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Final Exam

5-8-12

1. Jean-Paul Sartre says a human is characterized by an existence that precedes its essence. Normally we think of this this the other way around, essence precedes existence or in other words, we are given a "human nature" by some God. Sartre claims the opposite, existence precedes essence; we live for ourselves and our "human nature" is determined by the actions we take. Sartre believes that everyone has the potential to self-actualize unlike Nietzsche. Sartre believes that a person can do anything they desire as long as it does not interfere with someone else's freedom. So if want to take a certain action but in doing so I impair someone else's freedom my action is immoral, according to Sartre. This type of philosophy can cause many problems in society since there is no set list of guidelines on how freedom is classified. Sartre does not deny the existence of a God but says that we humans do not have any particular purpose, in the beginning (when we are born) we are nothing, and then it is our later life experiences that we can define ourselves. Sartre believes that we are responsible for our own actions, since we only follow our own guidelines, not a set of guidelines made by Christianity. Since God does not exist, according Sartre, we are free to do anything we wish, as long as it does not affect other people’s freedom.

The narrator of The Stranger is Meursault, and he explains the philosophy of Albert Camus. Meursault receives a telegram informing him that his mother had died. He travels to Marengo for the funeral. Meursault’s mother was in a retirement home when she passed. Meursault is very indifferent to the death of his mother, and he even says that he cannot remember what day she died on. “Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don’t know. I got a telegram from the home: “Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully your.” That doesn’t mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday.” (3) This tells us that Meursault is indifferent with everything that happens in his life. Meursault is asked if he would like to see his mother before she is completely sealed, he refuses. Meursault has a relationship with Marie, it is hard to tell if he really loves her since he is so indifferent to everything. Marie asks Meursault if he loves her and never gives her a definite answer. “A minute later she asked me if I loved her. I told her it didn’t mean anything but that I didn’t think so.” (35) Meursault says that Marie makes him happy but he is indifferent to the deeper meaning of the relationship. By the end of the book Meursault does not care about anything in his life, which explains part of Camus philosophy of the absurd, which talks about mans attempts to find meaning in life.

Sartre and Camus disagreed about many different things. In Existentialism is Humanism Sartre quotes Camus’ philosophy a lot and gives his thoughts about it. Sartre talks about a quote from The Stranger, how Meursault is indifferent about his mother’s death. “What were we to make of this character who, on the day after his mother’s death, “went swimming, began a pointless affair, went to the movies to see a comedy,” killed an Arab … “He’s a nut, a poor fool.” (73-74) Camus seemed to have a more positive outlook on humanity and life versus Sartre. Sartre had a concept of the absurd, which can be defined as humanity’s attempt to find meaning in life when life and the people in it are actually uncaring and indifferent. Camus shows in The Stranger, that he is sometimes happy and cares for someone else but usually later contradicts himself saying that his is indifferent and does not care. Sartre talks about transcendence, “For Camus, to the contrary, the tragedy of human existence lies in the absence of any transcendence.” (88) Transcendent in this context can be described as projecting oneself into the future by the choices you make in your life.

2.

* I really like how Socrates questioned everything and everyone. He was a really intelligent man and knew how to manipulate anything to his advantage. He challenged anyone who said they knew about a specific subject, later proving to them they did not know as much as they thought they knew. Socrates was really interested in defining virtue and starts to do so at his trial but he says that he does not know how to define Virtue and that is what is trying to do. Socrates also had a theory of knowledge is recollection and we hoped to be blessed by God with the ability to recollect knowledge. He did not have any type of explanation for this theory but he strongly believed it and often contradicted himself about his theory.
* Descartes was a very science minded philosopher. He believed that he was a thinking being therefore he existed. He had a very interesting proof showing God existed. He said that mortal beings couldn’t create other mortal beings so he went back to the first humans and said who created them? The only explanation was an immortal being created them; the only immortal being is God, which has always existed.
* Nietzsche is one of the philosophers I enjoy and understood best. He had a very structured and organized class system to classify people. There were two classes, which were the Higher Man and the herd. Most people fall under the class of the herd animal which were a majority Christian and followed authority. The Higher Men were in the business of self-actualizing over their lifetime. This class system really dehumanized people and ranked certain people above others.
* Aristotle believed that happiness and pleasure were mutually exclusive. He said that everyone should live a life of virtue for the sake of being virtuous never to make oneself happy. A person could only be happy at the end of their life and could reflect about their virtuous life. If a person performed an action to make him or herself happy then their action is immoral.
* Albert Camus was a very interesting man. He was indifferent to everything in life and never seemed to have feeling for anything or anyone. He was happy a few times throughout The Stranger but it later turned in to indifference. Camus mother died and he could not even remember what day and he did not want to see her body before it was sealed. It is to hard to live life this way and in the end life will not have any meaning.

My personal philosophy is to live life to its fullest and always be happy. Our human nature always categorizes people like Nietzsche, and people will always tend to do this. People will be categorized by the job, education, wealth etc., the list can go on forever. We should never get attached to material objects because they can be replaced whereas life long friendships and relationships cannot be replaced. We should all strive for greater intelligence like Socrates always did. We an intelligent society life will be more enjoyable and prosperous.