know the truth since anything transcendent is necessarily related to and conditioned by the immanent**. Thus to claim that something cannot be known since it lies in a sphere beyond is simply a kind of conceptual game that philosophers like to play; what they forget is that they themselves have posited the transcendent realm based on their experience with the immanent. But they fail to see the necessary conceptual unity of the two. The truth is revealed to the human mind, which is, for Hegel, represented symbolically by the Christian revelation. It would be an absurdity, according to Hegel, for the divine to reveal Himself but yet still remain hidden and unknown" (pg. 132)
    - □ "anyone who sincerely believes that he or she has received a divine command to do something that is in conflict with ethics or law is thereby ipso facto justified and indeed duty-bound to teleologically suspend the ethical, and act on the absolute divine command. Needless to say, this is a potentially very dangerous position since with it one can justify anything at all, based on the good motivation of fulfilling a divine command. The problem here is of course that **the merit of an action cannot be judged solely by its good intention or the belief that one is acting on a divine command. Instead, the actual content of the action is essential**. Without a determinate content by which an action can be meaningfully examined, Hegel believes that one effectively gives carte blanche to any kind of evil or self-serving act" (pg. 139)
  - ▪ "Generally speaking, the case against Hegel presented by Kierkegaard and others in this context has been overstated. It has long been a caricature of Hegel's political philosophy that he destroys the individual in order to deify the state. This is overstated since Hegel is of course interested in preserving key elements of the modern world that respect the rights of the individual" (pg. 137)
- ▪ Chapter 8 - Hegel and Nietzsche on the Death of Tragedy and Greek Ethical Life (pg. 142)
  - ○ "The preponderance of the evidence seems to support the view that Nietzsche never read Hegel's texts carefully, if at all; however, there is a minority view, defended most notably by Deleuze, who argues that Nietzsche's own philosophy is a self-conscious criticism of Hegel based on a solid understanding of the thought of his predecessor" (pg. 142)
    - ▪ "Despite their radically different conceptions of philosophy as a discipline and their different intellectual backgrounds and temperaments, Hegel and Nietzsche shared many philosophical concerns, with the result that they treat a number of the same issues, each in his own way and in accordance with his own methodology. In what follows, I would like to examine one of these important, yet hitherto neglected, points of overlap - specifically, Hegel's view of the collapse of Greek ethical life, and Nietzsche's account of the death of tragedy by the introduction of Socratic logic and rationality into dramatic art via the works of Euripides" (pg. 143)
      - □ "Nietzsche was not a systematic thinker in the same way Hegel was, and for this reason extracting his analyses from their contexts is

probably less distorting than is the case with Hegel. But, as the Nazi misappropriations of his work demonstrate all too clearly, grave interpretive dangers still lurk in the arbitrary excerpting of passages from their original context. There are, moreover, other interpretive hazards to be considered" (pg. 144)

- "Hegel believes aesthetics and religion to be inextricably linked components of Greek ethical life as a whole. For Nietzsche as well, religion and art are mixed in the origin and development of Greek tragedy. He too understands the Dionysian reveler as not just a manifestation of a religious act, but also a work of art. Nietzsche, like Hegel, characterizes the body of the Dionysian reveler as a work of art: " ... he is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art...The noblest clay, the most costly marble, man, is here kneaded and cut." Both Hegel and Nietzsche emphasize the fact that the human body itself is used as the raw material for the work of art, and this constitutes the first similarity in the two accounts" (pg. 150)
  - "The result of the collapse of the Greek world, for Hegel, was the movement to the atomistic individualism of the Roman world. **Hegel sees the fall of the polis and the rise of the world empire as a result of subjective freedom and the introduction of critical and reflective thought.** By the term "subjective freedom," Hegel means the idea that it is the prerogative of the individual to adjudicate what is correct and valid, and that this subjective judgment is preferred over custom or tradition" (pg. 159)
    - "Reflection and criticism shattered the immediate harmony of the state and the identification of the individual with it, resulting in the alienation which Hegel sees as characteristic of the modern age. Subjective freedom is thus the principle of the modern world" (pg. 159)
  - "Once reflection came about, thought could not return to the pre-reflective or "immediate" harmony of Greek life. Socratic rationality destroyed immediacy and the immediate identification of the individual with the social whole and gave rise to a new form of life: the world state and the conception of the legal person with citizenship rights. **For Hegel, the dualism between immediacy and individualism, characteristic of the ancient and the modern world, runs through the entire history of Western thought, and it is the task of his political philosophy to bring the two together.** He attempts to create a state which gives the individual his ethical life and identity, but which at the same time allows for a clear sphere of subjective freedom" (pg. 160)
    - "Like Hegel, Nietzsche sees the development and ultimately the destruction of Greek tragedy as representative of a cultural movement in the Greek world as a whole. This cultural movement forms part of the Western heritage which the Romans, medieval Europe and the modern world have inherited. Socratic rationality and logic replaced the traditional ancient virtues such as strength and bravery. Consistency and the ability to argue became the characteristics of the new hero: "Consider the consequences of the Socratic maxims: 'Virtue is knowledge; man sins only from ignorance; he who is virtuous is happy.' For now the virtuous hero must be a dialectician; now there must be a necessary, visible connection between virtue and knowledge, faith and morality." For Nietzsche, this same spirit of Socratic logic gave rise to the natural sciences, and has spread to dominate the Western world…" (pg. 160)
      - "Like Hegel, he sees Socrates as having initiated a movement which destroyed immediate and unreflected action and gave rise to our modern scientific and technological age. Although Socrates claimed to be searching for the good life and moral virtue with constant reflection and critical cross-examination, in fact, according to Nietzsche, he introduced a way of thinking that ultimately proved to be destructive. Nietzsche sees this form of Socratic thinking as characteristic of much of our own impoverished modern age: "Here we knock, deeply moved, at the gates of present and future: will this 'turning' lead to ever-new configurations of genius and especially of the Socrates who practices music? Will the net of art, even if it is called religion or science, that is spread over existence be woven even more tightly and delicately, or is it destined to be torn to shreds in the restless, barbarous, chaotic whirl that now calls itself 'the present'?" Nietzsche views with skepticism the prospects of true art and music in a technical, rationalistic age" (pg. 160-161)

- Chapter 9 - Existential Ethics (pg. 165)
  - "In its philosophical context, "existentialism" designates the series of thinkers in the post-Hegelian tradition of European philosophy. Kierkegaard is often referred to as the founder of this movement, and the term "existentialism" itself derives from his uses of the words "existence," "the existential" and their cognates, which he contrasts to the abstract or purely theoretical. Other nineteenth-century thinkers such as Dostoevsky and Nietzsche are frequently counted as forerunners of the existentialist move-ment, if not as existentialists in their own right. In the twentieth century, existentialism referred to the German school of phenomenology which was founded by Edmund Husserl, and continued and transformed by Martin Heidegger. The main proponents of religious existentialism in the twentieth century are Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel who, distinct from the phenomenological wing of the movement, can be seen as continuing in the tradition of Kierkegaard. Existentialism enjoyed its most popular phase in the French school whose leading exponents were Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Simone de Beauvoir" (pg. 165)
    - "For a number of reasons the issue of ethics in existentialism is somewhat problematic; indeed, many philosophers would dismiss the very notion of an existentialist ethic as an intractable oxymoron. **As a school, existentialism is generally averse to all forms of traditional morality and abstract ethical systems**. If one understands by ethics, a systematic set of universal maxims, laws or principles which are intended to govern action, then existentialism has no ethics since almost all of **the existentialist thinkers expressly deny the possibility of adequately justifying action based on rational principles or discursive arguments.** For this reason, it is hardly surprising that some of the leading theoreticians of the existentialist movement such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, despite their prolific and, indeed, varied writings, never wrote an ethics per se. The primary problem involved in explicating or reconstructing an ethics of existentialism lies in the critical or negative focus of the foremost existentialist thinkers. Since systematic moralities and organized religions are viewed by existentialists as the most pernicious obstacles in the way of an authentic realization of human freedom, the last thing existentialists wish to do is to concoct yet another morality in the traditional sense. (this is not to say, of course, that they successfully resist the urge to moralize; most do not, and their surreptitious moralizing is often cited as fatally faulting their existentialist positions.) For this reason, existentialist thinkers often describe their positions in overwhelmingly negative or privative terms. **Existentialists characteristically deny the validity of supposedly overarching, objective, or pre-existing structures that might lend antecedent meaning to human experience. In itself, human experience is radically meaningless, and it acquires meaning and value only through subjective acts of choice and decision.** At face value, this would not seem to leave much material with which to work in the construction of a positive ethics" (pg. 166)
      - "Moreover, since the existentialists reject traditional forms of ethical theorizing, their comments on ethics have more the look of cultural criticism or philosophical psychology in the case of, for instance, Kierkegaard or Nietzsche. Existentialist discussions of ethics can be considered meta-ethical in that, instead of offering a positive ethical doctrine, they provide general reflections on the very nature of ethics and the individual's moral situation in the world. Just as the existentialists rejected the content of abstract ethical theorizing, so also they rejected its discursive form; thus, many of the existentialists' insights on ethics are not found in abstract philosophical treatises but rather in novels, plays and short stories" (pg. 166)
    - "Insofar as one may speak meaningfully of an ethics of existentialism, then, this enterprise would comprise two related moments, one negative and one positive: (1) existentialists often speak as if positive value accrues to the project of debunking religious dogmas, objective verities and preordained orders. Much of the enduring interest in figures like Dostoevsky, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard is attributable to their antinomian iconoclasm in their ability to expose and discard the saving fictions under which most human beings feebly labor. (2) **Having penetrated to the basic meaninglessness of human existence, existentialists believe that a positive moral value accrues to the resolute act of choice, whereby one displays one's attainment of authenticity, which is the closest existentialist thinkers come to a moral ideal.** What one chooses is not

important; that one chooses is all that counts. <u>Those who cannot (or will not) choose for themselves the meaning of their existence must wallow in inauthenticity, which is the state wherein one chooses to believe that one has an essence or destiny which is impervious to choice.</u> **Most people, most of the time, live in inauthenticity**. The authentic life is reserved only for the existential hero, that quasi-mythical creature who can somehow affirm the meaninglessness of human existence and revel in the freedom afforded by the "death of God" or the collapse of all stable foundations or points of reference" (pg. 167)

- ○ "Aside from these purely philosophical concerns, there are a number of historical factors which explain the rise of the set of ethical concerns that existentialism attempts to address. **The existentialist movement is perhaps best seen as a logical outgrowth of a specific *Zeitgeist* characteristic of the nineteenth, and above all the twentieth, centuries. Existentialism is often associated with fundamental questions of the finitude of human existence such as death, alienation, suffering, anxiety, and similar concerns.** These questions tend not to be particularly pressing in times of stability or affluence. By contrast, the rapid changes in human life since the nineteenth century, accompanied by the violent upheavals above all in the twentieth century, have made the need to return to these questions much more urgent" (pg. 167)
  - ▪ "Existentialism is also characterized by a focus on the individual, which can be seen as a natural reaction to the rise of mass culture and the anonymity of modern society. The transfer from traditional forms of communal life to modern mass society has in countless ways relegated the individual to a marginal position. Out of this situation existentialism appears as an attempt to speak for the individual and for the power of tree self-determination, when everything in the world appears to negate even the very possibility of this. This must suffice as a general characterization of existentialism and the set of ethical issues that it aims to address" (pg. 168)
- ○ "While it would be a mistake to portray Kant himself as an existentialist, his theory of autonomy nevertheless clears the ground for the existentialist theories of choice, responsibility and ethical action. **Many of the existentialists can be seen as adopting Kant's theory of autonomous choice, while rejecting his account of the rational will subject to universalizable moral laws**. Indeed, this can in many ways be seen as the formula for existentialist ethics in general" (pg. 168)
  - ▪ "<u>The central notion for Kant is that of the moral will. According to his view, acts performed on the basis of external commands or authority are devoid of moral value.</u> Human beings, he argues, would not be free if they were subject to a moral law imposed by God or some other external source. On the contrary, <u>the moral agent must give him or herself the moral law and act out of respect for it. Autonomy involves legislating a moral law for oneself and thus imposing on oneself specific moral obligations.</u> By contrast, heteronomy means being subject to a law which has an external source beyond the acting agent. **Kant thus rejects all forms of heteronomy,** including both divine commands and altruistic motivations, <u>and instead locates moral action in the autonomous agency of the individual</u>. The moral law must be an expression of one's own will, regardless of the will of God, traditional morality, or the wishes of others. One result of this movement of the locus of moral action from an external source to the rational will of the individual is that the moral concepts of good and evil are no longer conceived as independent, self-subsisting properties of the world. On the contrary, they arise concurrently with the moral decisions of the individual will" (pg. 168-169)
  - ▪ "According to Kant, <u>the rational will is able to determine what actions are morally right by means of a rational procedure.</u> Specifically, **the moral agent is obliged to subject proposed maxims for action to <u>the test of universalizability.</u>** Kant believes that by means of this test internal contradictions will arise in morally fallacious maxims, and that these contradictions will then be self-evident to the moral agent. **The proposed action is morally permissible only if it can be willed by all rational agents without contradiction.** A proposed action that proves to be self-contradictory must then be discarded. The criterion of the rational will is therefore internal consistency, which is, according to Kant, the necessary and sufficient condition for moral action. **The moral action, *qua* consistent and universalizable, is the expression of the rational moral will"** (pg. 169)
    - □ "An appreciation of Kant's theory of morality is essential for understanding the background for the existentialists' deliberations on ethics. **Kant breaks with classical moral theory by largely rejecting the conception of a human being with a fixed essence which has a determinate content.** To be sure, he conceives of humans as essentially rational, but he limits this conception to the notion of a rational will that demands self-consistency. Kant thus prepares the ground for thinkers like <u>Sartre who categorically deny any *a priori* human essence that could serve as the basis of a moral theory</u>. Second, Kant breaks with medieval moral thought in his rejection of heteronomy. For freedom to be meaningful, only the individual moral will itself can form the moral law. <u>Kant discards the notion of God or any external source for moral commands, and focuses on the will of the individual.</u> **His theory of autonomy thus prepares the way for the existentialists, who insist on a form of voluntarism of the individual and deny that a given situation can ever fully determine an individual's action**" (pg. 169)
      - ◆ "<u>[the existentialists] reject his insistence on the ultimate rationality of the will and the ability of the individual to determine the morally correct action by means of a rational procedure. For the existentialists, reason, like a given moral situation, is itself always indeterminate and thus cannot ultimately be used to guide action.</u> A number of given maxims may be internally consistent but yet at odds with one another. Here reason alone cannot adjudicate, and i**t becomes clear that logical consistency is not a sufficient condition for determining moral action.** Thus, to appeal to it as a justification for a given action is inauthentic since it would be no different from appealing to an external fact of the matter which purportedly compelled one to act as one did. **The existentialists therefore in essence retain Kant's conception of autonomy while freeing the will from the shackles of a necessary moral law dictated by reason"** (pg. 170)
        - ◇ *\*Though they claim 'reason is indeterminate' (i.e., little to enough), they themselves had to reason their way to such a conclusion, where, ultimately, they found reason enough for rebuking the value / nature of reason altogether. Thus, where they suppress the significance of reason as a means, they, as a direct consequence of their 'forgetfulness', (mistaking) afford excess stature to the apparent insignificance of reason as an end – 'apparent' because they deceive themselves through their own 'forgetting'. Meaning, it's only because they forget how they arrived that they deem their end as 'all there is' (i.e., ultimate). It's only while 'forgetting' the former that one can in turn isolate and emblemize the end they pre-emptively sought in the first instance (i.e., prior to embarking). It takes reason to demand that reason is inadequate for making moral choices. Philosophers mistake themselves by retaining that which they fancy while ignoring altogether that which pressures them to do their job.*
        - ◇ *\*Karl Popper, in The Open Society and Its Enemies, says "The main philosophical malady of our time is an intellectual and moral relativism, the latter being at least in part based upon the former. By relativism - or, if you like, scepticism - I mean here, briefly, the theory that the choice between competing theories is arbitrary; since either, there is no such thing as objective truth; or, if there is, no such thing as a theory which is true or at any rate (though perhaps not true) nearer to the truth than another theory; or, if there are two or more theories, no ways or means of deciding whether one of them is better than another" (pg. 485). Popper continues, "...decisions enter into the critical method. But it is always a tentative decision, and a decision subject to criticism. As such it should be contrasted with what has been called 'decision' or 'leap in the dark' by some irrationalist or anti-rationalist or existentialist philosophers...[T]he irrationalist view of decisions is an exaggeration as well as an over-dramatization. Admittedly, we must decide. But unless we decide against listening to argument and reason, against learning from our mistakes, and against listening to others who may have objections to our views, our decisions need not be final; not even the decision to consider criticism. (It is only in its decision not to take an irrevocable leap into the darkness of irrationality*

*that rationalism may be said not to be self-contained...)" (pg. 496).*

- ○ "Kierkegaard was profoundly concerned with a number of ethical issues in the life of the individual." He was a deeply religious thinker, and his views on ethics are tightly bound up with his views on Christianity" (pg. 170)
    - ▪ "<u>One dominant strain of Kierkegaard's understanding of ethics is his rejection of all attempts to ground ethical action in rationality.</u> For Kierkegaard, every attempt to justify a given action must necessarily fail since there is always a gap between the reasons and arguments given for an act, and the demands of morality. This gap can only be spanned by a free decision of the individual. Kierkegaard distinguishes between the realm of science, which is characterized by a concern for evidence, justification and discursive reason, and the realm of religious belief and ethics, which is the sphere of individual choice. For Kierkegaard, scientific fields such as logic and geometry can justify certain conclusions from a given set of assumed premises without any gaps in the reasoning" (pg. 170-171)
    - ▪ "**For Kierkegaard, the realm of objectivity is a realm of necessity and logic, whereas the realm of subjectivity is governed by its own laws.** Regardless of how much objective knowledge one has or how rigorous a logician one is, the individual will always be confronted by moral choice where discursive knowledge and logic have no relevance and can offer no normative guidance. <u>Kierkegaard argues that if morality were simply a matter of working out a certain equation according to a utility calculus or of subjecting a maxim for action to the Kantian test of universalizability, then choice would be eliminated and humans would not be free.</u> Such procedures in effect produce a result and a plan for action independent of the individual since they are universal, objective procedures which, like a problem in mathematics, can in principle be worked out by any given moral subject. The real choice, which is perniciously hidden by theories of rationality, takes place much earlier when one chooses to allow one's action to be governed by a certain objective procedure of, for example, universalization, or an equation of a utility calculus. Thus, when one avails oneself of such methods, a decision has already taken place, and one has tacitly forfeited one's freedom in order to escape into the illusory security of the realm of rational foundations. For Kierkegaard, any theory which purports to ground morality in objective rational standards is simply a sham" (pg. 171)
        - □ *\*Kierkegaard's fear that 'choice' would be eradicated if morality held calculus is highly irrational and shortsighted. A mathematical equation can 'work' where each 'variable' involved retains it variability. The equation merely formats the overarching relation between things - but, as it should be noted, such 'things' are themselves still various (i.e., have for themselves 'possibility' to take on a variety of concrete realizations). So, it is incorrect to conceive of choice as being lost in reason-ability.*
    - ▪ "Despite the profoundly religious nature of Kierkegaard's thinking, many of his main ideas were taken up and developed by the atheistic existentialists such as Camus and Sartre, whose work can largely be seen as a secularized version of his views" (pg. 173)
- ○ "Perhaps the central theme in Dostoevsky's work is that of human freedom" (pg. 174)
    - ▪ "<u>Dostoevsky was consistently critical of materialism, determinism and other contemporary movements, which he saw as the enemies of freedom.</u> Such movements seemed in the eyes of many to be merely the logical outgrowth of the advances in the sciences in the nineteenth century. At that time fields such as psychology, economics, biology and chemistry seemed to be able to explain human behavior better than ever before, and even to offer the promise of a complete explanation in the future when, for instance, the social sciences would become more developed or when more would be known about the functions of the human brain. The view that science presents is that humans are simply biological machines determined wholly by nature and that once we understand fully the workings of nature, we will *ipso facto* have understood human beings. The idea of free will then comes to be regarded as an antiquated vestige of the dark ages of superstition, which has no place in the mechanistic world of science where every effect has a cause. For Dostoevsky, this view is one that human beings will rebel against for all eternity. He does not offer metaphysical refutations of this view, but instead simply claims that its results are intolerable for moral reasons. <u>Humans need to posit the idea of freedom as a sort of regulative ideal, even though it may be empirically unprovable.</u> Dostoevsky likewise criticized various forms of communism and utopian socialism that were in vogue in his day. The rapid growth of technology during Dostoevsky's time led some theorists to the view that it would be possible in the future to organize human society such that the physical needs of everyone were met. Given the high productivity made possible by modern machinery and mass production, it was thought to be merely a matter of organizing labor and distributing society's resources in an equitable fashion along socialist lines. The belief was that individuals must merely be educated to recognize their rationally calculated best interest, and they would act on it. If this could be done, then a new utopian age could be attained. Dostoevsky argues against this view once again on moral grounds. He contests the claim that humans will be happy and content if their physical needs are met. <u>Humans are more complex than cows, and require more than the satisfaction of physical needs.</u> There is a longing in human beings which remains even when all physical needs have been met. Humans are more than simply utility maximizers, and their actions cannot be explained merely as the result of enlightened self-interest. They do not lucidly perceive their best interest and then act upon it. Dostoevsky was suspicious of all utilitarian or socialist theories which claimed to know the rational best interest of humanity. He believed such theories could only lead to a limitation of human freedom. They fail to take into account the vast realm of the irrational in the human soul, and therefore can never be a satisfactory explanation of human beings and human existence. Dostoevsky thus criticizes social contract theory, which sees the end of the state as the well-being and security of the individual. Human existence cannot be lived as something static or complete, as in a utopia. Instead, man needs striving and becoming to be what he is" (pg. 174-175)
        - □ "<u>Dostoevsky rejects all rationalistic attempts to understand human nature and to ground morality.</u> On his view, reason is simply a formal ability that is employed, for example, to work out a mathematics problem, but in and of itself it is unable to recognize or distinguish between good and evil. Thus, modern science, which is founded on reason, is ultimately a moral void since it produces new technologies and new information but can offer no moral guidelines with regard to how to use them. **The seat of morality for Dostoevsky is thus not reason but <u>a spontaneous inner feeling</u> which he sometimes refers to as "conscience."** For Dostoevsky, all human beings are in possession of a natural moral impulse which immediately protests against immoral acts; in these cases, it is absurd when the Kantian or the utilitarian seeks the universal rule that applies to the particular case in question in order to demonstrate that the act is wrong. Moral conscience already knows that it is wrong, and reason can only obfuscate this by, for example, trying to rationalize an immoral action by giving discursive arguments and general laws which seek to portray it as morally correct. In this sense, reason is merely sophistry since it cannot of itself distinguish between good and evil, or offer moral insight" (pg. 175)
            - ◆ *\*I'm not sure how these thinkers, who ground themselves on spontaneity, expect to achieve societal harmony. How does spontaneity produce / effect order?*
    - ▪ "For Dostoevsky, the essential freedom at the center of human existence is not a liberating quality as it is for later writers such as Camus; instead, it is a negative formula, a prescription or invitation for nihilism. Dostoevsky's memorable character, Ivan Karamazov, says that if God does not exist, then "everything is allowed." The idea is that if we understand ethics to be the result of divine command, as either the old Law handed down to Moses or the new Law embodied by Christ, then ethical principles and values have an absolute sanction in God. Thus, <u>although individuals and particular cultures might have differing ethical ideas, these are merely human constructions which do not have absolute validity since only God's divine commands enjoy this absolute, universal status.</u> There is therefore a fundamental ontological difference between divine commands and human ones. **Thus, to deny God's existence is to invite ethical nihilism since this denial is tantamount to a denial of absolute ethical values. To say that God does not exist is also to sweep away the ontological grounding of ethics. The only values left would be relative, contingent human ones. In this sense everything is permitted since no one set of human values or human moral code could be**

**placed above or preferred to any other.** Every ethical command or prohibition would merely be the statement of an individual culture, tradition or person, which could be called into question by reference to other moral laws from other cultures. Dostoevsky thus understands the question as a kind of either-or proposition: <u>either God exists and there is a transcendent meaning and value, or he does not exist and everything is permitted.</u> Dostoevsky is sensitive to the fact that the modern secular age has made the belief in God problematic, but he is worried by the consequences of a world without God. The choice that he presents is then essentially between Christ, the God-man, and any number of forms of the demonic which try to make man into a god" (pg. 175-176)

- □ *to force ones attention upon these two extreme positions is, at the same time, ignore the unexplored place between each. Even more, the latter conclusion (that no moral human code can exist in the absence of a God) is merely the former inversely re-posed. So, really, we're not dealing with more than one proposition - it's only one said twice.*

- "While **Dostoevsky believes that moral feeling is the source of morality**, he, unlike some of the romantics and theorists of moral sentiment, is <u>not led to the conclusion that morality is purely subjective or arbitrary due to the fact that it depends on the conscience of the individual.</u> On the contrary, he believes that there is a correlation between individual conscience and divine law. The revelation of the moral law in the life of Christ provides us with a model for ethical action. It is a model based not on reason or on universal rules, but on the life of an individual. This divine law then forms the basis of our moral conscience. Although we have a natural moral sentiment in conscience which corresponds to the divine law, this does not imply that we are determined by it. On the contrary, <u>humans always have the freedom to listen to their voice of conscience or ignore it</u>. Dostoevsky's social ethic is essentially one of human brotherhood and solidarity based on the model of Christ's life. But this cannot come about in modern technological society where human intercourse is governed by self-interest and rational calculation. Brotherhood is based on <u>a spontaneous feeling of love</u> which <u>has been destroyed by Western rationalism</u>. Dostoevsky thus sees modern views of socialism as contradictory in their attempt to arrive at a society with human fraternity and solidarity based on rational calculation. Moreover, socialism demands a sacrifice of the individual and a surrender to the social whole. By contrast, for Dostoevsky, in order to be an individual, one must live in brotherhood with others on the basis of love, not mutual advantage. <u>The individual is in a dialectical relation to society</u> and is thus not exterminated and asked to sacrifice himself wholly" (pg. 177)

- "**Dostoevsky is counted along with Kierkegaard as a leading spokesman for theistic existentialism, although his influence has probably been most profound among the atheistic existentialists**" (pg. 177)

○ "Nietzsche was important in shaping much of the thinking of the later tradition of atheistic existentialism in that he was the first to try to offer a positive solution to the problems posed for ethics and morality by the absence of God or any transcendent power" (pg. 178)

- "Since Christians had no power in this world, they consoled themselves with the promise of emancipation in another sphere. This conception of morality, for Nietzsche, inverts and distorts humanity's nature, which is a will to express and exercise its own power. **Nietzsche often uses the metaphor of an illness to describe the effect of Christianity on modern Europe. Like a cancer, it has deprived modern man of his natural strengths and abilities by making him feel embarrassed and leaving him with a guilty conscience when he does exercise his natural powers.** Nietzsche is critical of any number of contemporary movements such as socialism, democracy and utilitarianism, which he sees as outgrowths of Christian morality. These movements merely coordinate the weakness of the masses or "the herd" into a collective strength with which it can effectively oppress the great spirits, and enforce a rule of mediocrity in which the weakness and ignorance of the individual become less visible. These movements are, for Nietzsche, pessimistic and life-denying in that they stifle the creative natural impulses of the individual. <u>Nietzsche never worked out a systematic ethic in response to his moral diagnosis of the age</u>, but he did manage to formulate a number of suggestions which might be regarded as guidelines leading in the direction of an ethic. One of these suggestions is <u>his doctrine of the eternal return</u>. This is essentially a metaphysical doctrine which Nietzsche regards as implying a kind of regulative moral principle. One problem with Christianity, as he sees it, is that it understands life as a linear progression leading teleologically to an eternal existence in heaven. This tends to take value and importance away from mundane life, which is then regarded as a mere trial or warm-up for the real life which only comes later. <u>Nietzsche suggests that we replace this linear conception of time with a cyclical view in line with that often found in Greek thought.</u> If we consider the universe to be like the seasons which come and go and then return again for all eternity, then we are obliged to think of our lives and actions in radically different terms. If the universe is a repeating cycle, then all of our deeds will be repeated for all eternity. Thus, each action is equally important in itself and is not merely of relative importance in relation to some illusory future event. The ethical result that Nietzsche hopes to achieve with this view is that **one will try to live one's life such that one can affirm all of one's actions without regret or misgiving**. <u>One must conceive of each action as a good in itself, and not merely as a means or stepping stone to some future action. One must be able to will each of one's actions to be repeated for an eternity.</u> It should be noted that **this principle is normatively neutral, and offers no guidance about precisely what is good or bad or worthwhile**" (pg. 179-180)

- □ *this 'cyclical' view takes time as a key component for making decisions - that is, what we do now will directly impact what will be tomorrow (i.e., eternity). Meaning, what each moment risks is becoming forever unalterable (i.e., eternal).*

- "Nietzsche's view of moral life can be seen as a response to Kant's account of autonomy. While he agrees with Kant in regarding the self-determining will of the individual as the focus of ethical action, he departs radically from the Kantian view in his conception of how the will decides and acts autonomously. **For Nietzsche, morality is concerned with ideals or virtues which are posited by the individual**. Unlike in Kant's conception, <u>these ideals are not in need of any universal validity or internal consistency; moreover, they need not be conducive to the compatibility of individual wills in the social sphere.</u> **The ideals and virtues of the overmen are the expression of their own individual choice, and require no further justification either from the inherent nature of the virtue or ideal itself**, or from the general approbation of others. The only criterion seems to be that the virtues be life-enhancing in the sense that they are conducive to the expression of the will to power. Likewise, the ideals posited by the overmen have a claim on them alone, and are not universalized or extended to others" (pg. 181)

○ "While <u>Heidegger's work</u> must be mentioned in any account of existentialist thought, it <u>is ostensibly concerned primarily with ontology and not ethics</u>. Although Heidegger never developed an ethical theory, the way in which ethical terms enter into his ontological analyses attests to a deep overriding ethical concern" (pg. 181)

- "Heidegger conceives of *Dasein* as being always already in a relation to the sphere of objects. <u>Much of *Being and Time* is dedicated to uncovering or disclosing this, for Heidegger, primordial relation to objects by means of an extended phenomenological analysis.</u> Heidegger's critique of much of the scientific and philosophical tradition is that it has forgotten this precognitive sphere by abstracting individual objects out of their original context, and thus giving an account of them as monadic and isolated. According to Heidegger, our fundamental relation to objects is that of use. Objects are "ready-to-hand" (zuhanden) in that they **already exist** in a larger schema of use before it is possible for us to abstract them from this schema and analyze them scientifically. Heidegger says that **human beings are thrown into the world in that we find ourselves surrounded by objects, practices and meanings which we did not create**. He calls this "facticity," which is intended to refer to the overarching network of meaning and practice which Dasein always already finds itself in. It has been noted that <u>Heidegger has a much more unified or integrated conception of human existence than Sartre</u>, whose Cartesian dualism of en-soi and pour-soi seems radically to separate the subject from the world, and thus to bestow on that subject an absolute and radical freedom. Heidegger avoids this with the very notion of Dasein which is fundamentally constituted by its being-in-the-world, i.e. by the fact that it is always already surrounded by objects and is bound up in their uses and meanings" (pg. 182)

- "For Heidegger, **time is an essential dimension of the constitution of human subjects.** Dasein is the kind of being which always projects toward a future. It is the future which contains countless possibilities and in which Dasein will realize its projects. Its orientation in the present is always with respect to this transcendence. However, the projection into the future is compromised by the countless petty distractions of daily life. **One falls into routines and habits and busies oneself with the chores of daily existence, and by so doing one forgets the original question of one's being and one's projection into a future.** One seeks refuge in the crowd, or what Heidegger calls the "they" or "das Man," in order to escape from the question of one's own being. In this way Dasein becomes inauthentic. Much of the first part of Being and Time is dedicated to outlining these forms of inauthenticity. In Part Two Heidegger attempts to determine the form of Dasein's possible authentic existence. For Heidegger, the key to authenticity lies in the concept of Angst, usually translated as "dread" or "anxiety." Angst is the vague feeling or mood that we experience when contemplating the finitude of our human existence. We see in the future the termination of our life in death. The feeling of Angst is crucial for authenticity since it tears the individual out of the routine of daily habit. Moreover, the Angst in relation to one's own death specifically calls attention back to the individual and does not allow him or her to seek refuge in the crowd. Thus, what Heidegger calls "being-towards-death" represents the possibility of an authentic existence. **From *Being and Time* one can discern the vague outlines of an ethics of authenticity.** Despite Heidegger's interest in history and his concept of being-with (Mitsein), according to which Dasein is always already in relation with other human subjects, his ethics seems to be confined to the individual. **Heidegger's conception of authenticity is a call to the individual to keep resolutely before his eye the finitude of his own existence.** Like the overman's virtues for Nietzsche, Heidegger's account of authenticity has a reflexive or self-referential character in that it concerns only the particular moral agent and does not make any claim to govern inter-subjective human relations. Unlike Nietzsche, who claims that the overmen could have a number of different and even conflicting virtues or moral ideals, with the only overarching criterion being that the virtues be expressions of the will to power, **Heidegger seems to limit the possible virtues to one - authenticity**. Unfortunately, in his later work Heidegger never developed an ethics or social theory explicitly. However, some of the French existentialists, who were inspired by him, attempted to work out ethical views based on some of his intuitions. But Heidegger violently rejected these attempts and distanced himself from French existentialism" (pg. 182-183)
  - "one will be disappointed if one hopes to find in these *Notebooks for an Ethics* a systematic statement of his ethical views since the notes, although providing a fuller picture, nevertheless remain rather fragmentary and fall short of a complete account. However, a great deal of other material on ethics from Sartre's hand is yet to be published, and it is conceivable that a more systematic picture may eventually emerge" (pg. 187)
    - "In the body of *Being and Nothingness* itself, Sartre sketches an elaborate ontological theory, but the focus is not exclusively on ontology since it is clear that he ultimately wants to draw ethical consequences from the ontological basis that he establishes. **The central theme in all of Sartre's writings, as well as in his ethical views, is that of human freedom.** Like Kierkegaard, Sartre emphasizes the choice of the individual independent of rational arguments or discursive reason. With his famous slogan, "existence comes before essence," he denies traditional claims that there is some kind of human nature which could determine the individual ahead of time. On the contrary, for Sartre, human beings have no predetermined essence; rather, they simply exist. As a result, **it is the responsibility of the individual to create his own essence through his actions.** Human beings are essentially defined by their deeds, or, as Sartre puts it, "Man is the sum of his actions." This, however, implies a mutable essence which changes with one's actions. For the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*, **the central ethical virtue is to accept this freedom and to lead one's life accordingly by being aware of one's free choices and taking responsibility for their consequences**. But this is by no means an easy task. The ontological fact of radical freedom which Sartre announces is both liberating and terrifying. Sartre says, "Man is condemned to be free," by which he means that the fact of freedom is not something that we can greet with unqualified joy but instead is something which, like a prison sentence, we are condemned to, something we face with uncertainty and anguish. When the individual realizes that the world is essentially a nothingness without human beings and their projects, and that only through free acts do individuals create themselves, then this nothingness and the concomitant responsibility become something terrifying since each individual alone must bear the entire burden of responsibility to for his own life. However, this freedom is not merely terrifying, for it is also liberating. Sartre's character Orestes in the play *The Flies* (1943) embodies this double-edged sword. He is aware of his freedom, which liberates him to the point that he is capable of anything, even challenging the gods, but it also makes it possible for him to commit terrifying acts such as killing his mother, acts which he must take responsibility for and live with" (pg. 187-188)
      - "**Human beings create many mechanisms by means of which they try to deny the fact of freedom to themselves, and thus escape from the responsibility of their moral choice.** This denial Sartre calls "bad faith." In an insightful psychological analysis, Sartre explains two forms that this denial takes" (pg. 188)
        - "(1) "Escape to facticity" is the denial of one's freedom by attempting to define oneself as an object with a fixed essence. If one had a pre-given essence, then one would enjoy a metaphysical certainty, and there would no longer be any contingency in one's existence. When one defines one's being, for example, by saying "I am a doctor," there is often an attempt to portray one's position as a fixed fact about the universe, as if there were no history of choice behind it, as if one were born a doctor and could never have been anything else. One pretends to be a doctor in the same way a chair is a chair, namely as a fixed fact of the matter. But unlike chairs, humans have no fixed essence and are always creating themselves. Likewise, when one tries to justify one's actions by fixed facts about the world, one tries to portray oneself as something fixed and determined by outward circumstances. If these assertions and self-definitions were true, then one would be relieved of the burden of moral responsibility since things are simply what they are by nature and cannot change. When one says, for example, "I could not come because I was too busy," one tries to portray one's being busy as a fact of the universe independent of one's individual choice or will. One forgets that one has already made certain choices and set certain priorities such that doing one thing is more important than doing another. This is in bad faith since what was originally a choice is later portrayed as a fixed fact beyond the individual's control. According to this version of bad faith, one tries to escape one's freedom by becoming a fact or a thing" (pg. 188)
        - "(2) "Escape to transcendence" is the other form of bad faith. Here the individual always defers judgment based on past actions and refers to an indefinite future where one's true essence is thought to lie. This represents an absolute and inauthentic denial of certain past actions by means of a retreat into the transcendent realm of the future. Despite, for example, one's history of cowardice and knavery, one is still free to define oneself and to create one's essence in the future. The individual portrays himself not as a knave but rather as a hero, since in the future, he asserts, he will perform heroic acts. For Sartre, this is an attempt to escape from the responsibility and the free choices of one's past by appeal to an indeterminate future. There is no deed so ignominious that one cannot try to ignore it and make it unimportant by pointing into the future. One is one's actions, and to that extent one must admit to being a coward; but this does not mean that one is condemned to be a coward forever, since one is always creating oneself through new actions and thus one might in part erase an ignominious past through heroic actions; but the proof is in the actions themselves, not in good intentions and promises about the future. Thus, on this version of bad faith, one escapes freedom by fleeing into a transcendent future" (pg. 188-189)
      - "**For Sartre, human beings are caught in the dialectic of facticity and transcendence.** He says paradoxically: "...we have to deal with human reality as a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is." By this he means that on the one hand, we are in a sense a certain set of facts of the matter, i.e. we are the sum total of our past actions, but on the other hand, this is not something static or fixed

as a tree or a table is a set of facts. On the contrary, our past is always being reinterpreted by the future and the present as our goals and projects change. Our past is indeterminate since it lends itself to an infinite number of possible interpretations, and in this sense we are what we are not since there is always a part of us which is indeterminate, namely, that part with relation to our future. <u>Authenticity lies in being aware of both aspects of this dialectical relation and, as a result, taking responsibility for oneself and the world</u>" (pg. 189)

- ◆ "Sartre's theory of responsibility is often couched on somewhat radical terms, which has led to a great deal of misunderstanding and criticism of his views" (pg. 189)
- ▪ "Sartre's ethics is clearly focused on the individual, and there is at least in his early work no attempt to sketch a theory of social ethics" (pg. 189)
  - □ "On the contrary, in Being and Nothingness Sartre argues that human relations invariably reduce to either sadism or masochism, and that a social ethics based on solidarity or mutual recognition is in principle impossible" (pg. 189-190)
- ▪ "In his later work, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), Sartre attempted a grand synthesis of existentialism and Marxism in which he tried to sketch a social ethic along Marxist lines. But in order to do so, <u>he was obliged to revise radically, and even reject, a number of his earlier views.</u> Sartre's work has been highly influential in a number of different fields. His personality was the focal point of the French existentialist movement during its most popular period. Along with Merleau-Ponty, he was largely responsible for introducing the work of Husserl and Heidegger into the Francophone world. His diverse literary works, which include novels, plays and essays, make him perhaps the best-known and most read of all the existential thinkers. Although it is clear that he was profoundly interested in questions of ethics, his contributions to the field are limited primarily to moral psychology. It can only be regretted that the companion piece to *Being and Nothingness*, dedicated to ethical theory, never materialized, and that so much of his work remained a preface to ethics rather than an ethical theory in its own right" (pg. 190)
  - ○ "As is well known, Simone de Beauvoir was Sartre's closest associate" (pg. 190)
    - ▪ "Attentive to the charges raised against existentialism and Sartre in particular for the problems involved in an existentialist ethic, de Beauvoir attempts in these works to respond to the critics by putting forth a positive view. In both texts <u>she is anxious to counter the charge of solipsism that was leveled against Sartre</u>. **It was claimed that Sartre's ontology precluded any meaningful ethical action since individuals were radically separated from one another**. De Beauvoir attempts in these works to demonstrate that the freedom of the individual is necessarily linked to the freedom of others. Her goal is thus in part to develop an ethic that can make sense of the social and political sphere in general, and not just the mental life of the individual" (pg. 190-191)
      - □ "The first part of her work [*Pyrrhus and Cineas*] treats the question of individual value and action. She notes that <u>human beings cannot remain at rest for long; there is something about the nature of human activity that compels us forward and makes us want to set out on new undertakings.</u> We quickly become bored in a completely static condition, even if it might appear at first glance to be a very attractive one. Thus humans cannot help but constantly have new projects, and the problem is how to justify or ground them. **Authentic people realize that they are the authors of their own undertakings, and for this reason no ultimate or transcendent grounding is possible.** <u>The project itself is its own justification</u>; but since our projects are always freely chosen, that justification is always contingent. The second part of the work then takes up the individual in relation to others, i.e. the community, social group or humanity as a whole. De Beauvoir begins by noting that <u>humans **need** the recognition of others</u>; for our projects to make sense, they must be understood and appreciated by other people. While she claims that individuals cannot limit the freedom of other individuals, nonetheless it is obvious that our actions do influence others. This enjoins us to act in a way that is conducive to other people in their pursuit of their freedom. She argues that one is invariably obliged to treat others as free individuals. Through language one implicitly respects others as free by speaking with them and listening to them. Even in a relation between a master and a slave the linguistic communication between the two implies a recognition of the latter's freedom. <u>The master always knows at some level that the slave is free</u>. From this it follows that in our actions we should treat others as free. It is thus always possible to join together with others to work for a common cause. I am free to make a case to others about the best project to be pursued, and to work with them to realize it. However, **since human beings are free, they pursue different and contradictory goals. As a result, they often come to impede or even actively work against one another in the pursuit of their goals.** <u>De Beauvoir claims that given this fact, we are condemned to violence.</u> We should in principle treat others as free and attempt to persuade them to join us in our projects, but this is not always possible since some people are sadly beyond rational persuasion. In such cases, de Beauvoir seems to grant that <u>violence is warranted</u>" (pg. 191-192)
        - ◆ *\*This is quite ridiculous*
    - ▪ "In *The Ethics of Ambiguity* from 1947…De Beauvoir begins with the philosophical anthropology sketched initially by Kierkegaard in The Sickness unto Death and recast by Sartre. According to this view, **human existence is essentially contradictory or paradoxical. Human beings are a part of nature insofar as they have physical bodies and are finite and limited. However, by virtue of self-consciousness, human beings also transcend nature and are infinite and unlimited, free beings. The human experience is lived within this tension. De Beauvoir portrays this as an ambiguity that is a natural fact of the human condition**. She attempts then to formulate an ethics based on this fundamental fact" (pg. 192)
      - □ "<u>She portrays the basic human situation as one of failure: human beings are forever attempting to create absolutes and eternal truths</u>, but these attempts always fall short. **We are then obliged to realize that there are no ultimate truths and must accept that we live in a world where truth and value are of our own making.** This means, however, that this truth and value will be ambiguous in the sense that other people will have different truths and values, and I will often be obliged to negotiate mine in relation to them. **The ethics of ambiguity refuses all predetermined values given by some external authority**, such as God or a political party. This would deny the fundamental ambiguity of existence, and treat values as factually existing. She gives detailed descriptions of specific kinds of individuals such as the fascist, the communist, the racist, the slave-holder, the colonialist, and so on, who erroneously reify and absolutize their ends, although they know at some level that these are finite and contingent. <u>By absolutizing their own goals, such people come to regard others, and especially others who oppose their goals, as inessential or even as impediments. This invariably leads to different forms of violence and oppression.</u> Those people who claim to be working in the service of some higher absolute truth or ideal have no scruples about sacrificing others or using them as means to this end. De Beauvoir rejects this form of thinking and its pernicious results. Instead, **she proposes that one embrace the ambiguity by accepting that <u>one is responsible for the creation of one's own values and meanings</u>**. By realizing this, one knows that one can never justify the suffering or oppression of others due to one's own self-made values. The upshot of her analysis seems to be that the many pitfalls of the modern, morally dubious characters mentioned above can be avoided if one authentically realizes and accepts the finitude of one's own values, and accepts responsibility for this in one's actions. She thus argues that the ethics of ambiguity, far from undermining or destroying ethics, in fact makes it possible. **It is rather the absolutists who destroy ethics by appealing to some abstract and illusory universal, and who thereby inauthentically attempt to escape from their freedom and thus their responsibility.** Although ethical values are ambiguous this does not mean, as is often claimed, that they are absurd or meaningless. Since we live in a world and exist in specific situations we always have values, goals and projects that we have invested with meaning. While this is, to be sure, not an absolute or transcendent meaning, it is still significant" (pg. 192-193)
        - ◇ *\*so, is 'truth' the aligning of human values?*
      - ◆ "If there is an implicit value claim in de Beauvoir's work, it is surely the notion that the promotion of freedom is good, and the limitation or retardation of freedom in any form is bad. While this is a more or less unargued thesis, it could well be that she

assumed it to be uncontroversial. It does, however, give her the ability to criticize any number of nefarious social and political forces in a way that would seem to be off-limits to a more relativistic view" (pg. 194)

- "The situation of ethics is similar in that we are always striving in the sphere of ambiguity with the consciousness that we will never reach any absolute values. The very nature of ethics presupposes this ambiguous field and could not exist without it" (pg. 194)

○ "Existentialism's contribution to ethics has often been overlooked due to the fact that modern commentators mistakenly tend to seek universal rules for conduct, which are generally taken to be the mark of an ethical theory. When they fail to find such rules among the existentialists, they conclude that existentialism has no ethics. But this in effect merely reflects the modern prejudice in favor of rule-based theories, and fails to recognize that existentialism is working within a wholly different tradition of ethical thought. In fact, in its rejection of formalism and all general rules for ethical conduct, existentialism can be seen as applied ethics. The existentialists turn to the individual and the concrete moral situation, and reject abstract theorizing about the proper application of rules to individual cases" (pg. 194)

- "In order to understand and appreciate existentialism's contribution to ethical thought, it is useful to place it within the larger tradition of ethics and social theory. **In the history of ethics, a distinction is often drawn between theories that concentrate on the cultivation of virtuous character traits in the individual, which are designated "virtue-based ethics," and those that aim to give rules for proper conduct, which are generally referred to as "rule-based ethics." Much of ancient ethical theory is characterized by the former, and much of modern by the latter**. Ancient theories of ethics such as those of Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, Epicureanism and Augustine focus primarily on the moral character of the individual as such. Theories of this sort are characterized by the fact that they concentrate primarily on what virtue amounts to, and how to live in accordance with it. Given that rules cannot guide moral action on this view, the goal of moral life is to cultivate a virtuous character which can make the right decisions in the particular moral situation. In addition, these theories enumerate the various vices and try to explain how to avoid them. Moreover, the virtues that were traditionally emphasized were ones such as humility, continence and temperance, which referred primarily to the individual and had only a secondary reference to relations with others. Like the virtues, the vices, for example, gluttony, garrulousness and incontinence, also focus primarily on the individual" (pg. 194-195)

- "Modern philosophy tends to conceive of the question of moral life differently. In the modern world "after virtue," ethics is considered not to be something which concerns virtue alone but rather universal rules for action. **For modern theories such as those of Kant or the utilitarians, the focus is on some universal principle which transcends the individual and which should govern individual conduct and inter-subjective relations**. These general principles are, for example, the "categorical imperative" or "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." For these theories, the moral life of the individual is conceived as the general correspondence of the individual will with some universal. While there are areas of overlap, and the distinction between virtue-based theories and rule-based ones cannot be conceived as absolute, this is nevertheless useful for understanding the various approaches to ethics in the history of Western thought" (pg. 195)

- "**The existentialists in some respects revive the ancient tradition, in large part in protest against the modern focus on the universal**. Like these ancient theories, existentialism is skeptical of the possibility of universal laws giving direction in particular moral situations. No universal rule or system can tell the individual what to do in the particular instance since such rules are always indeterminate and every ethical situation unique. For the existentialists, the individual must decide on their own without recourse to rules. Thus, the existentialists are primarily concerned with the inward, subjective life of the individual. Although the existentialists, with the exception of Nietzsche, do not tend to speak of virtue per se, there is a clear family resemblance between their accounts of the ethical life and traditional virtue-based theories. Seen in this light **the primary, if not the only, virtue for existentialism is authenticity,** which amounts, generally speaking, to the acceptance of one's freedom and moral responsibility" (pg. 195-196)

  □ "While authenticity can be regarded as the highest virtue among the existentialists, the way in which this is interpreted among the individual thinkers varies. For Kierkegaard, the development of one's inwardness and subjectivity before God has the distinct look of a virtue. For Dostoevsky, virtue involves listening to the voice of conscience or spontaneous moral sentiment and not allowing oneself to be led astray by the sophistry of reason. For Nietzsche, independence, strength, creativity and other classical Greek virtues are revived and reinstituted as moral character traits worth striving after in a godless world. Heidegger's conception of virtue is an authentic mode of existence in being-towards-death. For Camus, there is a sense in which maintaining human dignity and avoiding giving way to despair can be regarded as virtues. Virtue, for Sartre, is clearly the acceptance of one's freedom and moral responsibility according to the dialectic of facticity and transcendence" (pg. 196)

  □ "By the same token, all of the existentialists have some sort of theory which corresponds to the ancients' account of the vices or character flaws, namely, a theory of what constitutes an inauthentic human life. Any attempt to escape from one's freedom via inauthenticity is for the existentialists a moral vice, but once again inauthenticity is interpreted differently among the various thinkers. For Kierkegaard, inauthenticity is the mark of the absent-minded objective thinker, who forgets his own inwardness and subjectivity in the course of his striving for objective knowledge. For Dostoevsky, it is found in one who allows himself to be subjected to the false rules and conceptions of the good life offered by the various demagogues and ideologues of the modern world. Inauthenticity is a feature of the collective mass or, for Nietzsche, "the herd," where the individual finds comfort for his own weakness, and by so doing loses his individuality and natural strengths. This is, of course, similar to Heidegger's notion of "the they" or "das Man" to which the individual tries to escape. Camus' criticism of those thinkers who seek solace from the absurd by retreating to a position of metaphysical comfort can be seen as a theory of inauthenticity and modern vice. Likewise, for Sartre any attempt to escape from one's freedom is inauthentic and a clear sign of a moral character flaw or vice" (pg. 196)

- "While existentialism can be seen as a continuation of ancient virtue-based theories in the sense that it focuses on virtues and vices, and in the sense that it rejects universal rules for conduct, it nevertheless departs from the ancient tradition - not only in its conception of these virtues and vices, but also in its denial of the notion of a natural good or of human nature. For Plato and Aristotle, for example, human beings have a fixed essence. From this objective account of human nature they generate a theory of virtue which indicates how the individual can lead a flourishing, virtuous life given that fixed nature. Likewise, they believe that there are specific natural ends which all humans strive after, and from this objective account of natural ends, such as happiness, they derive an account of how one ought to act to achieve these ends. If we take Sartre's definition that existence precedes essence as existentialism's principle dogma, then **existentialism clearly rejects both the notion of a fixed human nature and that of natural ends or goods**. Human beings are essentially a nothingness until they create themselves through their actions. Likewise, there are no universal a priori or fixed goods apart from determinate projects which humans posit for themselves. (It seems that all of the existentialists except Nietzsche and Kierkegaard would accept this. Contrary to the other existentialists, for Nietzsche there is a sense of a determinate human nature which has been corrupted by Christianity and Christian ethics. So also for Kierkegaard: humans, being created by God, have a fixed essence)" (pg. 197)

- "Existentialism's rejection of natural essences and ends is bound up with the very conception of authenticity which, as has been seen, all of the existentialists espouse in one form or another. **In order to be authentic, one must be free and take responsibility for one's freedom**. A fixed human nature or essence would seem to limit one's freedom ahead of time. If there were such an essence, then one would have natural proclivities to do or not to do something, and human freedom would be no greater than the freedom of animals which are determined by nature. One might argue, as indeed the ancient virtue theorists do, that a determinate human nature does not necessarily preclude freedom

since one's essence or nature might only determine one's actions partially. But on this view, one could always escape from one's freedom by appeal to one's essence or nature. Any number of failures to live up to the standard of full authenticity could always be minimized with platitudes to the effect that such failures or shortcomings are only human. Thus, for the existentialists, the very possibility of virtue, understood as authenticity, is only made possible by the denial of a fixed human essence and of natural human ends. In this sense the existentialists, in their rejection of the metaphysical underpinnings of classical virtue-based theories, can be seen as making an original contribution to the discussion while working within the same general tradition of ethical thought. Understood as a theory in line with the classical doctrines of virtue, **existentialism can be seen as perhaps the most significant alternative to the formal, rule-based theories of ethics that have dominated modern ethical thought**" (pg. 197-198)

- ▪ Chapter 10 - Merleau-Ponty's Criticism of Sartre's Theory of Freedom (pg. 199)
  - ○ "it is clear that in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre sets as his end the establishment of the ontological basis for human freedom since he intends later to derive ethical consequences from it" (pg. 200)
    - ▪ "The theory of freedom 18 years later in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is not the same as that in *Being and Nothingness*, and his account of the powers of socialization only eight years later in *Saint Genet: Actor and Martyr* seems to contradict some of the basic tenets of his early work. As one can readily observe from his comments in a number of interviews, Sartre tempers considerably his claims about the absolute scope of freedom" (pg. 201)
  - ○ "Sartre's view makes freedom independent of any particular action, and by so doing destroys the very concept of action. In order to establish freedom, we must attempt to determine certain characteristics of action as criteria by which we can distinguish a free act from one that is not free. But when any action at all counts as free by virtue of the fact that freedom is synonymous with consciousness or existence in general, then the idea of freedom is rendered meaningless" (pg. 202)
    - ▪ "Sartre's theory lends itself to this criticism in many ways, since it seems as if it has confined freedom to mere freedom of thought and by so doing has made it such that we are always free" (pg. 203)
  - ○ "It is important to note that Sartre operates with two different notions of freedom, only one of which is addressed here by Merleau-Ponty. There is first the fundamental sense in which we are always free to choose our project. Here freedom characterizes what we are as human beings, and distinguishes us from objects. This notion has been referred to as "ontological freedom" or "categorial freedom." In other words, for Sartre it is the very ontological nature of consciousness to be free. Freedom is our way of being in the world. In this sense, it is the same as consciousness. It is this conception of freedom that Merleau-Ponty's first argument rightly takes issue with. Clearly on this ontological account, the very notion of freedom is in jeopardy; however, there is another more measured notion of freedom in Sartre which can be called "freedom in situation" or "contingent freedom." This is the kind of freedom we have when we choose the means for a given end; thus, it is "contingent" with respect to the posited end and takes place only in a "situation" determined and created by that end. It is clear that Merleau-Ponty recognizes both of these notions of freedom, but he seems to address only one of them with this criticism" (pg. 204)
    - ▪ **"In many ways Sartre seems to be his own worst enemy by presenting his theory with so many paradoxical formulae which so readily lend themselves to misinterpretation"** (pg. 205)
  - ○ "Our intuitive notion of freedom as autonomy is one that involves commitment and responsibility. In the philosophical tradition, theories of freedom are often accompanied by theories of morality and, as has been noted, it is clear that Sartre also wants to derive moral conclusions from his theory of freedom. Above all, he wants to be able to derive a strong notion of human responsibility. But according to Merleau-Ponty's second counterargument, the theory of radical freedom rules out the very possibility of a meaningful conception of responsibility since it conceives of action simply as an isolated monadic instant entirely separated from the past and the future…" (pg. 205)
    - ▪ "Free acts must be acts that have meaningful results and which imply commitments. **If each act can immediately be erased by the next without there being any meaningful pattern of logic behind them, and no continuity of character in the individual can be discerned in this chaos of freedom, then there can be no talk of genuine autonomy or ethical responsibility which rests on some conception of concern, or commitment to a general conception of moral obligation to other human beings. Freedom cannot be seen as isolated instances**. A free act must be one that is performed in the context of a freely chosen project, one that is done in accordance with the project. If, however, there is not a project that fixes the background or horizon of action, and one merely acts arbitrarily, as if by whim, then there can be no talk of moral responsibility or rationality" (pg. 205-206)
      - □ *\*such is why equivocating freedom with spontaneity is gross negligence.*
  - ○ "Not surprisingly, the two different conceptions of freedom that we are presented with here issue from two radically different conceptions of the individual human subject. **According to Sartre's dualistic view, the for-itself is fundamentally distinct and separate from the world. Thus, it is the subject or the for-itself alone which is entirely responsible for the creation of meaning and for the positing of particular projects.** For Sartre the individual is and must be free, since there is no genuine interaction with the world that might hinder freedom. Thus the individual can never be hindered in his projects by the world, but only by limitations which he himself posits and recognizes. The fundamental ontological concept for Merleau-Ponty is not the dualistic split of for-itself and in-itself, but rather the more Heideggerian-sounding notion of being-with" (pg. 214)
- ▪ Chapter 11 - Sartre an Merleau-Ponty on Consciousness and Bad Faith (pg. 215)
  - ○ "The theory of human consciousness is one of the hallmarks of the French existentialist movement. **For the French existentialists, the notion of consciousness is closely tied to that of freedom**. Indeed, <u>Sartre says that for him the two terms were synonymous</u>" (pg. 215)
  - ○ "Contrary to theories of the unconscious, Sartre argues that there is a "total translucency of consciousness," and it is perhaps this claim which best characterizes his theory in Being and Nothingness. He begins with the thesis that consciousness is transparent to itself, i.e. that it knows itself and its motives and desires, and as a result is fully cognizant of its actions. He then goes on to analyze forms of self-deception which he calls "bad faith" (mauvaise foi)" (pg. 215)
    - ▪ **"Sartre's theory of the cogito and human consciousness is essential for his project as a whole, since it serves to ground his theory of freedom and responsibility.** Sartre reports that he found the tools he needed to construct his own theory of consciousness in Husserl. It is Husserl's theory of intentionality and consciousness that forms the basis for Sartre's theory of the transparency of consciousness and everything that follows from it: freedom, responsibility, bad faith, and so on" (pg. 216)
      - □ "It is the very nature of consciousness to have a relation to representations, and thus all consciousness is directed toward or "intends" something. Sartre argues that this "positional consciousness" necessarily presupposes a non-cognitive relation of consciousness to itself: "However, <u>the necessary and sufficient condition for a knowing consciousness to be knowledge of its object, is that it be consciousness of itself as being that knowledge.</u> This is what Sartre refers to as "non-positional" or "non-thetic" consciousness. In order for me to be aware of an object, I must also implicitly be aware of my awareness. This is what Kant called the "transcendental unity of apperception," and what, for Sartre, is a fundamental precondition of all consciousness. This is not to imply that I am self-aware in every act of consciousness, since I can be so engaged in a particular activity that I forget myself" (pg. 216)
    - ▪ "This doctrine of the pre-reflective cogito is important for Sartre's theory, and can be seen in some ways as the very foundation stone of the rest of the book. **The self-conscious subject is transparent to itself. It is always intentional or positional in so far as it is always conscious of its relation to objects; but it is also always implicitly reflexive. This means for Sartre that self-consciousness is always implicitly aware of itself.**

**Ultimately, Sartre wants to make use of this account of the pre-reflective cogito to ground his account of freedom and human responsibility.** Thus he wishes to derive ethical consequences from this account, as is evinced by the moralizing tone in the "Bad Faith" chapter of Being and Nothingness. **Since a pre-reflective cogito is necessarily implied in every act of consciousness and thus constitutes the very nature of consciousness, we are always aware of our mental states.** Thus any appeal to something hidden from conscious-ness, such as unconscious desires or motivations, is rejected. In the section analyzed below Sartre refutes precisely Freud's account of the unconscious, arguing that what Freud attributes to the unconscious is in fact domiciled in consciousness. The conclusion that he wants to draw is an ethical one. <u>We cannot justify our actions by an appeal to the unconscious.</u> We have chosen, and we are aware of our choices. What Sartre sees in Husserl's theory is an account of consciousness upon which he can build in order to establish clear criteria for human responsibility. Thus we begin with an account of consciousness, which will lead to accounts of freedom and responsibility" (pg. 217)

- □ *we don't need an unconscious to make choices. However, that itself doesn't negate the existence and role of the unconscious. You explain away this 'always aware of our mental states' and Sartre's whole system collapses. And, it's not that hard to refute.*

- ▪ "Humans try to avoid this responsibility by denying their freedom with what he calls "bad faith." Bad faith is one of the best-known and most influential concepts in *Being and Nothingness*. This is Sartre's account of self-deception, and it is in many ways the logical conclusion of his theory of the transparency of consciousness" (pg. 218)

d. <u>Further Readings</u>:
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