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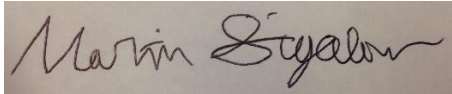
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Isolation and Relations: Sitting Alone, but Together, Together, but Alone

Priyanka Krishnamurthy

In Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essays “Self-Reliance” and “Love”, two distinct perspectives of the self and its relation to another are uncovered. Initially, the notion of solitude seems incompatible with caring for and investing time into the beloved. However the two ideas are not mutually exclusive due to their reliance on dialogue, trust, and self-actualization – solitude, trusting yourself, and nonconformity are a prerequisite to understanding, loving, and being with another. Emerson is setting up a framework that is focused on conversation – be that conversation with the corporeal and natural world, conversing with yourself, or conversing with the beloved. This sense of conversation facilitates the compatibility of love and self-reliance. The correlation points the other way, as well: love can give us¹ a feeling of purpose and meaning by livening and awakening ourselves, particularly by giving us a better sense of who we are and what we are capable of. Love is ineffable, but through the mere act of loving, we are able to experience, feel, and simply live, more.²

Throughout “Self-Reliance,” Emerson discusses love in the context of an individual. This discussion is not necessarily focused on the beloved, but can be applied to the relation between the self and the other. More specifically, he goes on to say: “I must be myself. I cannot break myself

¹ While I understand that the use of “us” and “we” presupposes a universal understanding and interpretation of concepts and ideas, I find it more valuable to use personal pronouns when discussing abstract and complex feelings such as love. Otherwise, the sentiment behind the essay becomes lost in academic and grammatical technicalities and jargon.

² This essay is structured in an unconventional way, focusing on experimentation as opposed to relying on a thesis or argument. Similar to love, this essay is an extrapolation of fragments, motifs, and themes; it is one long stream of feelings.

any longer for you, or you. If you can love me for what I am, we shall be the happier” (273). We do not necessarily need to love everything about our beloved, , but we must still love completely and in light of imperfections, we must open ourselves up to loving *what* the beloved is, and embrace these essential characteristics. Through this embrace, we are able to love our fragmented halves, and though the beloved has the power to change *what we are*, they must understand that we cannot change what we are *for them*. Changing ourselves for the beloved means losing our sense of self, and if the beloved were to act on this power to change what we are, then love is lost and contrived. Instead, love is brightened, then, when you cannot help but fall in love with what the beloved is, completely. Furthermore, Emerson focuses on authenticity and nobility – traits that must be found in the beloved. He does not care to have everyone love him, or love everyone, but instead find those who uphold similar, personal truths:

If you are noble, I will love you; if you are not, I will not hurt you and myself by hypocritical attentions. If you are true, but not in the same truth with me, cleave to your companions; I will seek my own. (273)

Emerson is describing truth as an integral part of life, and as our souls progress, we will find truth within ourselves that matches that of another. For Emerson, truth is an individual’s interpretation and understanding of reality, found by intuition and recognition. This sense of truth feeds into self-reliance: your truth is true for you, but may not be true for another. To fall in the same truth, then, implies similar belief in many aspects of life, but presupposes that we have an understanding of our own truth. We must somewhat know ourselves before we can pursue our search for the beloved; we must know our truths before we can fall for a beloved with similar interpretations or reality. To have companions is to be in the same line of truth with another, and in the context of loving, that truth must indefinitely parallel, otherwise our love is ontologically damned. Our lives

become fallible to one another and ultimately these lives will be unable to coincide. To be in love is to be in the same truth – you are true to yourself and your values, and must hope the beloved believes in these truths, too.

Following being in the same truth, it is also necessary to be and belong to the same nature, alone but together, together but alone. Emerson uses natural imagery to describe what it means to love another; the love felt towards the beloved has the ability to parallel the beauty of nature. For example, the beloved is similar to the rose Emerson discusses in “Self-Reliance”: “it is perfect in every moment of its existence,” (270) because it is an object of our love and affection. The beloved is perfect in and of themselves, at least in the eyes of the lover. Moreover, as a transcendentalist – believing that individuals are smaller parts of a larger whole while simultaneously emphasizing trust within the self – Emerson is able to emulate the significance of love by comparing it to the richness and power of nature: “Like a tree in flower, so much soft, budding, informing loveliness...her existence makes the world rich” (332). Such metaphors portray that he immensely values nature and the individual’s relation, or belonging, to it. Both the beloved and nature are able to inform the lover and individual of their loveliness – to show them who they are, their characteristics and traits, their inner and outer beauty. The mere perception by the lover of the beloved feeds into this – once the pair has really fallen in love, they may see reflections of themselves in one another. This happens in nature, as well, because we as individuals learn from and interpret our environment, we may eventually see ourselves. Through the budding roses of perfection, the pine trees that climb towards the sky, the flowing crystals in the water, we see the vastness and infinitude of life, we see where we came from. We are then informed.

The lover “sees no resemblance [to others] except to summer evenings and diamond mornings, to rainbows and the song of birds” (332). In nature, as previously mentioned, we see

ourselves, and in the beloved, we see nature. Then, perhaps, in the beloved, we can see ourselves. When you're in love, it effects how you engage and converse with the environment – it can change the way you see the external world, perhaps more clearly, more lightly. This line of logic justifies love being transcendental; Loving should be valued similarly to the leaves that blow in the wind, or the wise oak tree that sits in the forest. The focus on the self is important in transcendental thought, but only once we become true individuals who are self-reliant can we then break free from institutional and structured power, and instead see the beloved as what they are. In that, the beloved becomes unique, as is nature, and the two should be treated with care and tenderness; with understanding and passion; with the utmost respect. The value of our beloved is similar to the natural world's significance, but this begs the question of whether we belong to the beloved. If we are beings that belong to nature, then is it possible to belong to another human being?

Under the transcendentalist framework, we do not belong to another. We belong to ourselves, first. The beloved, too, then belongs to themselves, first. We must “believe [our] own thought” (259) and uphold the maxim that “nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind” (261). Only our nature is sacred to us, but it's our own nature, our own constitution; it's what we have learned and intuited to be our truth, hence, the significance of our relationship with another. Through this, we achieve a sense of comprehension and understanding of both individuals involved. These relations, be them fragmented, with our beloved allow us to “go back to those delicious relations which make the beauty of [our lives]” (328). Love is able to make all things “alive and significant” (331), the passion we feel when we are with the beloved, or merely thinking of the beloved, is in and of itself important and true. We become alive again. And in nature, all things become more alive and significant, as well – we see the roots of our ancestors, the other species that coexist, we learn more about where we came from. And through a relationship with

the beloved, through the passing of time, the intimate conversation we similarly learn more about ourselves. We become *new*, while still maintaining *what* we are, with “new perceptions, new and keener purposes” (331). New is not to say that the beloved changes who we are – instead, that we are able to see things in a different light, to understand through the perspective of others, and perhaps, then, our purpose becomes not only to live, but to live alone, but together.

In addition to newer perspectives, through love we are able to reject societal conformity that we adhere to previous to meeting the beloved and awakening ourselves. Specifically, once we fall in love – regardless of how many times this happens – we stop prescribing to societal and familial norms. Instead, we are refreshed; our perceptions and experiences change in the context of the beloved, and we become a person, again. Our soul is refreshed because love does not have boundaries, or rules – it is a personal feeling that is nearly indescribable to those who live it. Even further, self-reliance acts as an “aversion” to the conformist nature of society – we all engage in groupthink every single day and that is because “society...is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members...members agree...to surrender the liberty and culture of the eater” (261). But, through solitude and then love, we are able to reorient ourselves within society, while simultaneously rejecting that which is deemed as *normal*. We can think for ourselves. When we engross ourselves with the external world, with relations that are trivial, we lose all we have learned about ourselves and about nature: “these are the voices which we hear in solitude, but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world” (261). Therefore, we must always think for ourselves, even with the beloved; however, the beloved allows us to do this successfully – a subject of our affection, a passion that rebuilds ourselves. The beloved’s conversation should take priority over “...the forced smile which we put on in company where we do not feel at ease in answer to conversation which does not interest us” (264). Love puts us at ease, “[touching us] with emotions

of tenderness and complacency” (332) in regards to our own self, and the beloved. Their mere sentiment reinvigorates our souls and allows us to do things outside of the tender act of loving. We are able to use love as a medium to converse with the larger whole – with a fresher and clearer mind we can engage in greater conversation. The voices we hear in our times of solitude grow louder, and we allow them too. We let them influence us, dictate our actions; we materialize their thoughts in our actions; we are the same but still perceived differently because we let these voices out.

Love allows us to just *act* and find what we are capable of. We do not know where love is going: to love another in a way that is inexplicable is to be human. This love story is a part of our unexpected voyage and hits on the emotions of delicacy and sweetness that we cannot find elsewhere. As we are constantly changing the beloved allows some stability, the feeling of love being a constant in our modes of thought. The moment of acknowledgement epitomizes the idea that individuality and the way of life, is a way of abandonment; therefore, we must take the plunge and give our lives fruitfulness – sharing this cultivation and depth with another.

We must engage in “private and tender relation of one to one, which is the enhancement of human life” (327); we must also “not wish to expiate, but to live...life is for itself and not for a spectacle” (263). To love is to advance, even if this love is not eternal. This parallels the intimacy and privacy of relations to the beloved. Life is not to be treated as a show for others to watch, but instead an intimate way of interacting with the self and the beloved. As long as we remain true to ourselves through the process of love, then we shall not fret when others judge us – instead, it is up to us to value the process of becoming, to find solace with another in an ever-changing world. This privacy is necessary and fragile.

With the recognition of the privacy of our relations, we find a more mature kind of love.

Through this, we can turn to the similarities of Emerson’s analysis of memory in the context of self-reliance and love. He argues we should not:

Drag about this corpse of your memory... [that] it seems to be a rule of wisdom never to rely on your memory alone, scarcely even in acts of pure memory, but to bring the past for judgment into the thousand-eyed present, and live ever in a new day. (265)

He goes on to criticize individuals for their inability to live in the present – instead, we seem to be slaves of time, constantly manipulated by what we see as restrictions and boundaries. We live in states of temporality, where eternity is not an option and we worship the tick of a clock. However, we “...cannot be happy and strong until [we] too [live] with nature in the present, above time” (270). This same idea can be applied to love – when ready, we must get over the romantic relational past, and then focus on the now: we cannot be hindered by guilt and worry. This, of course, takes time, and we must allow ourselves the proper amount of time in order to mend a broken heart. Through this we can realize that we should not regret the past, but we also cannot live in history. This interpretation of time shows a mature representation of love – those who are still in stages of mourning a previous beloved are blinded to what is currently in front of them, what could even be a new beloved. It’s okay to be blinded, but when ready, the beloved must start to live again and perhaps love can awaken them once more. This kind of mature understanding of love is contingent on the idea that may not last forever, but that we should still valuing what is in front of our eyes in the present moment, and *love* it.

Moreover, the distinction between boy and man, girl and woman, is important not only for knowing ourselves, but making mature decisions in the context of another human. The boy is independent and irresponsible, and is able to be genuine with his decisions – but naivety clouds

his genuineness. The man is more troubled than the boy because he is “clapped into jail by his own consciousness” (261). I would even argue that the mature individual is more capable of falling in love and has a greater incentive to do so: love has a way to break free from this intellectual prison and find another to share the world with. Moreover, Emerson makes a distinction between youthful love and that of a more mature soul. The distinction ceases to exist because “it matters not, therefore, whether we attempt to describe the passion at twenty, at thirty, or at eighty years” (328). We are able to find the inward law of ourselves through the “patience and the Muses’ aid...which shall describe a truth ever young and beautiful, so central that it shall commend itself to the eye, at whatever angle beholden” (328). Age does not really matter – it is more about self-trust and self-understanding.

Therefore, before we can truly love another, we must find peace and truth within ourselves, we must “believe [our] own thought...believe that what is true for [us] in [our] private heart is true for all men” (259). After all, how are we able to love someone else, if we cannot love ourselves? Premature love blurs this ability of complete self-understanding, but it has the potential, through new perspectives and experiences, to help us rediscover what we already were, but also cause personal growth. Still, trusting and somewhat knowing yourself is a precondition to trusting and knowing the beloved. This is not to say we must be whole in order to fall in love – for this is unattainable – but we must be self-reliant and understand the necessity of solitude before we intertwine and conjoin our souls with another being.

Solitude does not preclude the loving of another soul. For this “isolation must not be mechanical, but spiritual, that is, must be elevation” (273). The isolation Emerson discusses is an elevation of the mind and body, and because it is spiritual, loving another is still attainable. For love allows us to choose for ourselves...it allows us to live for ourselves, and live fully and greatly.

However, self-trust is *essential*; without it, we are incapable of loving another, the other self who upholds the same kind of self-trust that we are constantly searching for, and hopefully, we one day uncover. Emerson argues that “nothing can bring you peace but yourself” (282), so ultimately it is up to us to find the tranquility of life, but once we have some kind of sense of this internal peacefulness, this abstract form of wisdom, loving someone will cultivate and enrich the experience of life. Love is sacred; love is divine. We need our beloved, but we need ourselves, too. So let us sit, first alone, then together, together but alone.

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Being-with-the-State: a Phenomenological Account of Oppression

Bryan Reines

Influenced by the works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Frantz Fanon, and Kirsten Jacobson, I posit that our being-in-the-world is fundamentally formed within the State. The State must be seen not only as an entity formed by people, but also as an entity rooted in the individual's experiences and relationships. Just as Jacobson asserts in *Agoraphobia and Hypochondria*, that our physical spatiality is not fixed, but rather constantly contracting and expanding, I assert that the political spatiality in which we reside is also in flux. In the first part of this analysis, building off the Heideggerian model of being, I will explore the foundational nature of the State and explain what it means to *be-with-the-state*. Subsequently, by focusing on the effects of oppression, I will demonstrate how an individual's political being-in-the-world contracts and expands depending on policies of the State. Last, I will explore two common methods of coping with oppression, internalized racism and disobedience, which provide insight into the oppressed individual's constricted political spatiality. This phenomenological investigation, unsatisfied by Heidegger's assertion that the individual's existence is an existence with others, posits one's experience also as an existence within greater society, a being-with-the-state.

Section one: The State and Being

Before delving too deeply into the thought of our phenomenological predecessors, it is worth a brief explanation of what is meant by the State. In this analysis, the State will be used as a generic term referring to the governing body of a given area. Usage of the term "State" here will primarily have in mind the conception of the modern nation-state, but it will be asserted that what

we find to be true of the structural relationship between the individual's existence and the State will be true for any and all States, formal or not.

The rise of the sovereign state has resulted in an increasingly limited number of stateless lands. Though hundreds of thousands of square miles in oceans and the Antarctic remain unclaimed, the amount of livable land on the globe of which no State has dominion is miniscule. The State, therefore, is foundational in that it immediately imposes upon the individual at birth. Under typical circumstances, minutes after birth, a newborn is registered with the State and subject to its governance.¹ At birth the State makes an immediate proposition to the individual, as if to say, "Here are my demands and here are the benefits you stand to receive if you abide by these terms." To even escape the bounds of a State, an individual is generally required to seek permission from the State she flees and/or the State she enters. This analysis is not a normative one concerning the role of the State. Whether or not the State *should* have this authority and why, and whether the State should continue to expand as a concept, are all questions of great concern but not our present focus. These questions of the State have been, and should continue to be, an essential topic of philosophic inquiry, but they are difficult and complex questions, deserving of their own rigorous analysis. This analysis merely works under the assumption that the State and its characteristics have a profound impact on those it governs. The State almost instantly becomes fundamental to an individual's being.

In an effort to gauge how and in what ways the individual's being is affected by her immediate relationship to the State, we must now turn to the question of what *being* is really like in the first place. In Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, the reader is asked to drop their natural attitudes concerning how we perceive the world, the presumption that the world exists objectively

¹ While there are upwards of 10 million "stateless" persons according to the United Nations, these individuals are subject to the laws and demands (if not the benefits) of the states in which they reside.

and independent of the subject. Instead, Husserl asserts that “consciousness is intentional,” that is, subject and object can only exist in an interdependent state (Husserl 33). The external world is not objective and perceived the same by all, rather it is subject-dependent, the world I perceive is different from the one you perceive. In his seminal *Being and Time*, Heidegger builds on Husserl and asserts that an individual’s being is a being-in-the-world. Heidegger supposes that our relationship to our world and the things in our world is primarily defined by how we engage with the things around us. Heidegger uses the terms “handiness” to evaluate whether or not an object aids or hinders our completion of projects. He concludes that the world functions as the “workshop” of the individual, and objects are only explicitly noticed when they impede our projects, when they break, go missing, or interrupt us (Heidegger 75). Heidegger further asserts that our being-in-the-world is fundamentally a being-with-others, that is others are not “those from whom the I distinguishes itself,” but “those among whom one also is” (115). Even our relationship to objects tacitly recognizes other experiencers. In other words, my experience in the world is both crafted and crafting other individual’s experiences in the world.

Based on Heidegger’s conclusions, I assert that not only is the individual’s relationship to the State similarly fundamental to her being-in-the-world, but also that the individual’s explicit recognition of the State, like her recognition of objects, depends on the State’s handiness and its relationship to her projects. Individuals nearly always accept the State’s proposition and passivity is tantamount to acceptance. On the other hand, rejection of this proposition requires an active decision to leave the places and people that shaped the individual. Furthermore, the State’s policies result in an expanding and contracting of the individual’s being-in-the-world that is naturally most evident when the State’s policies are “unhandy,” when they interfere with the individual’s projects and diminish her workshop. For instance, non-oppressed individuals may think about the State

fairly infrequently, becoming disgruntled when their interactions with the State hamper their projects, like when they are late to work because of a long line at the DMV. In contrast, when the State's traffic light system functions properly and the individual makes it to work (without the chaos likely to occur if there were no traffic control system) it would be quite unlikely for her to thank the State. Similar to physical objects, individuals are most likely to acknowledge the State when this relationship is constricting, when the State is unhandy. With this realization, I will now turn to State-sponsored oppression, its effect on the individual, and a couple ways that individuals are likely to cope with this oppression.

Section Two: Oppression

State-sponsored oppression occurs when the prejudices of individuals receive legitimacy by the authority of the State and the State enacts policies that disadvantage certain populations. States can legitimize cultural prejudices in a number of ways. For example, in pre-*Brown*² America, the prejudices of mainstream white America were codified into law. Obviously black Americans were physically limited, unable to drink at the same water fountains as whites, eat in the same restaurants, or attend the same schools, but their political spatiality was also constricted. Not only were black Americans stifled in completing their projects (it is well known that in reality blacks were given inferior facilities and treatment), but also their ability to conjure up projects was hampered. For example, white children were often told they could have any career they wanted, they could be astronauts or even the President, on the other hand, black Americans, because of legalized discrimination, had fewer role models at the top of society whom they could seek to emulate. A teacher told the bright young Malcolm X that his dream of becoming a lawyer was “no realistic goal for a nigger,” and the future civil rights leader often credited this moment with his

² In *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the “separate but equal” doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

departure from school and his turn to a life of petty crime (History, 1). The racist reality of the Jim Crow era stifled imaginations and limited the potentiality of many black Americans.

This constricted being-in-the-world, which is so fundamentally different than the experience of the non-marginalized individual, has serious implications. For cultural biases to be backed by the authority of the State is to delegitimize the stigmatized individual's entire sociopolitical being. It is to influence not only her interactions with agents of the State, but also her interactions with individuals that tacitly or explicitly accept the State as legitimate. As one sees both mainstream society and her own marginalized group accept the legitimacy of an oppressive State, her own worth is belittled. W.E.B. Dubois coined the term "double consciousness," which he explained as, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Dubois 12). Heidegger's revelation that objects are only explicitly recognized in their unhandiness, and our analogous recognition that this is also true of the State, explains a deep divide between the oppressed and non-oppressed. Blatantly discriminatory policies of the State may only be truly visible to the targets of discrimination.

Next, I will examine two well-documented responses to oppression. Of course, oppressed individuals may respond to their suppressed being-in-the-world in a myriad of ways. Obviously each individual's being-in-the-world is unique and it must be acknowledged that marginalized individuals may exhibit one of these responses, both of these responses, or neither of these responses, simultaneously or at different times. Sketching out the infinite number of reactions to a constricted being-in-the-world would quite obviously be impossible. However, even a limited analysis of two common reactions to an oppressive State and society can be especially useful to non-marginalized individuals who simply cannot experience or relate to an existence, a being-in-

the-world, so fundamentally different from their own.

Section Three: Coping with Oppression

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison takes up the well-documented phenomenon of internalized racism in which oppressed peoples, in Morrison's case black Americans, come to resent the physical attributes that led to their group's marginalization. This phenomenon of internalized racism is obviously not unique to black people in America³, but rather is a cross-cultural phenomenon, a common reaction to an oppressed individual's stunted being-in-the-world.⁴ Internalized racism allows the marginalized individual to dwell comfortably within the confines of society, yet in a limited way. In shaping one's own personal values in conformity with society's oppressive values, the marginalized person aligns her own interests, goals, and attitudes with society's. In his preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean Paul-Sartre writes:

They selected adolescents, branded the principles of Western culture on their foreheads with a red-hot iron, and gagged their mouths with sounds, pompous awkward words that twisted their tongues. After a short stay in the metropolis they were sent home, fully doctored. (Sartre xliii)

This reaction can be seen as an attempt to gain a feeling of personal legitimacy from the State and mainstream society. In other words, the individual accepts their oppressor's values in an effort to "fit in." However, it is not difficult to see why this "fitting in" could come at the individual's own expense. This "fitting in," characterized by a more comfortable residing in the status quo of the State, is a fundamentally reduced existence. This sentiment is expressed in our language; "fitting"

³ In India, the "Dark is Beautiful" campaign (which bears similarities to the American "Black is Beautiful" campaign of the 1960's) aims to combat what has been called "India's disturbing obsession with lighter skin." The concept of the "Self-Hating Jew," is also well documented and often compared to "Stockholm Syndrome."

⁴ We need not rely on anecdotal evidence to prove the existence of internalized racism. Scholars like Kenneth and Mamie Clark of Columbia University have conducted experiments supporting the hypothesis.

is to reduce the space of something to ensure it does not lie outside rigid boundaries. By shrinking oneself, or accepting one's constricted being-in-the-world, the individual attempts to gain the respect of the very society that constricts her. In this way it may be very hard for the individual to be in the world authentically, that is to not fall "*away from itself*" and "fall prey" to others and the world around her (Heidegger 169).

In contrast to this reaction of internalized racism, is another common reaction to oppression: disobedience. Whether violent or non-violent, disobedience rejects the individual's constricted being-in-the-world in a couple of ways. First, refusal to obey the State's commands rejects the very authority that has constricted the individual's being. The rejection of the oppressive State is simultaneously the rejection of the State's values. Once the individual questions the State's legitimacy, the individual's constricted existence, her belittled self-worth, caused by the widespread acceptance (from mainstream society and her own marginalized group) of oppressive values, can begin to be restored. Second, the act of disobedience is not only negative. It does not seek merely to tear down the existing structures that constricted the individual's being-in-the-world and hampered her being; rather, it seeks to build a new status quo in which the traits that formerly led to the individual's oppression no longer hinder her projects. The process of rejecting the State, even when manifested in violent ways, is a positive project. It can result in the unification of the oppressed who are sidelined, shunned, outcasted, and individuated by society. The oppressed witness first hand that the State and its values are not accepted by people of their marginalized group, they begin to fervently question the legitimacy of the State and its values. The oppressed individual then has no reason to believe the State to be legitimate, and thus no reason to continue devaluing herself; her being-in-the-world expands. This communal experience of rejection and creation of a new status quo, does not guarantee authenticity but does allow the individual an

opportunity for authentic being.

Of course the marginalized individual and group may not be primarily concerned with merely how they can exist authentically within an oppressive society, but also how they can uproot the constricting society. Acquiescing to State oppression and accepting the State's oppressive values rarely lead to a change in the status quo. History demonstrates that resistance, and rejection of oppression, though obviously carrying with it the risk of major punishment, offers the possibility of individual empowerment. Though the dangers of accepting one's own oppression may not manifest themselves in such graphic ways, individuals would be inattentive not to notice the danger of leaving oppression unchallenged. This phenomenological account helps explain why marginalized individuals can feel empowered and emboldened by active resistance. Martin Luther King Jr. frequently commented on the pleasure of resistance, "Ordinarily, a person leaving a courtroom with a conviction behind him would wear a somber face. But I left with a smile...I was proud of my crime" (Scholastic 1). Independent of political outcomes, resisting individuals may find themselves more satisfied with this existence, more able to create and pursue their projects.

The primary goal of this phenomenological account is neither to elicit change in the actions of the marginalized, nor to provide insight into their behavior. Rather, this account functions to help individuals with a non-marginalized being-in-the-world understand what it is to have a marginalized being-in-the-world. In effect, to bridge the divide, between the distinct worlds of the oppressed and non-oppressed, caused by the reality that the state is only explicitly noticed in its unhandiness. This phenomenological account makes clear the reasonableness and logic of even violent disobedience, not on a grand political scale, but on the scale of the individual and her experience in the world. In addition, people that fail to comprehend why others might attempt to subvert the State's laws and society's oppressive attitudes, may understand individuals of an

oppressed group, as just as that, individuals, beings who have been constricted by society and the State, are forced to cope with the sociopolitical structures of their time.

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Phenomenology of Discourse: Seeking Truth through Others

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Though our unique capacity for complex communication has been addressed within Philosophy since Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Phenomenology presents an account of human communication that is truly groundbreaking. The significance of this account lies in its concern for the ontology of discourse, and further, the ontology of all human understanding. For Heidegger, any account of communication that does not address the fundamental features of Dasein's Being will be liable to consequences of unquestioned assumptions, as exemplified by the fallacious subject/object distinction of Cartesian dualism resulting in a mistaken view of language as representation. In the discussion below, I will outline Heidegger's ontological account of understanding, interpretation, and statement, and subsequently broaden this ontology by drawing from Merleau-Ponty's conception of speech as expression, and further show how such a combination presents a novel view of discourse and language. Finally, I will explicate the Heideggerian conception of truth and argue that according to the described ontology, truth must be sought through interaction with the Other, in which one must, on the one hand, reflect upon the constraints imposed on understanding by their own framework of meaning, and on the other hand, be profoundly open to the being-in-the-world that is opened to us through the Other's speech.

In order to comprehend Heidegger's conception of statement and discourse, it is necessary to first briefly explain Heidegger's overall project and then more specifically, the primordial process of understanding and interpretation, through which all that Dasein encounters is disclosed. The primary investigation carried out in *Being and Time* is the meaning of the question of Being,

which Heidegger believes to have been ignored or forgotten within philosophy due to previously held assumptions of Being as the most universal, indefinable, and self-evident concept. After casting doubt upon these assumptions, he begins his investigation into a fundamental ontology of Dasein: that which intrinsically understands Being through its very own being-the-world. For Heidegger, it is incomprehensible to conceive of either Dasein or the world as separate entities, rather both are inextricable aspects of the unified structure of being-in-the-world.

The nature of this unified structure is disclosed to Dasein through the immediacy of understanding. As Heidegger asserts, “The disclosure of understanding, as that for-the-sake-of-which and of significance, equiprimordially pertains to the entirety of being-in-the-world” (139). In this assertion, Heidegger points out the dual structure of understanding. The “for-the-sake-of-which” of understanding pertains to Dasein’s relation to the world in regards to its personal ends, or teleological purposes. The “significance” of understanding, for Heidegger, pertains to the world as a web or totality of significations, as no object in the world stands alone from this totality, or from Dasein. For Heidegger, this dual structure of understanding is always in the mode of thrown-projection. That is to say, Dasein is always projecting in both directions (the for-the-sake-of-which and of significance) its potentiality for being. This is Heidegger’s recognition that Dasein, as a being that understands, always does so in light of its perceived potentialities. Though, at the same time, Dasein is “thrown” in that its understanding is always already situated in a world that is not of its choosing. This concept of “thrown-projection” will be discussed in deeper context below.

The disclosure of understanding is equiprimordial in that it precedes theoretical contemplation. We do not contemplate what a thing is, rather the thing is *immediately* apprehended by us *as* something, in relation to both the totality of worldly signification and our own ends (i.e. the “in-order-to” in Heidegger’s terminology). We are never neutral in our apprehension.

Heidegger illustrates this “seeing-as” structure of understanding in his explication of understanding’s development into interpretation. Heidegger explains, “Interpretation is not the acknowledgement of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding” (144). In interpretation, that which becomes immediately apprehended by Dasein in understanding, is made explicit and seen *as* a particular potentiality. As Heidegger explains:

Interpretation does not, so to speak, throw a “significance” over what is nakedly objectively present and does not stick a value on it, but what is encountered in the world is always already in a relevance which is disclosed in the understanding of world, a relevance which is made explicit in interpretation. (145)

For example, one’s interpretation of a candle *as* that which provides light, is one actualization among other potentialities disclosed in understanding, such as a candle as decoration, or a sacred object, or used to create a certain atmospheric mood. However, to define interpretation in such a way, makes it so “Interpretation is never a presuppositionless grasping of something previously given” (146). Nothing is apprehended outside of our preconceptions (i.e. “the fore-structure” of understanding). Potentialities for understanding are only potentialities in virtue of our preconceptions.

Further, Dasein is “thrown” into such preconceptions as they are subject to one’s present situation, one’s upbringing, one’s culture, one’s mood (or attunement). Dasein’s understanding is necessarily constrained by the preconceptions which are outside of its control. Heidegger is careful to clarify, however, that this is not a limitation but an essential precondition of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. Therefore, one would be mistaken to attempt to avoid the influence of their

preconceptions, as they constitute the very framework of meaning that makes understanding possible.

Heidegger's conception of the statement is just the further development of the process of understanding and interpretation. The understanding which is made explicit in interpretation is made definite and becomes shareable in the making of a statement. Heidegger summarizes his conception of statement, in the succinct assertion, "Statement is a pointing out which communicates and defines" (151). Heidegger's conception of statements is three-fold: (1) A statement is a kind of "pointing out" which designates the being itself, not a mere representation of it in the mind, (2) In statement, the "seeing-as" of interpretation stamps a prediction on an object and thus gives it a definite character, (3) a statement is communication or a "speaking forth." Heidegger explains the interrelatedness of these three aspects by explaining that:

[Communication] is letting someone see with us what has been pointed out in its definite character. Letting someone see with us shares with others the being pointed out in its definiteness. What is "shared" is the *being toward* that which has been pointed out, it is a way of seeing something as in common. (150)

Such being-toward, is Heidegger's contrast with the notion of the content of a statement as a representation in the mind. For Heidegger, when we understand or make a statement about an entity, we are being-toward it. That is, we are taking up a particular orientation toward the entity itself. In the statement we are making that orientation sharable with others, so that they may take it up in a similar way. This three-fold conception of the statement as the development of understanding and interpretation shares many features with Merleau-Ponty's conception of speech as gesture or expression.

In describing the phenomenon of speech and the deliberate act of signification, Merleau-Ponty seeks to “leave behind, once and for all, the classical subject-object dichotomy” (179). Merleau-Ponty seeks to undermine both empiricism’s and intellectualism’s approach to speech by exhibiting how the word has a sense, or meaning; an assertion that both traditions refute in their own way. Merleau-Ponty’s strategy to illustrate this is similar to that of Heidegger’s in that, for Merleau-Ponty, “speech does not translate a ready-made thought; rather speech accomplishes thought” (183). For both, speech is development of understanding, and thus is never distinct from it. Further, there are similarities between Merleau-Ponty’s conceived relation between thought and the content of thought, and Heidegger’s conceived relation between statement and the content of statement. Merleau-Ponty asserts, “The designation of objects never happens after recognition, it is the recognition itself” (183). That is, to name an object, to associate it with a signification, is one and the same as the immediate apprehending of it. Similarly, understanding, for Heidegger, is not distinct from the seeing-as structure (i.e. the seeing a thing *as* something). Further, in Merleau-Ponty’s claim, “the word bears the sense, and by imposing upon the object, I am conscious of reaching the object,” (183) there is a parallel between “reaching the object” and Heidegger’s conception of being-toward a thing. Both reject a view of speech that depicts its mental aspect as a mere representation of an object existing in itself, out in the world. Rather, when one makes a statement, it reflects their apprehension of the object, which can never be distinct from one’s orientation to it.

Importantly, for Merleau-Ponty speech acts as an expression, as does any gesture. Merleau-Ponty concludes, “we discover here, beneath the conceptual signification of words, an existential significance that is not simply translated by them, but inhabits them and is inseparable from them” (188). The meaning of a word (its conceptual signification) is inextricably linked with one’s

experience (its existential significance) and thus is an expression of one's existence and experience of the world. As Merleau-Ponty explains, speech "presents, or rather it is, the subject's taking up a position in the world of his significations" (199). Thought, and its accomplishment in speech, is not an expression of one's inner life or a representation of an object in the world, but rather, it is an expression of one's entire relation to the world. Similarly, for Heidegger, understanding is the disclosure of one's unified being-in-the-world, and since the statement is a development of such understanding, the statement is likewise an expression of one's being-in-the-world.

Speech, or statement, conceived in such a way consequently results in a reconceptualization of discourse between individuals. I will discuss this reconceptualization in two senses. First, discourse as shared Being-with. Heidegger asserts:

Communication is never anything like a conveying of experiences, for example, opinions and wishes, from the inside of one subject to the inside of another. Dasein-with is essentially already manifest in attunement-with and understanding-with.

Being-with is "explicitly" shared in discourse, that is, it already is. (157)

Similarly, Merleau-Ponty explains that, "Through speech, then, there is a taking up of the other person's thought, a reflection in others, a power of thinking *according to others*, which encircles our own thoughts" (184). Further, Merleau-Ponty asserts that in listening there is no inner representation that I am trying to reproduce in myself, "I do not primarily communicate with "representations" or with a thought, but rather with a speaking subject, with a certain style of being, and with the "world" that he aims at" (189). These passages serve to show both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger's conception of discourse as that through which there occurs a taking up of the other's orientation to the world, and *sharing* it among one's own. This conception rejects the tendency to conceive of discourse as a kind of transmission of messages, or a reproduction of the

other's internal representation of the world, and instead accepts discourse as the Being-with of Dasein. Further, according to Merleau-Ponty when I take up the being-in-the-world of the other there is a "synchronic modulation of my own existence, a transformation of my being" (189). Through the Other's expression of their being-in-the world in speech, and my "taking up" of their orientation as it is shared in discourse, my own orientation, my being-in-the-world, is transformed.

Second, discourse as constitutive Being-With. Sharing implies a common world in which speech is made possible. For Heidegger, discourse is "the structuring of the attuned intelligibility of being-in-the-world" (157). This is, since that which is disclosed in understanding is made intelligible by Dasein's framework of meaning, the articulation of this illegibility expresses itself as discourse. The framework of meaning which makes all understanding possible – the concepts and categorization used for seeing something *as* something – is precisely the linguistic framework of discourse. Language is the worldly manifestation of the shared intersubjectivity of discourse. In the statement, the content (i.e. the being-toward an entity) is simultaneously the linguistic meaning and the meaning of the entity. In an equiprimordial relation, the totality of significations which constitute understanding are learned and developed through discourse, and reflexively, discourse is the articulation of this totality of significations. Further, Dasein stands in an essential and necessary relation to the shared world of discourse. This necessary situatedness is exemplified in Heidegger's explanation that "Initially we never hear noises and complexes of sound, but the creaking of a wagon, the motorcycle... Even when speaking is unclear or the language is foreign, we initially hear *unintelligible* words, not a multiplicity of tone data" (158). In such a way, we are thrown into the structure of discourse, thrown into a linguistic system that was created independently of us, and thus what and how we apprehend our world, including the speech of

others, is dependent upon the situation in which we are thrown. This relation to discourse is inescapable in that it constitutes our very being-in-the-world as being-with.

Similar to Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty explains the nature of discourse through the transcendental intersubjectivity of language. Merleau-Ponty explains the special status of speech by asserting, “Of all expressive operations, speech alone is capable of sedimenting and of constituting an intersubjective acquisition” (196). Later, Merleau-Ponty claims:

In the experience of dialogue, a common ground is constituted between me and another; my thought and his form a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion and are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator... We are, for each other, collaborators in perfect reciprocity: our perspectives slip into each other, we coexist through a single world. (370)

In such a way, discourse presents a common social world in which the perspectives of each subject may manifest themselves in speech, and slip into each other as they take them up. The intersubjectivity is exemplified in the interdependence of understanding and its transcendence is exemplified in that language is beyond us yet we express our world through its given structure of intelligibility in which we are thrown. Thus the transcendent intersubjective nature of discourse is that which constitutes Being-with as essentially Being-in-the-world.

In order to argue that the previous illustrated conception of speech, or statement, suggests that the way towards truth is the opening up to others and allowing one’s own being-in-the-world to be transformed, I will first briefly explicate Heidegger’s conception of truth in relation to Dasein as a being which understands. Heidegger’s explication of truth (or knowledge) begins with its simplistic definition of an agreement between the content of one’s statement and the real thing

about which one makes a statement of. Heidegger argues that the confusion of what constitutes this agreement results from mistakenly asking a question of epistemology, though it is really a matter of ontology. That is, the epistemological question itself falls prey to incorrect assumptions about the subject/object dichotomy. Heidegger then outlines his conception of knowledge (and thus truth) as self-demonstration of the statement. What is demonstrated is that “the expressive being-toward that which is spoken about is a pointing out of the being; *that is reveals* the being-toward which it is” (Heidegger 209). It is not an agreement between some mental representation and the real world object, since a statement does not involve representation. It is rather that one’s own being-toward (i.e. one’s orientation to the thing) demonstrates itself to be true. Since the statement is the development of one’s understanding (the disclosure of their being-in-the-world through a framework of meaning), truth is then dependent upon a being that understands. This is not to say that things exist only in so far that Dasein exists, for there must be a world that exists independently of Dasein for Dasein to relate to the world comprehendingly. However, the apprehension of things in the world, that is, the understanding something *as* something, requires the apprehension of the meaning of the thing (or the Being of the thing). For Heidegger, meaning is not located in the things themselves, but rather is the structure of Dasein’s relation to them (146). To use Heidegger’s example, in order to determine the truth of the statement “the picture on the wall is askew” one must first comprehend the meanings of “picture” “wall” “askew” and their spatial orientation to each other (209). As was previously discussed, the linguistic meaning of the word “picture” is undifferentiated from the meaning (or Being) of the “picture.” Which is to say, the Being of the picture is precisely the way in which the “picture” stands in relation to Dasein (i.e. its potentialities according to Dasein’s own ends, and its position in the totality of signification). So while beings can exist independently of Dasein, the Being of things (i.e. their

nature or meaning) is contingent upon the conceptual framework through which Dasein apprehends the world. It is in this way, that Heidegger poetically asserts, “Language is the house of Being,” as it is through language and discourse that Dasein’s encounter with the Being of beings is not only articulated; language and discourse also constitute and transform the conceptual framework through which Being is disclosed. Therefore, if (1) truth as such is the event of the self-demonstration of Being that is disclosed in Dasein’s understanding, and (2) understanding is constituted, transformed, and articulated by discourse, and (3) discourse is a function of Dasein’s Being-with others, then (∴) the encountering of truth as such is a function of the way in which one is Being-with others.

In a brief explication of meaning, Heidegger described meaning as “that which can be articulated in disclosure that understands” and that wherein something is made intelligible (146). Conceived in such a way, meaning is relational. It is neither *in* Dasein nor *in* entities in the world. As the framework *through which* everything is apprehended (or, perhaps, the framework *through which* the Being of everything is disclosed), meaning is the inescapable relation of Dasein to everything. The meaning of the candle is the unified structure of the way in which Dasein stands in relation to the candle and as such its Being is discovered as a fulfillment of this relation. In such a way, the Being of all things is inextricably linked to our own being-in-the-world. However, as we have seen, being-in-the-world is essentially Being-with. In recognition of the nature of discourse as that through which we share in the being-in-the-world of others, and as that which constitutes the disclosure of the Being of all things, the way in which we engage in discourse becomes a crucial feature in our search for truth (i.e. the discovering of Being demonstrating itself). We must engage in discourse in such a way that new meanings are produced, transforming our being-in-the-world and expanding the disclosure of Being.

To do so we must be in constant recognition of the constraints imposed on us by our own preconceptions, and thus recognize the necessary limits of our current understanding, that the Being of an entity that is disclosed to us is a function of our relation to it. Additionally, we must be open to the being-in-the-world of the Other that is expressed through discourse. In doing so, we may be introduced to alternative relations, or alternative orientations to the thing, and are thus exposed to new meanings, which expands the intelligibility of and capacity for articulation of Being. If truth is the discoveredness of Being demonstrating itself, such expansion can only further one's search for truth, as our discourse with the Other's would present higher complexity in our encounter with Being, and thus a deeper experience of Being's self-demonstration as a manifestation of our own being-in-the-world.

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Goals of Three Philosophies: Effects on Human Experience

Lokita Rajan

In this paper, I will argue that tenets of Stoicism and Buddhism stifle human potential by repressing freedom when compared to Existentialist ideas that embrace those same freedoms as enhancing the human experience. First, I will contrast how these three philosophies characterize the human experience by the relative value each places on material objects, human relationships, and emotions. Then, I will present the ultimate goal of existence for Buddhism and Stoicism: to reach a detached, objective perspective in order to illustrate how it limits human potential. Finally, I will demonstrate that Existentialism gives a more persuasive account as it allows individuals to define the telos of their own lives.

Stoicism characterizes life as small and insignificant and dismisses the importance of an individual human perspective. Marcus Aurelius draws on Plato's notion of "holding human affairs in contempt," and takes the perspective of seeing human existence and life itself as small and insignificant from Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* in order to justify the ideal of the stoic sage (Hadot 184). While conscious of their being part of the world, the stoic sage nevertheless aims to view the world as it is, independent of their own experience of it (Hadot 256). In other words, the sage tries to transcend their personal perspective to live in accordance with nature and adopt the perspective of the world itself.

The stoic sage views everything in the world for what it is, as an end in itself rather than in terms of utility for personal gratification. In *Meditations*, Aurelius defines objects in terms of their "true" meaning in contrast to their role in the human representation of the world. For example,

“foods and dishes...are only dead fish, birds, and pigs,” from his stoic perspective (Hadot 185). Granted humans are able to identify these objects in the world through language, but the stoic sage understands their import in terms of their objective actuality (e.g., dead fish) versus their import in relation to a human experience (e.g., as food). The stoic sage’s perspective is strikingly similar to the ideal viewpoint emphasized by Buddhist teachings.

As the stoic sage sees things in terms of their objective reality, they are able to overcome the hold that material objects exert on the individual, as described in Aurelius’s sentiments in *Meditations*. When Aurelius mentions luxuries such as fine food, sex, and wine, he describes them stoically from a non-attached standpoint. When he refers to Falerian wine as “a bit of grape juice,” Aurelius expresses neither lust nor hatred for the wine, rather he merely acknowledges its existence without any particular emotion or recognition of its potential usefulness to him (Hadot 185). Aurelius’s way of interacting with the material world is closely echoed by Buddhist concepts.

Buddhists also believe in adopting a mentality of non-attachment when it comes to material objects (Yun 48). In Buddhist teachings, attachment is considered the root of all suffering and appears in two forms: *trishna*, which is desire or greed, and *dvesha*, which is avoidance or hatred (Boeree). Both types of attachment are caused by *avidya*: the ignorance or refusal to see the impermanence of things (Boeree). Adherents of Theravada Buddhism follow an Eightfold Path to end suffering, which teaches them to look past previous illusions of attachment that are created by the human experience in the world in order to attain an objective perspective of enlightenment. The seventh step of the Eightfold Path focuses on right mindfulness to end suffering. Right mindfulness entails “the focusing of one’s attention on one’s body, feelings, thoughts, and consciousness in such a way as to overcome craving, hatred, and ignorance,” very similarly to Aurelius’s mindset as he described it in *Meditations* (Boeree).

Existentialists, on the other hand, define objects in terms of their usefulness to the individual through the notion of being-in-the-world. Whereas stoicism and Buddhism separate objective reality from human perception, existentialism merges the two through the concept of being-in-the-world. This refers not so much to our physical experience of living on earth, but to the ways in which we are engaged in the world through our actions. Merleau-Ponty asserts that individuals perceive the world, and that the reality of the world is that which individuals perceive (Hadot 253). The existentialist's state of being-in-the-world implies that the individual's physical experience and socio-historical perspective determine the way he or she intellectually interacts with things. From an existential perspective, there is no objective reality that transcends the human experience of the world. The reasoning used to support this argument is that because we can only verify the existence of ideas in our own minds, we cannot prove the existence of an objectively real world independent of our thoughts.

In existentialism, the things individuals encounter every day are made significant by their function in usual activities of human beings. The relationship and interaction between individual and object is the paramount to attribute value to objects. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger offers an example of a hammer, which makes sense only in relation to other things, nails and boards, and to “purposive human activities such as building a cabinet or framing a door” (Aho 38). This means that the hammer is never understood in isolation, and equipment is meaningful only in relation to a practical context. Since an individual is familiar with the context as a whole, he or she is able to fully comprehend that piece of equipment. In the case of the above-mentioned platters, an existentialist would look at the dead fish and pigs described by Aurelius in terms of the practical and universally understood context of eating to justify their definition as food. As a modern example, when people use smartphones today, they are not thinking about the engineering that

went into designing a phone that will perform functions such as keeping notes and a calendar and sending messages; this type of thought would be detached, more like the objective reality that stoics seek but less representative of the phone's relationship to people.

Existentialism, Buddhism, and Stoicism characterize the human experience differently by placing distinct values and roles on interpersonal relationships and the feelings that accompany them. The "subject" that Merleau-Ponty claims to be is shaped, according to existentialist thought, by the "meaningful public setting" of his life (Aho 35). This setting is meaningful, because of the effect that it has on shaping the individual, in this case Merleau-Ponty. The setting is public, because it encompasses other individuals and Merleau-Ponty's interactions with them. Society is crucial to the human experience of the world and so, for existentialists an individual's interactions with other people then determine reality. This idea differs drastically from Aurelius's standpoint of theoretical detachment because it regards individuals in terms of their interdependence rather than in isolation with "purely mechanical and external [relationships] with other objects" (Aho 35).

Like existential philosophy, Buddhism emphasizes the importance of human relationships in the process of forming the individual, and the definition of human relationships as causes and conditions is closely tied to the idea of existential facticity. Others in an individual's life are believed to be causes and conditions in that individual's life (Yun 167). Little regard is given to the role of emotions that come along with most human relationships. Unlike stoicism, people who play a role in the individual's life are not seen as distractive influences but rather as actors who form a specific aspect of the individual's experience. In this sense, parents are the causes and conditions in an individual's family relationships, because their actions determine the experiences that shape the individual's relationship with his or her family. Teachers, likewise, are an

individual's causes and conditions in the pursuit of knowledge; farmers, workers, and merchants are an individual's causes and conditions of living in society; drivers and pilots are his or her causes and conditions of traveling (Yun 167-168).

In contrast, the classical stoic does not see value in human relationships as a part of cultivating the individual. Aurelius's ideas on human interactions and relationships are similar to his views on objects. He states "everything highly prized in life is empty, petty, and putrid," including the individual's relationships with other people (Hadot 185). Aurelius uses the term "human comedy" to describe all individual pursuits of both material objects and relationships. He claims "two words suffice to sum up the human comedy: all is banal, all is ephemeral" (Hadot 185). On the topic of sex, that has an unarguably close tie to the discussion of relationships, Aurelius treats it quite like an object as he describes it as nothing but "the rubbing together of pieces of gut, followed by the spasmodic secretion of a little bit of slime" (Hadot 185). Aurelius's apparent disgust for physical and emotional human interactions translates into stoic disdain for emotionality.

Stoicism holds that emotions arise from false judgments, and since the stoic sage is one who has attained moral and intellectual perfections, the sage would not undergo any emotions (Baltzly). The stoic view on emotions or passions is that they are things an individual undergoes, rather than actions taken by the individual. The view that the ideal stoic is apathetic stems from the idea that the individual "should not be psychologically subject to anything—manipulated and moved by *it*, rather than [himself or herself] being actively and positively in command of [his or her] reactions and responses to things as they occur or are in prospect" (Baltzly). The classical stoic is expected to be an unmovable thing rather than a dynamic, changing being.

In contrast, existentialists admit that there are aspects of the human experience outside of

their control called their facticity. Human relationships fall under the umbrella of existential facticity. The individual's facticity encompasses "all those properties that third-person investigation can establish" (Crowell). These properties can be known by a third-person observer who is outside of the individual's experience and include thus: natural properties such as height and weight, social facts such as race and nationality, psychological properties such as desires and character traits, and historical facts such as past actions and family background (Crowell). An individual is not initially aware of his or her facticity in this third-person way, but his or her facticity is manifest in his or her moods. In the example mentioned earlier, parents contribute to an individual's facticity with their actions while raising the individual by encouraging certain behaviors and character traits and setting historical facts that will affect the individual's facticity for future actions. As Beauvoir writes in *The Second Sex*, woman is made subordinate by virtue of being-in a masculine world. She is "shaped as in a mold by her situation...her convictions, her values, her wisdom, her morality, her tastes, her behavior – are to be explained by her situation" (Aho 144). The part of a woman's experience in the world that is determined by her situation, whether her physical form, the objects she experiences, and other individuals she interacts with, constitutes her facticity.

In existentialism, facticity manifests in the individual's moods when the individual comprehends his or her own facticity. This idea is best embodied in the dissolution of self, known as anxiety or *Angst* that is central to the existentialist conception of the self (Aho 127). Unlike fear, which can be reduced to a bio-chemical reaction in response to a stimulus, *Angst* is not caused by a tangible stimulus; it is "a basic experience that discloses *the nothingness* that underlies everyday being-in-the-world" (Aho 127). *Angst* is the individual's realization that he or she is not a stable, substantial, and enduring being, and the meaningful structure that makes up his or her identity does

not truly exist. In other words, *Angst* arises out of an individual's realization of his or her own "structural nothingness" (Aho 128).

Buddhism, like existentialism, recognizes "anguish and despair at the heart of the human condition" and uses the Four Noble Truths to characterize human experience by understanding and alleviating suffering (Aho 154). The first of these Four Noble Truths is that ordinary life brings about suffering. The human condition, as laid out by Buddhist philosophy, recognizes suffering and despair as the first and foremost fact of life. The fourth noble truth lays out a guide for the cessation of suffering, making the recognition and overcoming of suffering the central objective for practicing Buddhists. The second noble truth agrees with stoicism that much of this ubiquitous suffering is "caused by the ceaseless change and impermanence of all things" to which individuals become attached (Aho 155).

Aurelius' description of this ceaseless change as the ephemeral nature of the human comedy is integral to the stoic view of time and eternity. As Aurelius states, "eternity is a kind of river of events...no sooner has each thing been seen, than it has been carried away; another is being carried along, and it too will be swept away" (Aho 182). Aurelius shows here where stoicism moves away from the Classical pattern of viewing time and events as cyclical. Seneca too deviates from this cyclical classical philosophy when he says "everything falls into the same abyss...time passes infinitely quickly...Our existence is a point...but nature [...] has given it the appearance of a longer duration" (Aho 182). Buddhism mirrors this sentiment of eternal time passing quickly, with humans living and dying as "the present shoots by like an arrow" (Yun 226).

Buddhism, Stoicism, and Existentialism define the goal of human life differently. Unlike Buddhists and stoics, existentialists are not concerned with discovering an objective truth from the "perspective of eternity" (Aho 34). Rather, the existentialist is much more interested in

experiencing reality through conscious interactions with the world. Conscious perception is the way existentialists define the individual's sense of self. Self for the existentialist is established by a combination of the facticity of an individual and that individual's transcendence, which is the aspect of an individual that goes beyond the factual and connects from the present to the possible.

Transcendence in the present occurs, according to existentialism, because the individual must interpret the elements of facticity that can be identified by third-person observation in order for that facticity to determine him or her (Crowell). For example, third-person observation can identify me as an Indian-American female, but those characteristics of my facticity cannot determine me as an individual or as a self without me interpreting those elements of my facticity and making them my own. The minute a third-person observation, "seeks to identify...as *mine* it must contend with the distinctive character of the existence I possess" (Crowell). In essence the kind of being that I am is, "defined by the stance I take toward my facticity" (Crowell).

In Existentialism, the other aspect of transcendence is the possible: the actions an individual can take given his or her facticity. Existentialists describe the state in which people make choices as the mode of engaged agency. Engaged agency is a state in which the individual has the awareness and mental faculties to make a decision. Existentialists describe engaged agency in terms of choice and claim that it is a point at which the world reveals to the individual their own identity (Crowell).

In contrast, Stoicism and Buddhism idealize similar goals of detachment from any idea of the self as a part of the human experience. Stoicism and Buddhism both place a large emphasis on seeking out an objective truth that exists outside of the self. In these philosophies, the self is presented as an obstacle to be overcome in the mission to see the world as it truly is. Aurelius' *Meditations* are strictly a spiritual exercise, which is evident because they were never intended for

publication. Rather, they were intended to be a record of Aurelius's personal musings. Aurelius used them to "provide [himself] with a vision of human affairs capable of replacing them within the perspective of universal nature" (Hadot 184). This exercise served to minimize the idea of the self for Aurelius. Minimizing the self, and humanity in general, is an idea consistent with the work of other stoics. In Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, the grandson of Scipio Africanus contemplates the tiny insignificant Earth from the top of the Milky Way, claiming that the Roman Empire seems imperceptible (Hadot 184).

According to Buddhism, the ultimate source of all suffering is the illusory self (Yun 19). This is because when individuals believe in the existence of a self, they "seek nice things to satisfy [their] needs, and this pursuit gives way to greed" which leads to anger when greed cannot be satisfied (Yun 29). The Buddhist sense of non-self is not by any means nihilistic; it simply means "to free oneself from attachment to the self, the love of self, and the desires of the self" in order to realize the truth and "come to know [one's own] true, pure, and joyous nature" (Yun 30-31). Like the classical stoics, Buddhists minimize any importance of the self, going so far as to deny its existence altogether, to show that it plays no role in the course of an individual's life.

The idea of the self is embraced in existentialism and the individual defines his or her own goal of life. The individual's understanding and definition of himself or herself is formed in relation to other things and other individuals based on his or her interactions with people and perception of objects. Since the way individuals make sense of things determines the reality they perceive, the facticity of their physical and sociohistorical background by extension determines reality by influencing their experiences of the world. Individuals accepting a reality formed by their own perspective then take on the responsibility of forming their own purpose for existing based on that reality.

As a person of Asian family origin and a bi-cultural upbringing, I have been exposed to both Eastern and Western schools of thought. I was raised with the Hindu philosophy at home, but grew up in a Judeo-Christian society in which most of my friends and teachers were only familiar with Western thought. For me, Eastern philosophy was reserved for the temple and religious *pooja* ceremonies at home, while Western thought was for school and most other social events.

Just as I would switch from eating rice to eating sandwiches and go from wearing a *bindi* on my forehead for religious ceremonies to hastily wiping it off before getting on the school bus, it started to feel just as natural that the definitions of some things would change as I moved back and forth between these two realms. For example, the snake, which is the translation of my parents' last name, would symbolize knowledge when I was reading Hindu mythology in Sunday school, but during the week when I was learning about symbolism in literature in school, the snake was vile and represented trickery and deceit. In my household, deities were a god and goddess whose powers were dependent on each other, while when speaking with my friends God was a single male entity who created woman essentially to entertain man. As I left my home to come to Emory for a liberal western education, I decided to continue my own personal eastern education by independently doing research particularly on Buddhism through reading Buddhist literature, speaking to Buddhist teachers in the Emory Buddhist Club, and practicing meditation.

My two distinct intellectual upbringings had always conflicted with each other until I was exposed to philosophy at Emory and began to draw parallels between Buddhism, Stoicism, and Existentialism. I found myself drawing connections between ideas like Aurelius' *Meditations* and the importance of meditation as a spiritual exercise in my own life and how the importance of teachers, which had been stressed to me my entire life, fit in with the idea of existential being-with-others. The Buddhist denial of self and focus on discovering an objective truth mirrors

stoicism, while its focus on human relationships and inherent suffering in life is more closely relatable to existentialism. Overall, I have now been able to integrate two parts of my life, which had been fairly separate up until this point.

Existentialism provides the most persuasive argument for the goal of life because it appeals to the human desire for a sense of control and does not require denial of the self. Rather than viewing reality as a perspective to be achieved by denying one's self as Buddhism and Stoicism do, Existentialism places individuals into a reality based on their existing perspective. The denial of self involved in Buddhism and Stoicism limits the human experience, and striving for a goal of detachment takes away any control that the individual has over his or her own individual goals of life. Since Existentialism affords individuals the control to determine their own goals and affirms the individual's perspective as a part of reality, it maximizes the human experience much better than Buddhism and Stoicism.

In addition to taking away power from the individual, the practice of denial of the self in order to reach enlightenment or the perspective of the sage is a contradictory practice. Because knowledge is based on experience, denial of the self requires individuals to ignore all of the knowledge they have acquired from life experience and attempt to understand the world. The action of suppressing the human experience stifles intellectual progress and impedes the human experience.

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