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## Explorations of Self: A Philosophical Inquiry

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Meredith Rathbun  
*Explorations of Self: A Philosophical Inquiry*

Asking “Who am I?” seems to be something that everybody ponders. This concept of “I”—what is it? We all have an individual and unique “I”—something that has been with each of us since birth, something that has changed and grown, but also stayed the same in many ways. My question “What is The Self?” is imperative. What is it that experiences life, if not The Self? When a 99-year-old man watches his last sunset, reflecting on his life, what inside of him is doing that reflecting? As you read my ideas on this page, what inside of you is processing them, agreeing with them, challenging them? It is The Self. *Your* Self. And do you not wonder what, exactly, that is?

The first part of my paper involves a review of the theories of human nature put forth by Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Jean-Paul Sartre. The second part is a phenomenological account of the connection between Self and Place. I also created a visual account of my own Self; this, unfortunately, cannot be portrayed through the final paper.

Keywords: Human nature, Self, Place

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Major: Philosophy

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Exploratio  
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Of Self:  
A  
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Inquiry

Meredith Rathbun, 2006

# For Dr. J

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# Introducto ry Remarks

The question “Who am I?” seems to be one that everybody at some point in their life ponders. Have you ever looked up at the sky or out at the ocean and wondered who you are in this endless universe? This concept of “I”—what *is* it? We all have an individual and unique “I”—something that has been with each of us since birth, something that has changed and

grown, but also stayed the same in many ways. My question "What is the Self?" is imperative. Before we can know our own selves, we must first understand "the Self" in its own right. Before I can answer "Who am I?" I must first understand what "I" means.

We experience life through our selves just as we experience vision through our eyes. My Self is at the heart of my life. I go through everyday as Meredith. Me. I.

*Meredith.* The journey of life must be seen as a journey of the Self, for, what else is it? How can one have a life without first having a Self? What is it that experiences life, if not the Self? When a 99-year-old man watches his last sunset, reflecting on his life, what inside of him is doing that reflecting? As you read my ideas on this page, what inside of you is processing them, agreeing with them, challenging them? It is the Self. *Your* Self. And do you not wonder, as I do, what, exactly, that is?

\* \* \* \* \*

Throughout this semester, I have read about a million books. Reading, reading, studying, researching, reading... for months, I have been trying to get my head around this idea of Self. There are endless ways to go about the task of finding the Self—sociology, psychology, philosophy... (I had no idea what I was getting myself into! ☺) It was necessary for me to find the way *I* wanted to do it, and that proved to be quite a challenge. There are infinite facets of the Self, and infinite ways to examine the Self, but I have chosen to narrow this paper down to two main topics: first, a discussion of theories of human nature, and second, a phenomenological account of the connection between Self and Place. (I have also produced what I call a creative depiction of the Self, which includes photographs and quotes of what makes up my *own* Self. This, of course, cannot be portrayed through a paper.)

And thus we are off...



# Karl Marx & Human Nature

Karl Marx: Genius and Inspiration

*Man [is] a creature whose labor produced  
an intricate web of economic relationships that  
ultimately have trapped him ~ Paul Heyer*

What interests me most about the philosophy of Karl Marx is undoubtedly his theory on the relationship between sub-structure and super-structure; specifically, the relationship between these in capitalist society. Examining the implications of Marx's philosophy will help to lay the ground-work for a closer understanding of man. To make sure that the main points in this paper are recognized, the following is a loose outline of topics which will be discussed: I) the conceptions attached to the idea that the driving force in man is to work or produce, II) the journey of Self-discovery or Self-expression through such work/production, III) the concept of an "alien will," and what this does to man's relationship with his work/production, IV) the division of labor and how it affects man's social nature, V) the relationship between history and human nature, and finally, VI) distorted perceptions and alterations of the Self that occur as a result of such capitalist society as described in all previous topics. The examination of these topics will help lay the foundation of my project, whereas Marx's theory of man is essential for a comprehensive understanding.

I. Man: Economical Creature; Productive Creature

*Labor [ . . . ] is not a result of convention, consent, or external circumstances, but a deeply rooted panhistorical, pancultural endowment of the species-being ~ Paul Heyer*

Marx tries to avoid giving an all-encompassing account of human nature because he believes it is something that constantly changes and evolves throughout history. He would say

that “there is no such thing as individual human nature—what is true (and even universally true) of men in one society or period is not necessarily true of them in another place or time” (Stevenson 61). He does, however, consistently return to three aspects he sees as being inherently present in man: we are historical, social, and economical. While the other two will be addressed at later times, it is with this concept of man as economical with which I wish to begin. The idea of man being economical refers to the fact that it is through the things we produce that we come to know who we are as individuals. Consider, for example, the work of an artist. If I love nature, I might choose to paint a picture of the ocean on a beautiful summer day. Each brush stroke is my own, acted out by my own hand, and as a result, the work as a whole can be considered an extension of myself. I paint a painting and I look at it afterwards, and it is easy to see that it is an expression of who I am. (Though it may seem unrelated, this is a significant point to make before delving into Marx’s theory on the productive nature of man).

There are two main sub-points involved in man’s economic nature, the first, being the human drive to work or produce. “Man is an *active*, productive being, who distinguishes himself from the other animals by the fact that he *produces*” (Stevenson 62). In describing what Marx stated as “needs” of man, Archibald identifies the first as “*Activity* itself: (quoting Marx), ‘It seems [ . . . ] That the individual [ . . . ] needs a *normal* portion of work’” (84). This may seem like a simple assertion, but it is one that is necessary to make in the ground-work of Marx’s philosophy. “...For man, labor is life’s activity” which “implies that the capacity to labor is at the core of Marx’s conception of human nature” (Arnold 49). Identifying labor as man’s “life activity” is a huge step in understanding the relationship between man and his work. Marx believes that “the kind of life which is *right* for men is one of productive activity” (Stevenson 62). It is more than something to fill our days—it is something that we devote our lives to in order to have a meaningful and significant existence, which will be an important point to reflect

on later in this paper. Heyer points out that in Marx's *Das Kapital* "labor [ . . . ] becomes the primary natural human force..." (85). He quotes Marx: "It is the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human existence, and therefore is independent of every social phase of that existence" (Heyer 85).

Archibald also identifies another of man's "needs" with regards to his labor, the second sub-point: "A *variety* of activities: (quoting Marx) 'Constant labor of one uniform kind disturbs the intensity and flow of a man's *animal* spirits, which find recreation and delight in a mere change of activity'" (84). Again, while this seems a simple assertion, its implications are deeper. The reason Marx suggests numerous forms of work and productive stimulation is related to his theory about the division of labor, which we will return to at a later time. Marx "believed that human beings [ . . . ] should not be burdened by one monotonous form of work, which [ . . . ] produces not a pride or satisfaction in their work, but rather a sense of alienation" (Sullivan 1). Considering the conditions imposed by the Industrial Revolution, it is easy to see what Marx is referring to with this passage. A discussion of the division of labor is more than relevant to this idea, and it will be discussed at a later point in the paper.

## II. Self-Discovery Through Production

*As individuals express their life, so they are.*

*What they are coincides with what they produce*

*and how they produce... ~ Karl Marx*

One of the most interesting concepts associated with Marx's conception of the connection between man and his labor is the concept that labor is a form of Self-expression. This idea is closely linked with the Marxian belief of the human creative impulse—something I find particularly interesting. According to Marxist ideas, people need to “pursue activities which are *creative*—that is, unique rather than simply instinctual—and [ . . . ] gratify themselves [ . . . ] through their own responses to their activities and finished products” (Archibald 85). I wonder if this is Marx's way of saying that he thinks it is difficult to be fully in touch with one's Self without reflecting on personal production? I imagine if this is his opinion, it is most likely correct. Heyer quotes Marx, as he says “[people] begin to distinguish themselves [ . . . ] as

soon as they begin to *produce*' (88). The concept that 'what I produce varies from what you produce' as distinctive expressions of our 'selves,' has deeper implications again, when you take into consideration people working under the conditions of and similar to the Industrial Revolution. If I pull a lever that adds part A to a gadget, and you press a button that adds part B to a gadget, there is no difference in the lack of Self-expression. This, Marx would identify as an alienation from our species-being, because the labor which we are performing has nothing to do with expressing who we are as individuals.

The opinion exists that "Man not only has the natural faculty to make his 'life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness,' but he is also by nature able to confront the product of his labor both consciously and freely" (Wallimann 31). The problem that follows here is capitalism. While by our "nature," according to this passage, we should have these abilities, capitalism ruthlessly rips them from our grasp. "Under capitalism, man [ . . . ] is alienated from his species being" in two respects: 1) "As individuals [the working class] have lost the capacity for universal production by being riveted to one repetitive, dehumanizing task," and 2) "Though collectively, the proletariat produce in a universal manner under capitalism, the method of production (i.e., the market) masks that fact from them" (Arnold 277). There are a few things within these passages I would like to point out. It was stated in the first citation of the paragraph that by nature, man is able to mindfully select his "life activity," implying that being forced to sell his labor and being reduced to pulling a lever in a factory is an implicit alienation from his species-being. To continue, it is also alienation from his species-being to be denied the ability to experience and reflect upon the objects of his production. With regards to producing universally, note the connection between the previous idea that man "needs" a variation of activity, not just "one, repetitive, dehumanizing task" as described above.

The concept of Self-expression through creativity is an important one. I believe that creative expression is an essential element of the Self, and I will return to an exploration of this at a later point in my paper.

### III. Dominance of Alien Will

*Since man is more than the sum of his life functions,  
his full expression [ . . . ] is contingent on these functions not being turned  
into 'sole and ultimate ends' as they are when his relation to the  
products of his labor becomes alienated ~ Heyer*

When I use the term "alien will" I refer to the phenomenon that occurs when men who lack the ability to join the bourgeoisie in capital ownership must sell their labor as a commodity. Wallimann describes this concept: "Man under capital is forced to sell his labor power and is forced to subordinate his will to an alien will" (30). In essence, this means that since I cannot afford to start my own business creating colorful candles like *I want* to, I have to work for Mr. Smith doing whatever it is that *he wants* me to do (for instance, assembling brown buckets). In this case, "alienated from the fruit of [my] labor" I ("the worker") lose "a sense of humanity" (Pojman 158). Since I must sell my labor, I am not allowed to live according to my nature. This means that my "own product of labor ceases to be an object of [my] will and consciousness. Rather, under capital the product of [my] labor becomes the object of a will that is alien to [me]" (Wallimann 31). Generally speaking, because I am forced to make something that I myself do not want to make, but instead, is something Mr. Smith owns and Mr. Smith wants me

to make, both the object of production and the will of production are alien to me. According to Marx, "his theory of what is wrong with man and society involves this concept of alienation"—an alienation "from man himself and from Nature" (Stevenson 63). The brown buckets I put together were Mr. Smith's idea and are also made out of materials he owns. Therefore, not only am I alienated from the product of my work, but I am also alienated from my own labor. This alienation from my own labor is a direct alienation from my Nature in general.

Since most people are members of the working class and are not their own bosses, what does this alienation mean for them? To put it blatantly, these capitalist systems cause people to dislike or in some cases hate work—which, in itself, is alien to our human nature since work is at our very roots of essence, according to Marx. Many people within capitalist societies "are not able to gratify their needs—especially for creativity, Self-expression and recognition—through their labour, [so] they experience their labour as depriving rather than gratifying. 'Enjoyment' is *'separate'* from labour, and [ . . . ] is experienced as 'pain' and 'suffering,' and as a 'sacrifice' and 'denial' of Self" (Archibald 97). Instead of an outlet for Self-expression, or as an exercise of man's most basic elements, work turns into something different: "work is not a part of the worker's nature, he does not fulfill himself in his work, but feels miserable, physically exhausted, and mentally debased" (Stevenson 63). When their labor alienates them from their own species-being, it makes perfect sense that they would feel this way. In essence, laboring in the position of the working class *is* a "denial' of Self." "His work is forced on him as a means for satisfying other needs, and at work he does not belong to himself but to another person [ . . . ] Even the objects he produces are alien to him, because they are owned by someone else" (Stevenson 63-64).

Connecting previous ideas with these of the present, what human life and existence is about is expressing (using this word boldly) the soul or (a safer approach) the Self—as already



noted, in Marx's opinion, the expression of Self manifests itself in labor or production. However, in work conditions that are not controlled by the worker, he becomes alienated "from his or her human potential [ . . . ] and is liable to exploitation by those who are in control of the system" (Stevenson and Haberman 151). In capitalism, for most people, their work ceases to be an expression of who they are, but instead turns into a necessity of life. "The worker's activity is no longer determined by his personal benefit (his Self-creation) [ . . . ] Labor, instead of being man's Self-realization, becomes his Self-negation [ . . . ] Instead of it being an expression of himself, it becomes a burden which he is *forced* to assume in order to keep himself alive" (Dupré 127).

As Marx puts it:

*The worker is related to the product of his labor as to an alien object. The object he produces does not belong to him, dominates him, and only serves in the long run to increase his poverty. Alienation appears not only in the result, but also in the process of production and productive activity itself. The worker is not at home in his work which he views only as a means of satisfying other needs. [ . . . ] Alienated labor succeeds in alienating man from his species, species life, productive life, life creating life, [and] turns into a mere means of sustaining the worker's individual existence, and man is alienated from his fellow men. Finally, nature itself is alienated from man, who thus loses his own inorganic body*

Sadly (or maybe not so sadly?) we are forced to reserve our expressions of Self for other channels.

This raises an interesting question for me... Earlier, I pondered if Marx would believe that it is difficult to be fully in touch with one's Self without reflecting on personal production. If we can no longer express ourselves freely in our labor as a result of being forced to work for an "alien will," does that mean as people, we are more detached from our true selves? Or does it simply mean that we adapt by nature to express ourselves through production in other ways,

such as in music and art? I wonder if Marx would agree, or if he would say people express themselves through channels such as music and art regardless, and the problem with losing our Self-expression through labor is simply that it is one less way in which we do this. Regardless, with respect to labor, it is undoubtedly reduced for many people to simply a mere necessity for survival. "No longer does he mold the objects of his work to his own inspiration" (Dupré 128).

#### IV. Division of Labor

*Within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social*

*productiveness of labor are brought about at the cost of the individual laborer; all means for the development of production transform themselves into means of domination over, and exploitation of the producers; They mutilate the laborer into a fragment of a man, degrade him to the level of an appendage of a machine, destroy every remnant of charm in his work and turn it into a hated toil; They estrange from him the intellectual potentialities of the labor process ~ Karl Marx*

Another of the main aspects of human nature Marx identifies is that “man is by nature a social being” (Wallimann 17). Predominantly, this refers to man’s relationships with other people. No one would deny that this is a huge part of life, and therefore, a huge part of human nature. One particular way this “social” tendency of man is associated with the topics I've been discussing is if it is applied to the concept of the division of labor. Division of labor, essentially, strips man of his social qualities and (from the quote above) “degrade[s] him to the level of an appendage of a machine.” Instead of valuing the craftsmanship of labor, or the reflection of the person in production, capitalists assign specific tasks in order to improve productivity time. “...’As soon as the division of labor comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive’ sphere of activity, which is faced upon him and from which he cannot escape” (Archibald 102). Clearly, this is a form of alienation from his species-being. I have described the scenario of a worker pulling a lever or pushing a button, and how that devours the personal quality in production. Instead of producing an entire object, each worker produces a small piece of the object. While some may attempt cleverness, saying that the product is then an expression of collective people, this is surely not the case: the division of labor does not function as a “social aspect,” but instead, as a “social form of man’s alienation” (Dupré 128). Clearly, the division of labor conflicts with the ability of man to produce something entirely on his own, therefore it

tears from him his ability for Self-expression in creation. Now, not only is the product alien in that it is owned by someone else and willed by someone else, but it is also alien in that it is made by numerous other people. "A man's [ . . . ] nature is to become, as Marx puts it... 'An individual with an all-around development [ . . . ], one for whom various social functions are alternative modes of activity.' Consequently, the division of labor is unnatural and inhuman, an impediment to a human being's Self-realization" (Tucker 22). When the division of labor is applied to a production process, "it gradually deprives [the laborer] of all human and social dignity" (Dupré 128).

Marx believes that "the division of labour makes man's work into an alien power opposed to him, preventing him from switching from one activity to another at will" (Stevenson 64). In this sense, man is not only alienated from his labor because he is only doing one of the many tasks necessary for production, but he is also alienated from it because he is forced to persist in the monotony of this single task. For the worker, work has become "fragmented and meaningless" (Pojman 158). At man's most beginning, work was a "physically demanding activity, requiring manual dexterity and personal ingenuity sufficient to cope with the fluctuations of the natural environment and culminating in a clearly identifiable end product, such as harvest wheat or corn, a successfully hunted deer, or artifacts" (158). Now, instead, it is reduced to pushing a button, all day long... With the Industrial Revolution and division of labor, "work became a series of repetitive movements that, however exhausting after a full day, seldom used more than a fraction of a person's full muscular and mental ability" (Pojman 158).

V. Man and Human Nature: Past, Present & Future

*What is often seen to constitute immutable human nature is not immutable, but represents human traits under certain historical circumstances ~ Isidor Wallimann*

One of the things I have come to appreciate so passionately about the philosophy of Karl Marx is the way in which he thinks everything through—from the beginning, until the end as he envisions it. One of the most interesting things about Marx's philosophy of human nature is the way he theorizes about its transformations. According to Marx's philosophy, "everything

about the individual person (including his consciousness) is determined by the material conditions of his life" (Stevenson 61). In general, this means that the economic sub-structure of a society (such as capitalism) defines its super-structure (such as the 'types of people' that inhabit the society). It is truly amazing to think about how *right* he is when I consider our own sub-structure and what it has done to our super-structure. As history progresses, the sub-structures change, and along with it, the super-structures change as well. Marx attributes most of the characteristics applied to man's "nature" as being flexible and dependent upon historically adaptive circumstances (other than the fact that we are social, economical, and historical): "When Marx wrote that human nature changes during the course of history [ . . . ] he did not mean the intrinsic biological nature, but the social and ideological conceptions that form the basis of a people's identity" (Heyer 91). Marx concludes that human nature is dependent upon sub-structure characteristics, or, more specifically on "the social and productive apparatus of a given historical period" (Heyer 91). In short, "what kind of individual one is and what kind of things one does are determined by what kind of society one lives in" (Stevenson 62). People will change as society change, and this is why there is not one "human nature." As Stevenson explains, "what seems instinctual in one society [ . . . ] may be quite different in another" (62). What is meant by this more clearly is that "the natural capacities of the human species interact with external nature through labor to produce the constantly changing economical, social, and ideological situations [ . . . ] in which man defines himself and his human nature" (Heyer 76). As time progresses and changes, the sub-structures change to form different modes of production, which are the ways in which we organize work and distribute wealth. These shifts in sub-structure influence heavily the kinds of people that develop, hence, the reshaping of "human nature" throughout different periods in history. As Robert C. Tucker states, "The whole of history is nothing but a continual transformation of human nature" (5).

## VI. Distorted Perceptions: Materialism and The Self

*Private Property, instead of being the human foundation of the economic process, is human only in appearance [ . . . ] Private property seems to correspond to a basic need of human nature, but, once accepted, it becomes uncontrollable and leads to the most inhuman conditions of life~ Louis Dupré*

Resulting in a social distinction between the capitalist and the worker, class-divided society causes a number of things to happen. First and foremost, the capitalist becomes the “upper-class” and the worker becomes the “lower-class.” This is an essential fact to note, as Marx claims that “people identify primarily with their socioeconomic class (not race, gender, or religion)” (Pojman 156). It is desired by the lower-class to overcome their circumstances and one day obtain wealth like the upper-class; it is desired by the upper-class to become wealthier than they already are, so to be at the top of the top. The more money and material capital one owns, the higher the status—essentially, money means power. “...Class position predominates

over individuality, in that one's interest in, and control over, others depends mainly upon whether or not one owns the means of production" (Archibald 52). People desire to be associated with wealth because, in capitalist society, those who have greater material wealth in turn have a power and superiority over those who do not. "One's value as a person becomes equivalent to the value of the commodities one can exchange or purchase in the market; to one's possessions and income" (Archibald 89). Material wealth is more important than intellectual wealth, and it is better to have a nice house than it is a kind heart. The big boss walks by with her Prada bag, and the worker thinks, "I wish I had \$2,000 to spend on a purse." It does not work the other way around; the big boss does not walk by the worker and think, "I wish I could be more humble." Quoting Marx, "The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket" (Archibald 89). The rich are not only powerful, but they are also to be envied.

Not only do people become fixated with material objects themselves, but they become fixated with the people who have them. Our country is **obsessed** with celebrities; we have television shows dedicated entirely to showing off their posh houses and million dollar cars, and for what? Do they think they are better than us because they can buy a house for 5.8 billion dollars? Yes, they do think they are better, and what's worse is that we think they are better, too. It is the illusionment of capitalism at its worst. Our sub-structure is a market-economy which causes people to define themselves in terms of what they have the capacity to *buy*. A truly *horrific* person can literally purchase the admiration and respect of others. "Under capitalism, the alienated form of man's species-being is money [ . . . ] Money can and does distort our perceptions of ourselves and others. The uncultivated rich man can appear cultivated by buying the right kind of art [ . . . ] A poor person, with a thirst for knowledge is denied education because she lacks funds" (Arnold 199). We see what a person owns as a clearer



indication of individual worth than is what they have to say. We begin to worship those who have extensive amounts of material goods, and in turn, adopt a strong desire and longing for material objects ourselves. *We* want to be the ones with the Gucci sunglasses that everyone knows cost \$400, not necessarily because we like the way they look, but because we like what they stand for: I have enough money to spend \$400 on a pair of sunglasses! Hence, the fetishism of commodities: a sexual term that refers to the devotion or worship of objects that are in no way worthy of such sentiment.

Is this the way we were meant to live? Stevenson claims that "capitalist society is in some respects not in accordance with basic human nature" (63). This sentiment is echoed in the statement that "capitalist society does not enable the full development of the potential of human nature..." (Stevenson and Haberman 151). Through capitalism, we have become alienated from the very fibers of our existence. "Working on commodities, the worker becomes a commodity in the hands of capitalism" (Pojman 157). We have become alienated from our own nature, and have been taught to worship material things. If we are economical, in the sense that our labor is supposed to express who we are, that has been taken from us. If we are social, that too has been stripped from us, as the relationships between men have become distorted into something they were never intended to be. Marx blames "alienation on the institution of money, as a means of exchange which reduces social relationships to a common commercial denominator" (Stevenson 64). Everything has been reduced money, and there seems to be no way around it.

No matter which end of the spectrum you're on, rich or poor, money is the most important factor in determining success and happiness. Logically, this is the case because, under capitalism, we define people's status in terms of material wealth. The more you have, the better off you are. Hence, we breed people who are greedy, Selfish, and materialistic. New

types of vocations arise, as old ones are lost. Suddenly, there are millions of investment bankers and stock analysts running wild in the streets, and a monk or person interested in poverty and chastity can't be found even if your life depended on it. Everything is about advertising, trying to get people to buy your product so you can make money, and more intensely, we get consumers, people who are fulfilled by shopping! To consider the connection between how our economy functions, and who our society's people become is incredible. When Marx's concepts are thought through, he paints for us an intricate and irrefutable picture of human nature and society.

*As a system of exploitation, capitalism so degrades the individual,  
so frustrates his or her potentialities for creative development,  
that life under it is hell on earth ~ Pojman*

Sigmund  
Freud  
&

# Human Nature

## Sigmund Freud: Instincts and the Unconscious

Sigmund Freud was a ground-breaking philosopher. He “inaugurated the sexual revolution” and “challenged the philosophical ideal of the ‘rational man,’ [ . . . ] asserting that prerational, unconscious forces determine our behavior” (Pojman 168). An examination of human nature should not be undertaken without consideration of Freud and his theories. Because his theory is so different from any other, and because so much of it is undeniable in my opinion, I have chosen to examine the blueprint of human nature that Freud puts forth. My consideration of his theory will be organized within the following topics: A discussion and examination of...

### I) The Id

- II) The Ego
- III) The Superego
- IV) The Conscious and Unconscious
- V) Human Drives and Instincts
- VI) The way in which our nature is repressed/distorted in society

### I. The Id: Desire and Satisfaction

*It is the dark, inaccessible part of our personality [ . . . ]*

*A chaos, a cauldron full of seething excitations ~ Freud*

Freud says that there are three components to the personality: the id, ego, and superego. It is the first of these which is the topic of current discussion. As Pojman writes it, the id has as its purpose to “provide for the release of energy in the system” (170). It operates by way of the pleasure principle, whose goal is to “rid the person of tension or at least to reduce the amount of tension to a low level so that it can be kept under control” (171). The id is a “primary source of psychic energy and the instincts,” meaning that if a person lets the id rein as a driving force, they will probably end up in trouble. The id is a “blind, potentially destructive force,” and within a civilized society, it can not be permitted to run freely (171). It is

a manifestation of bodily desires, and is in "closer touch with the body and its transactions with the world" than the ego or the superego (171). It listens to a person's "instinctual needs" and is driven towards achieving satisfaction of these needs (Pojman 171). It is strictly wants and desires, without any consideration of logical outcomes or repercussions. Freud writes, "It is filled with energy reaching it from the instincts, but it has no organization, produces no collective will, but only a striving to bring about the satisfaction of the instinctual needs subject to the observance of the pleasure principle" (92). It is free from value judgments, meaning "no good, no evil, no morality" (93).

## II. The Ego: An Attempt at Compromise

The role of the ego is to maintain harmony and efficiency. The ego "aims at controlling and ruling the id and maintaining communication with the external world" (Pojman 171). While the id is governed by the pleasure principle, the ego is governed by the reality principle, constantly concerned about the 'real world' (171). The ego is the "center of rational thinking, learning, and wisdom" and is said to be "laid down by heredity but developed by socialization and education" (171). It "gives us a firm grip on reality and channels the id's drives in ways most likely to produce happiness" (Pojman 171). It is the part of the mind that balances, trying to mediate between the id and the superego. It tries to "reconcile the conflicting demands of id and superego, given the often unhelpful facts of the real world" (Stevenson and Haberman 162). The job of the ego is a challenging one, as it seeks to satisfy the id while keeping in mind the demands of the superego. "Individual well-being or mental health depends on a harmonious relationship between the various parts of the mind and between the whole person and society"

(164). The ego wrestles with the demands of both the id and the superego, trying to find a healthy balance that works in the real world. It attempts to reconcile both other parts of the mind, "seeking opportunities for satisfying the instinctual demands of the id without transgressing the moral standards required by the super-ego, the internal representative of society" (Stevenson and Haberman 164). If the ego cannot find and take advantages of such opportunities for fulfillment, the id will be frustrated, resulting in an internal unrest of the person.

### III. The Superego: Morality Strikes

The superego is the "legislative-judicial" part of the personality, as it represents the "ideal patterns and principles of behavior" (Pojman 171). The ego is concerned with reality ("what is the case"), and the superego is concerned with ideality ("what ought to be the case") (172). Morality springs up from the superego, as an internalization of principles instilled by society. It is of two parts: the ego-ideal and the conscience (172). The ego-ideal "corresponds to the child's conception of his parents' values, which they communicate by rewards and punishments" (172). The conscience, on the other hand, "corresponds to the child's feeling regarding his success in living by the ego-ideals" (172). If one consistently acts within the limits of the ego-ideals, the conscience feels a satisfaction, but whenever one breaks with the ego-ideals, a harsh sense of guilt settles in (172). The superego attempts to control behavior, putting "inner constraints" on both the id and the ego, "harnessing the sexual and aggressive drives which would endanger the stability of society" (172).

#### IV. Consciousness and Unconsciousness

Freud's theory of personality is often referred to as an "iceberg model," because it holds that there is only a very small part of ourselves that is visible and accessible to us. As Pojman puts it, "we are conscious of only a small part of our experience, the tip of the iceberg" (174). Freud claims that most of our attitudes, fears, and desires are submerged deep beyond our conscious level of experience (174). Most neuroses are caused by factors that we are completely unaware of, which is where psychoanalysis comes to the rescue. By accessing the unconscious through interpretations of dreams and experiences, "feelings long repressed can be ventilated, a catharsis takes place, and the patient comes to understand his or her problems and emotionally comes to terms with them" (Pojman 175). This is the general idea behind Freud's concept of conscious and unconscious, but perhaps in this instance a closer look is called for...

In Freud's theory of human nature, a certain element of determinism is present. Freud takes "the principle that every event has preceding causes" and applies it "to the realm of the mental" (Stevenson and Haberman 160). Freud concludes that everything one does and everything one will ever do is determined by "hidden causes" that generally, are not perceivable. "Nothing a person thinks or does or says is really haphazard or accidental;



everything can in principle be traced to some cause or other, presumably in the mind" (160). This belief houses an implication that we are not really free, and that "unknown causes" are what determine our choices (Stevenson and Haberman 160).

[An interesting side note: both Marx and Freud claim that "the contents of our consciousness, far from being uniquely 'free' and 'rational,' are determined by causes of which we are not normally aware" (Stevenson and Haberman 160). In Marx's philosophy, the causes are social and economic, while Freud believes they are "individual and psychological, rooted in our biological drives" (Stevenson and Haberman 160).]

Before contemplating the unconscious any further, it is necessary to address the issue of the preconscious. The preconscious is made up of "memories of particular experiences or facts, of which we are not continually conscious but that can be recalled to mind" (Stevenson and Haberman 161). This, too, may conceal unknown causes for our actions, but it is not the same as the unconscious for the unconscious includes only "states that *cannot* become conscious under normal circumstances" (161). Freud claims that the unconscious stores "emotionally charged ideas" that "actively yet mysteriously exert causal influences on what a person thinks, feels, and does" (161). Desires or feelings we have that we are not conscious of can still control our actions; they can make us do things that we cannot understand or explain (161). Especially, the unconscious can be a refuge for certain memories or feelings that we used to be conscious of, "but were repressed because they became just too painful to acknowledge" (Stevenson and Haberman 161).

The unconscious is also home to "the driving forces of our mental life (the 'instincts') which operate from infancy" (Stevenson and Haberman 161). These instincts are "motivating factors" which may not be in the realm of awareness, but which influence our actions and

desires at all times (Stevenson and Haberman 162). The instincts are where we shall turn to next...

#### V. The Human Instincts

Human instincts are "forces which we assume to exist behind the tensions caused by the needs of the id"; they are "physical representatives of somatic states" (Levitt 97). As Stevenson and Haberman point out, "we can distinguish an indeterminate number of 'instincts' [ . . . ] but they can all be derived from a few basic drives that combine or even replace each other in multifarious ways" (162). There are two basic drives: *eros* and *thanatos* (163). *Eros* is known as the life drive, and includes instincts for our basic physical needs, such as "eating and Self-protection [ . . . ] libido and hunger" (163). *Thanatos* is the death instinct, including things such as "sadism, aggression, [and] Self-destruction" (163). As Pojman reminds us that "a powerful measure of desire for aggression has to be reckoned as a part of [man's] instinctual endowment" (177).

It is clear throughout Freud's psychoanalytic theory that he believes sex to be the most powerful human instinct. Pojman elaborates on this, writing that the "sex drive is the most powerful drive in humans"; it is a "psychological hydraulic pressure which seems to burst through the mental pipes and cisterns at times" (172). Though the sexual drive may vary amongst different people, it is still one of the most basic and raw instincts involved in being a human being. Freud traces "much human behavior back to sexual thoughts and desires," claiming that sex "is manifest in much more than 'normal,' adult heterosexual intercourse (162). Because we are not generally free to act on our sexual impulses and desires, "neurotic illnesses result from the frustration of the sexual instinct, either because of external obstacles or because of internal mental imbalance" (164).

This concept of repression, either sexual or otherwise, is essential when considering Freud's theory of human nature. As he sees it, humans are raw and instinctual characters. We are compelled by natural impulses, mainly sex and aggression, and when we are organized into civilization we are forced to control and limit these instincts. Not only does this separate us from our true nature, but it causes internally uproars, leading to different forms of neuroses, not to mention unhappiness.

## VI. Discontentment

Freud gives an honest and true-to-nature account of what it means to be human, not denying any of the ugliness that might be present. We are driven primarily by sex and aggression, according to Freud, which means that in order to cohabitate in a civilized society, we must control much of what we feel inside. Plain and simple: "in civilization, [we] are repressed" (Pojman 177). While civilization does offer benefits, such as "physical and social mobility, efficient communication, medicine, a longer life span, and institutions which enable us to resolve conflicts peacefully," it also causes "enormous frustration of our id" (177). In order to get along peacefully, we must live "within a moral straightjacket—our superego," as Pojman puts it (177). Repressing our natural instincts has a backlash to it, resulting in internal unrest, manifesting itself as differing neuroses. "It was discovered that a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of its cultural ideals" (177). We feel conflicted because we are trying to fight our natures, and of course, there are repercussions. When we don't contain ourselves to the demands of society, however, we feel guilty "for having our natural instincts, sexual and aggressive drives" (177). Of course, guilt is a result of civilized society: it "is an internal authority, a product of the superego, which takes the place of the external authority, the overseeing parents and police" (Pojman 177).

As a species, we have internalized what society expects of us. Beginning with our parents, with teachers, with religious instruction, we begin to form ideas about the way other people expect us to act. "The standards to which a person feels obliged to conform are one of the crucial factors in mental problems, but they are a product of the social environment" (Stevenson and Haberman 165). The socialization of the human being involves this kind of internalization, and it is a necessary step in order for civilized societies to properly function. "The instilling of such standards is an essential part of education, making children into members

of society; for as Freud sees it civilization requires Self-control, some sacrifice of instinctual satisfaction, in order to make work and human society possible" (165). Has it gotten to be too much, though? Stevenson and Haberman speculate that "the relationship between society and individual has gotten out of balance, so that our whole civilized life might be described as neurotic" (165). Perhaps we have learned to contain ourselves too much, to the point where it makes us mentally unstable.

According to Dilman, Freud "wanted to represent the different divisions and splits within men as modes of an ultimate duality in man's nature and in human life itself" (135). Perhaps it is a part of human nature to repress our instincts, because it is necessary for peaceful, civilized living? Dilman theorizes that culture and individuals are "*essentially* opposed and, therefore, irreconcilable: culture is alien to man's nature; civilization is something imposed on man" (141). According to Freud, he says, "human nature resists conforming to culture, submitting to its demands" because (quoting Freud) "the passions of instinct are stronger than reasoned interests" (141-142). Freud claims that "primitive man was better off in this respect, for he knew nothing of any restrictions on his instincts... civilized man has exchanged some part of his chances of happiness for a measure of security" (Dilman 142).

So what happens, then, to the desires we have and ignore? According to Freud, we repress these thoughts and feelings, and they confront us later through unexpected and unrecognizable forms. When "someone experiences an instinctual impulse that is sharply incompatible with the standards they feel they must adhere to, it will be repressed out of consciousness, so that as far as the subsequent awareness is concerned, it does not exist" (Dilman 164). In this respect, repression serves as a defense mechanism, as it assists in a person's avoidance of their inner-conflict. It will come back to haunt you, though, because "what is repressed does not go out of existence, but remains in the unconscious portion of the

mind" (164). Instead of confronting the conflict head-on, we sometimes ignore it and try to forget about it, but this doesn't work, according to Freud. Dilman writes, "By repressing an idea, [a person has] given up effective control over it; they can neither get rid of the symptoms it causes, nor lift the repression and recall it to consciousness" (164).

Jean - Paul  
Sartre  
&  
Human  
Nature

Jean-Paul Sartre: Defining Action

*Man makes himself; he is not found ready-made* ~Jean-Paul Sartre

Jean-Paul Sartre is *the* Existentialist philosopher. He gives us an account of human life through an examination of consciousness, and sheds light on many important factors that had been overlooked before his time. While he avoids issuing a depiction of “human nature” (he would deny that there is such a thing), he still illuminates for us many important aspects of what it means to be a human being. My consideration of Sartre’s philosophy will gather around the following topics of interest:

- I) Man as a distinctive being
- II) Nothingness
- III) Existence precedes essence → condemned to be free, we are our actions
- IV) Anguish
- V) Bad Faith
- VI) Man as a being-for-others

### I. The Distinctiveness of Man

Jean-Paul Sartre begins by defining man with a distinction between human beings and inanimate objects. He declares consciousness, or “human reality,” being-for-itself, and



inanimate objects, or “nonconscious reality,” being-in-itself, separating these two different modes of being (Stevenson and Haberman 180). He claims that since we are conscious, we exist in a way that is different from unconscious things. Being-for-itself, he says, is “intentional,” meaning that the “states of consciousness are *of* something conceived as distinct from the subject,” usually also involving “an implicit awareness of Self” (180). Being-in-itself, however, “involves no awareness *of* anything, and no conception of itself” (Stevenson and Haberman 180).

Sartre would generally refuse the idea that there is any such thing as human nature. His philosophy is marked by a rejection of “generalizations about human beings and human lives,” but there still exists a very clear concept of how Sartre views the human *condition* (Stevenson and Haberman 181). Sartre writes, “it is impossible to find in each and every man a universal essence that can be called human nature, there is nevertheless a human universality of *condition*” (199). This human *condition*, as he calls it, refers to certain situational factors that are the case for people everywhere. He writes, “what never vary are the necessities of being in the world, of having to labour and to die there” (Sartre 199). He says that these necessities are both object and subjective: “objective, because we meet them everywhere and they are everywhere recognizable,” and “subjective, because they are *lived* and are nothing if man does not live them” (199). Being in the world is necessary for everyone who is alive, obviously, as is the necessity for choosing who you are (200). Sartre writes, “there is a human universality, but it is not something given; it is being perpetually made. I make this universality in choosing myself” (200). This “choosing” oneself is an important aspect of Sartre’s philosophy, and will be returned to at a later time.

## II. Nothingness

Sartre connects consciousness with what he calls "nothingness." According to Oaklander, "nothingness" and consciousness are connected in a number of ways. First, "consciousness is not a thing or a substance in the world," second, "unlike things, consciousness is completely translucent, there is nothing about consciousness that is hidden from us," third, "in virtue of its intentionality consciousness is a *lack*; its essence is 'outside'

itself," and fourth, "consciousness is free" (239). Nothingness manifests itself in daily life and daily situations. For example, we could perceive someone by way of their absence. If Keeghan and Cortnee are supposed to be in class on Wednesday but they aren't there, we wonder *where are they?*—we perceive them by way of their *absence*. Another example is the fact that we see "*possibilities* for our actions" (Stevenson and Haberman 182). Having different possibilities shows us the "state of affairs that are *not* already the case [ . . . ] but that we might decide to make real" (182). Desire "also involves recognition of the *lack* of something" (182). I am reminded of Nietzsche with this example of nothingness, whereas he tells us that to desire power means that one does not have it. Stevenson and Haberman make better sense of Sartre's notion of nothingness when they explain that "conscious beings who can think and say what *is* the case can also conceive of, and act to bring about, what is *not* the case" (182). Implications of this ability to perceive what is not? It "involves the freedom to imagine other possibilities and to try to bring them about" (182). Sartre writes, "...to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until late, and then he will be what he makes of himself" (Sartre 186-187). This is closely tied in with Sartre's belief that we are who we choose to be, which is the next point of focus in this paper.

### III. Existence Precedes Essence

*Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in  
the world—And defines himself afterwards ~Jean-Paul Sartre*

Jean-Paul Sartre's most famous philosophical idea is "existence precedes essence," basically meaning that "man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself" (Sartre 188). Stevenson and Haberman summarize this opinion about the state of man: "we have no 'essential' nature, [ . . . ] we simply find ourselves existing by no choice of our own and have to *decide* what to make of ourselves, so each of us must create his or her own nature or 'essence'" (182). While liberating as a refutation for determinism which would make our lives completely out of our hands, this is also at the same time a difficult concept to deal with. Sartre proclaims

that man is *condemned to be free*; that “there is no limit to our freedom except that we cannot cease being free” (182). Sartre holds us responsible for every facet of our lives, even claiming that “every aspect of our mental lives is [ . . . ] in some sense chosen and ultimately our own responsibility”—even our emotions (Stevenson and Haberman 183). According to Sartre, emotions aren’t external forces that sweep over us, “but [are] ways in which we apprehend the world” (183). He claims that we are responsible for our emotions, because they are choices we make about how to react to the external environment (Stevenson and Haberman 183). Sartre “places the entire responsibility for [man’s] existence squarely upon [man’s] own shoulders” (Sartre 188).

He also holds us responsible for “longer-lasting features of our personality or character” (Stevenson and Haberman 184). He says that the personality traits or roles we label ourselves with aren’t “unchangeable facts”—for example, to declare “I’m sarcastic” or “I’m a waitress” aren’t factual statements in the sense that “I’m a white female” is (184). He calls upon us to take responsibility for the people we are, and to make changes if need-be: “we are always free to *try* to become different from what we are” (186). Sartre “tries to extend our freedom and our responsibility to everything we think, feel, and do” which is at once both liberating and frightening (184). It allows and inspires change, because “no motive and no past revolution, however strong, determines what one does *next*,” but also demands that one takes responsibility for one’s own life (Stevenson and Haberman 184). Sartre writes, “We have defined the situation of man as one of free choice, without excuse and without help, any man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passions, or by inventing some deterministic doctrine, is a Self-deceiver” (202).

Another important aspect of Sartre’s “existence precedes essence” theory is that man is defined by his actions (Sartre 198). He writes, “man is nothing else but what he purposes, he

exists only in so far as he realises himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is" (196). Sartre won't even allow for hiding behind what society constitutes as morality, as he reminds us instead that, we are "obliged to invent the law" for ourselves (201). Sartre concludes that "what man needs is to find himself again and to understand that nothing can save him from himself" (Sartre 206). We have no excuses in this world. Nothing to blame for our actions or feelings. Nowhere to turn but inside...

Sartre places man's destiny in his own hands, which is at once both a blessing and a curse. If one realizes this, though, it is more of the former. Sartre's philosophy is about realizing that life is what we make of it—that "life is nothing until it is lived; but it is yours to make sense of"—and taking a hold of that and embracing it (204). He wants to remind us that it is "always by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realisation, that man can realise himself as truly human" (Sartre 205).

#### IV. Anguish

Sartre's term "anguish" refers to man's awareness of his own freedom (Stevenson and Haberman 184). It is "not the fear of an external object, but the uneasy awareness of the ultimate unpredictability of one's own behavior" (184). According to Sartre, anguish arises out of a desire to flee from our inescapable freedom. Sartre thinks that we would prefer to live in "a state in which there are no choices left open for us, so that we would 'coincide with ourselves' like inanimate objects" (Stevenson and Haberman 184). (I must admit, it would definitely make things a lot easier sometimes 😊) However, we are free, and because of it, we "cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility" for our lives (Sartre 189).

## V. Bad Faith

Bad faith may be defined as “the attempt to escape anguish by trying to represent one’s attitudes and actions as determined by one’s situation, or one’s character, one’s relationship to others, employment or social role—anything other than one’s own choices” (Stevenson and Haberman 185). Basically, it is a denial of the freedom that is inherent in the human condition. Sartre believes bad faith to be “the characteristic mode of most human life” (Stevenson and Haberman 185). To bring to life this concept by use of everyday example, Stevenson and Haberman refer to Sartre’s two most common examples of bad faith: the girl in the café and the waiter.

Sartre’s first example of bad faith is the girl in the café who’s on a date. The man she’s with tries to hold her hand and she “tries to avoid a decision to accept or reject his advances by seeming not to notice” (185). She pretends that she’s unaware that her date is holding her hand, and according to Sartre, this is bad faith. The girl pretends to herself that she “can be distinguished from her body, that her hand is a passive object, a mere thing; whereas she is, of course, a conscious embodied person” (185). She knows exactly what’s going on, of course, and is therefore responsible for her actions, or lack of actions in this instance (Stevenson and Haberman 185).



The second example is of the café waiter, who is “acting the part [ . . . ] identifying himself completely with the role, thinking that it determines his every action and attitude” (Stevenson and Haberman 185). What this waiter doesn’t realize, though, is that it’s his choice to be a waiter and that he could stop being a waiter at any second. He also needs to see that just because he is a waiter in some ways, doesn’t necessarily mean he needs to be a waiter in *all* ways. In Sartrean terms, he is not *essentially* a waiter the way that a candle is *essentially* a candle, for instance. As conscious beings, (quoting Sartre) “it is necessary that we *make ourselves* what we are” and the waiter is allowing for his essence to be dominated by a role he plays (Stevenson and Haberman 185). It is up to the waiter to be who he wants to be, and Sartre would say that he needs to realize, “anything we do, any role we play, and any value we respect is sustained only by our own constantly remade decision” (Stevenson and Haberman 185).

## VI. Man as a Being-for-Others

An important concept to keep in mind when discussing Sartre and his theory of the Self is the concept of the other. Sartre's "the Look" is an essential element in this part of his philosophy. The look of another involves someone seeing us when we didn't think they were looking. We feel *ashamed* if we're caught doing something we wouldn't want other people to know about, as we are "aware of someone else who might be critical of our actions" (Stevenson and Haberman 187). For this reason, Sartre insists that the relationship between conscious beings is "one of conflict" (187). According to his philosophy, "another person represents a threat to one's freedom by his or her very existence, in that the person's perception of one 'objectifies' oneself as a mere object in the world" (Stevenson and Haberman 187). Generally speaking, this means that there is a certain element of who we are that we are not in control of—specifically, that is the way in which others perceive us to be. To a large extent, who we are is dependent upon who others perceive us to be. Sartre writes, "[man] cannot be anything [ . . . ] unless others recognise him as such" (199). In this way, "the other is indispensable to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself" (Sartre 199).

This concept of other also brings to light another important issue. When we give ourselves labels, such as "I am a student," we are distinguishing between two different parts of the Self: there is the Self "doing the describing" and the "Self described" (Stevenson and Haberman 186). We also have to add in a third part, which is this Self as perceived by the other. Within ourselves, "we can never be mere objects to be observed and described like any

external matter of fact," but for others, this seems to be exactly what we are (186). For others we are simply an object in the world, and we have no control over this perception. This concept of objectification seems to be a tricky one. Who we are to others is an essential piece of *who we are*, and we cannot access this account. We also can't seem to unify the Self because once we attempt a description or explanation of who we are, an automatic and unavoidable split occurs. What, then, does this lead us to? Basically, we are left with a confirmation of the difficulty and possible impossibility of whole Self knowledge.

Greatest  
Hits:  
Personal  
Reflections  
on the  
Theories

The theories of human nature put forth by Marx, Freud, and Sartre are all very different. In part, their difference is why I chose them. They all focus on very different aspects of man, bringing to light various aspects of our nature. The following is a personal reflection on my favorite parts of each of their theories—it is, if you will, a collage of the ideas that I think are most pertinent and interesting when it comes to human nature.

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Karl Marx offers us a picture of man as a productive being, expressing himself through labor and creativity. According to him, we come to know who we are through the things we produce, both artistically and otherwise. I find this concept undeniably present in every facet of life. We see our modes and forms of production as indicative of the Self, and it seems as though this will probably never change. It is that way from the time we are born, until the time we die. There are boxes in my closet at home filled with things I had made in school from the time I was four. And why does my mother insist on keeping them? Because they are reminders of who I was as a little girl, of course...

I relate to Marx's theory of production on a very personal level. Ever since I can remember being in school, my work and grades have always been important to me. Over time, they have even become a *part* of me. When crunch time comes and I feel overwhelmed by all

of the work I have to do, I remind myself *This is what you do, Meredith... This is what you **do!*** Studying, researching, writing papers—this has become a form of production that is attached to who I am. Not the only one, of course, but still a significant piece. Defining ourselves by way of our production shows no sign of ceasing. Especially in the last few months I've found myself confronted by the question "What are you going to do after you graduate?" It's really frightening in a sense, because there's a feeling of panic that sets in when I realize that I'm not sure what my mode of production will be once college is over. Studying and writing and thinking—that has been my mode since kindergarten, what is going to happen to me once I don't have it anymore? Of course, I know I will find my way, but it's still a strange thing to be concerned with.

Aside from production in terms of labor, the creative impulse is also of significance. It seems as though everyone I know has a creative outlet of sorts, and it varies between persons. My Mom loves creative writing and painting, for instance, and my sister loves to sing. I have a passion for singing and playing the piano, and I know that if I don't get a chance to express myself through these mediums I feel out of balance. When I do get to engage in these acts of creativity, I feel more connected with myself than I do at most other times. Likewise, I feel a connection to others when I witness them expressing themselves creatively. Listening and watching my friend Keeghan gently strum his guitar, for instance, or reading an essay written by a Professor-friend about his experiences in the wood-shop... witnessing these acts of Self expression gives us a closer and more intimate look at each other. I feel connected with them on the human level of being a creative species, and appreciate them more for giving me insight into their personal experiences.

These two aspects of production highlight what I see as a dual-sided drive in humans. We not only express ourselves through productive labor, but we also express ourselves through

productive creativity. The way in which we exercise these outlets differs among us, and these differences define us each individually.

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Sigmund Freud gives us a much different account of what it means to be human. Much of his claims are controversial, but in my opinion this controversy is only legitimate with regards to some of Freud's more extreme concepts. The basic foundation behind his concept of id, ego, and superego I think is accurate, as well as his conception that life experiences are shaping and influential. It is important to take note that people are *embodied* beings. We are of our bodies, meaning that physical drives and instincts are an important part of who we are as creatures. The concept that we are sexual and physical doesn't seem like something that should be contested, though I agree that sometimes Freud can be said to go too far with it. The id, however, is not really of interest to me. Instead, I'd like to discuss the implications of the ego and superego with regards to the Self. Pojman writes, "the ego is a product of one's own interface with the world; and the superego is the product of socialization and culture" (172). The ego and superego are, therefore, both parts of the mind that are constructed by others: namely, our parents, teachers, religious instructors, the government, etc. Obviously, people are socialized differently, meaning that we will all have egos and superegos that function differently—for example, my parents and your parents probably don't have exactly the same values. Because values and beliefs are an important part of the Self, this is an essential point to consider. These differences in socialization and education contribute to differences amongst individuals.

One qualm I have with Freud's theory of the mind is his belief that holding a moral code is against human nature. The way I see it, there's something to be said for a basic level of human decency. While I agree that some of the ways we repress our physical and instinctual

desires can be frustrating and maybe even unhealthy in some cases, I think it might be even *more* unhealthy if we acted on all of our physical impulses. Freud seems to brush off too easily the concept that man is a *rational* being—that our reason is what sets us apart from the rest of the living creatures on this earth, and is the explanation for why we aren't still living in caves eating woolly-mammoths for dinner! If creating a set of rules to live by in order to be civilized is so alien to our nature, then how did anyone ever think of it? And how has it become so dominantly a part of our being? Freud, perhaps, overlooked this significant consideration.

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Jean-Paul Sartre puts forth a liberating theory of man. His concept that existence precedes essence gives us something that Marx and Freud's did not—complete freedom to control who we are. However, it is his theory of nothingness that I find most interesting. Particularly, how we perceive people by way of their absence. Throughout my thinking about the Self, death has been a recurring factor. I asked myself: what is it that gives me proof that a "Self" even exists? My answer came when I realized that it is through death we find proof of the Self. Morbid, I know, but significant nonetheless. What happens to us when a person dies? We mourn them, our loss of them, and their loss of themselves (we can hope this to be untrue, but we don't know). They are no longer here and we can feel it; we can *feel* that they are gone, even if we barely knew them. Last year, one of my classmates died of an over-dose on his twenty-first birthday. He was someone I had known on the level of an acquaintance—we lived in the same dorm freshman year and had a few classes together. The class we had together that last semester was small—there were only eight of us—and when I sat in that room on the first Monday he wasn't there, I could feel it. It was palpable. *His absence was palpable...* When



I initially read about Sartre's nothingness, John Derrah was the first thought that popped into mind.

Sartre's philosophy also makes me think about this concept of Self-knowledge. He defines who we are, in part, as how others perceive us, which got me to thinking. Generally speaking, we see who we are for ourselves as being more accurate than how others see us. I wonder: is this necessarily true? Of course, people we barely know cannot know us as well as we know ourselves because they only get fragments... but when it comes to people like our family and best friends, is it possible that they could know us better than we know ourselves? Of course, there can never be a definite answer to this question, but it's still worth pondering...

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When I began this project of investigating the Self, the connection between Self and Place was an immediate interest. I remember hearing Edward Casey come to the Honors Colloquium to talk about Place, and being moved by the fact that someone was voicing through philosophy something that I had always felt; something that I'm sure everyone feels. I had never really considered it on a philosophical level, though I realized that the impulse to connect to Place had always been there. It was an interesting phenomenon to have someone bring to light something like this—something that everybody experiences, but who few really take the time to ponder. Thus began the process of looking back at my own life, and realizing the ways in which the connection between Self and Place had manifested.

The first memory I have of a feeling of connection to Place was in August, 1988. I was four years old, and my family was moving from our house in Massachusetts to South Florida. I remember standing in the driveway with my sister, waiting for our parents to come out. Our driveway was gravel, made up of scattered stones of silver and grey. I picked up a few to keep so I could always have a piece of my first home, and I still have them to this day. I remember standing there and picking up those rocks, choosing the ones I liked best, and keeping them in a safe spot so that they would never get lost. If this memory doesn't speak of the inherent connection between Self and Place, I don't know what does.

A Professor-friend shared with me an experience he had when he went to visit the first home he lived in. This farm was a very historic Place for his family, as his own father had been born there and lived there his whole life. My Professor and his family lived there permanently until he was four, and after that it continued to be where he spent his summers until he was

sixteen. Naturally, this farm in Finley was a very special Place for him—a Place that held a sense of family history as well as years worth of memories and experiences. Eventually, of course, time went on and their farm and land was sold. Twenty-five years later, he attended a family reunion not too far from where the old farm had been, and he and his Dad decided to go and visit. The farm had since burned down, and there instead were fields and fields of sunflowers. He and his Dad stood on the empty land, trying to piece together where everything “had been.” He used the word “Placeless” to describe the feeling, remembering an entire life of events and experiences that were no longer represented by the structures which used to stand there. No house, no barn, *nothing*... and yet, nonetheless the feeling of connection to Place was still present. Both present and not present, it seems. Present, almost, by way of its absence. One can only imagine how his Dad must have felt—returning to a place that was, in a way, no longer there. Still, though, there seems to be something significant about grounding our feet in the earth. The house and the barn may be gone, but there’s still something about standing on the land that makes us feel something special.

\* \* \* \* \*

Places are of momentous value to each and every one of us as individuals, as they remind us of different times in our lives, different Places we lived, and of past experiences and feelings. It seems to be that way across the board, as there are signs of the significance of Place all over. The concept of memorials is one example that we see throughout human society everywhere. The memorial set up for 9/11 will soon, if it hasn’t already, become a Place where people from all over the country will go to so that they may remember our country’s greatest tragedy. There is something significant about standing there—on the Place where it happened—that causes an overflow of emotion in people. It allows them to feel a connection with the people who died there, as well as the entire event itself. Seeing pictures of this memorial or

watching footage of it on television is not the same as actually *standing there*. Again, this concept of having our feet on the earth arises. It is about grounding ourselves on the actual land that seems to matter.

When discussing this concept of memorial, I cannot help but think of the ways in which families and friends of car accident victims mark the land where the accidents occurred. Scattered everywhere, we see crosses on the sides of roads, marking the place where car accident victims have been killed. They function as gravestones, in a way, only not to mark where the body rests but to mark the Place where the person was killed. I have been lucky to never lose someone close to me in this way; lucky to never have to visit one of these road-side crosses to mourn the death of a friend or loved one. Still, though, whenever I see them or pass by them I'm overcome by a feeling of sadness. The thought is always this same *In this Place, right where I am right now, somebody was killed*.

Clearly, the issue of death is an important one when discussing the connection between Self and Place. This semester, URI has experienced the tragedy of losing three of its students. While I did not know any of these three people directly, I do know people who did. I have friends who lived with Geoff, and there was one recurring thought that went through my mind when I saw them in class the days following the tragedy. *If one of my closest friends had just died, I would not be able to get off the floor of their bedroom*. Again, we return to this issue of personal space as being connected to the Self. Just to be around a person's belongings, in a person's space where they worked and slept and *were* gives us a feeling of connectedness with them.

\* \* \* \* \*

When I speak of connectedness between people, the concept of Art comes to mind. As I was jotting down notes about experiences I have had of Self and Place, I thought of my visit to

the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Standing in front of the works of great artists like Paul Cézanne and Auguste Rodin is an overwhelming and moving experience on many levels. One of the most unique, however, is the experience of feeling as though you are standing in the same Place as the artist had at one time. To look at a painting that had once been caressed by brush strokes made by Cézanne, to gaze over a statue that had been formed by the hands of Rodin... these experiences give you the feeling that you are where they *were*. This sensation intensifies when you touch the artwork (something that isn't really appropriate, but can be tolerated with statues, at least). I remember running my fingers along where Rodin's name had been carved, feeling as though I was touching a surface he once touched. It is a feeling of Place in a different sense than I have previously discussed; a feeling of Place that arises out of an artwork connecting the artist with the audience.

This connectivity between artist and audience via an artwork does not necessarily call for these two people to be strangers. A more personal experience I have had, and a fond memory of a lost friend, I hope will serve to tie together all of these facets of Self and Place that I have discussed...

I had a friend, Ryan, who I'd known since middle school. The night before I left for my freshman year of college, he and a few of my other friends were over to hang out and say goodbye. On my bed was the new journal I was going to bring with me to school, and Ryan, for some unknown reason, decided to open it up and write me a poem on the very first page. I can still picture him sitting on the floor in my room against the closet, scribbling away.

Ryan died that year, and that night was the last time I ever saw him.

There isn't a time since he passed away that I opened up that journal to write in it, without first stopping to read his poem. And every time I do, every time I read it, I touch the

ink on the page and feel as though he and I are in the same Place, because he once held the journal in his hands like I do now. And when I'm missing him or thinking about him, I'm wishing that I could be sitting on that same spot on my bedroom floor where I know he once was. Being in a Place where I remember *him being* makes me feel close to him again. Again, I find myself returning to the thought that he is there by way of his *absence*. Also, that it is grounding our bodies on the *exact piece of earth* that holds a memory or feeling for us that is important.

\* \* \* \* \*

I believe it is necessary and automatic for each and every one of us to have Places that hold special significance. Whether it be our first home, where a fond and dear memory happened, or where a loved-one is laid to rest... these places become a part of who we are. To hold Places close to our hearts seems to be an inherent tendency in man, which is why I chose to delve into this aspect of the Self in more detail. The consideration of Places as a facet of the Self seems to be something that is too hastily overlooked. Because we are embodied creatures, *where we are and where we have been in the world is extremely important and significant*. Our experiences and memories take place in physical space—in a specific location of the world. These locations are an essential part of the experiences and memories themselves, and I could not allow myself to do an examination of the concept of Self without a discussing of this significant aspect of man.

# Concluding Remarks



What it is that makes me different from you, and you different from the next person is the Self. *My* self, *your* self, *their* self... they are not the same.

In a way, finding the Self is one of the most mysterious tasks to ever undertake, and yet at the same time, it is one of the most obvious...

**I am my family.** Traces of my mother, father, and sister. Grandparents, Aunts, Uncles, and ancestors I've never even known...

**I am my friends.** People I've known forever, who have shaped me everyday I spent with them. People I've only known for a short time, who have become an indispensable part of me...

**I am my teachers,** wisdom imparted by those who have become friends...

**I am my memories and experiences,** lurking in the back-reaches of my mind, influencing my every move and every choice...

**I am my expressions,** the ways I participate in creative acts of catharsis,

**I am my Places,** Places I've lived, Places I've valued, and the places I am to go...

**I am my habits, my quirks, my obsessions, and my pet peeves...** that which has sprouted out of who-knows-where, and that which will probably never vanish...

**I am my actions, my decisions, and my choices.** That which has brought me where I am today, and which will take me to where I'll be tomorrow...

**I am my passions, my desires, my hopes, and my fears...** I am defined by what makes me different from you...

Most importantly, **I am My Self...** individual, significant, and like none-other...

## Acknowledgements

There are many people who deserve to be mentioned, as this paper and project could not have been undertaken without their guidance and encouragement. First, I'd like to thank Dr. Johnson, my teacher of four years and advisor on this project. Thank you for always filling my brain and soul with knowledge and philosophical thirst. As I have said and will always say, you illuminate my world.

I would also like to thank my friends who have made this last semester at URI unbelievable—Cortnee and Keeghan, my thesis and antithesis...

Dean, for recommending helpful sources and for really motivating me to work. ("Do you have a draft I can read yet, Meredith?" "Umm... no" "Do you even have a *thesis?!'*") ☺

Dr. McIntyre, for those witty little buttons reading "PANIC NOW" without which, I might not have gotten a single thing done all semester.

And last but not least, I would like to thank my family. Mom, Dad, Holiday, and Pat. Without you, I would not be who I am today. Your love, support, and encouragement have always been the wind beneath my wings.

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