



The Quest for Genuine Freedom

IN DEFENSE OF KIERKEGAARD'S
UPBUILDING OF FAITH AND THE
UNITY OF TEMPORALITY AND
ETERNITY

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Welcome to Class!

Introductions

- TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOURSELF!
- TELL ME YOUR NAME AND WHY YOU ARE INTERESTED IN THIS CLASS IN PARTICULAR?
- ANY EXPERIENCE READING KIERKEGAARD OR FAMILIARITY WITH HIS PHILOSOPHY?
- INTEREST IN OR FAMILIARITY WITH THE SUB-DISCIPLINE OF EXISTENTIALISM IN PHILOSOPHY?
- FAVORITE PASTIMES, HOBBIES, INTERESTS IN LIFE?
- FINALLY, HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT THE OLLI PROGRAM, AND ARE YOU TAKING OTHER COURSES HERE AS WELL THIS SEMESTER? WHICH ONES?
- JUST ANYTHING YOU WANT TO SAY ABOUT YOURSELF, BRIEF OR A BIT MORE DETAILED... THE FLOOR IS YOURS!



Overview for Today

- ❖ OVERVIEW OF EXISTENTIALISM
- ❖ HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF EXISTENTIALISM
- ❖ WHO WAS SØREN KIERKEGAARD?
- ❖ FAITH AS TRUE ETHIC
- ❖ SMALL DISCUSSION GROUP QUESTIONS
- ❖ LOOKING FORWARD (WEDNESDAY): KIERKEGAARD'S IDEA OF THE ORIGINAL SYNTHESIS; SELFHOOD; SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS; KIERKEGAARDIAN ETHICS; THE INWARD JOURNEY TO GOD AND "THE LEAP OF FAITH"; SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS; A CHALLENGE TO KIERKEGAARD'S ORIGINAL SYNTHESIS AND THE INWARD JOURNEY TO GOD: SARTRE, DE BEAUVOIR, AND THE FREEDOM OF THE FOR-ITSELF); SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Overview of Existentialism

- ❖ What is the Meaning of Life?
- ❖ Is this a question we need to ask? Why?
- ❖ What is the point of living?
- ❖ Who (or What) is in charge of our lives? Who (or What) placed us Here?
- ❖ What is "Here"?
- ❖ If there is a "Here", where is "There"?
- ❖ Existentialism: "Life is absurd". Is this true?
- ❖ Existentialists: A collection of writers, poets, philosophers, thinkers who MAY find life absurd but celebrate the FREEDOM TO CREATE MEANINGFUL LIVES

Overview of Existentialism

Nihilism

Engagement versus Detachment

Existence Precedes Essence

Freedom

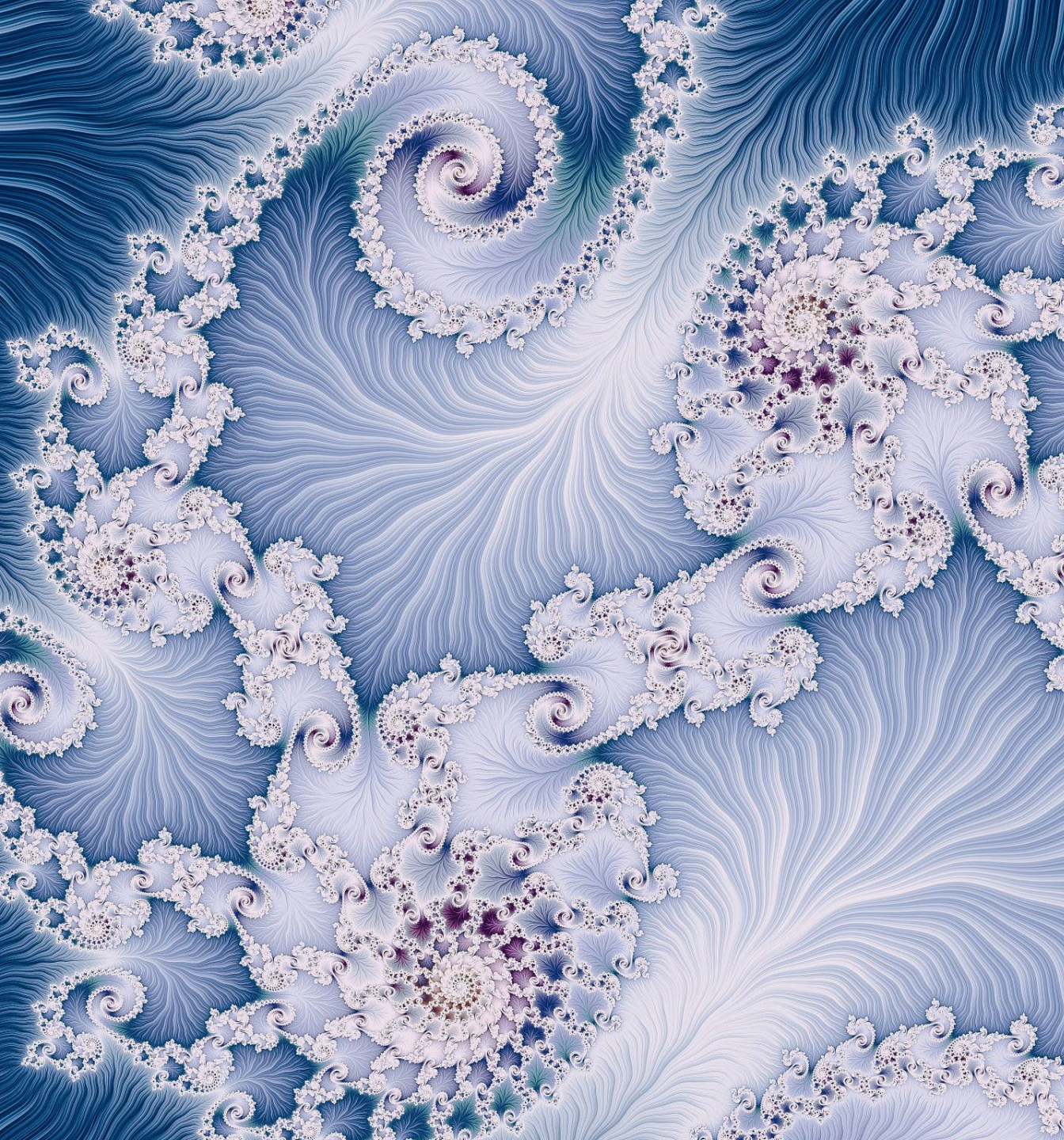
GENUINE FREEDOM (Kierkegaard)

Authenticity

Ethics

Overview of Existentialism

In surveying its representative thinkers, one finds secular and religious existentialists, philosophers who embrace a conception of radical freedom and others who reject it. And there are those who regard our relations with others as largely mired in conflict and self-deception and others who recognize a deep capacity for self-less love and interdependence. Given these disparate threads and the fact that there is no unifying doctrine, one can nonetheless distill a set of overlapping ideas that bind the movement together. Source: Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy



What IS Genuine Freedom?

- Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre: **freedom of the for-itself**
- Søren Kierkegaard: **original synthesis and self as spirit**
- Despair and the "leap of faith"
- The unity of temporality and eternity (Christ)

Historical Context of Existentialism

- 19th century: The idea of “upward mobility” (Referring to Europe) had come to fruition;
- There was an erosion of beliefs and meta-narratives
- Darwin
- Freud
- Knowledge, faith, values were eroding
- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) had an answer for all of this: The only thing that counts is RATIONALITY
- In EXISTENTIALISM, BY CONTRAST, THE ONLY THING THAT COUNTS IS EMOTIVE/MOOD/SUBJECTIVITY/AFFECT
- Descartes (1596-1650): We must LOOK INWARD to find truth (“I think, therefore I am”)
 - “Clear and distinct” is the criteria, but what is our INTERNAL CRITERION FOR AUTHENTICITY?
- IN ORDER TO FIND CERTAINTY... INTROSPECTION IS THE HALLMARK OF MODERNITY
 - THE EXISTENTIAL CRISIS ARISES!
 - What is an EXISTENTIAL CRISIS?

Historical Context

KIERKEGAARD

- 19th century proto-existentialism
- Optimism as illusion, despair
- Man's simultaneous life as an individual in spirit (eternity) and as a citizen in society (time)
- Philosophical analysis of Christian faith
- Theistic, faith as hope, edifying

SARTRE AND DE BEAUVOIR

- 20th century existentialism
- Nihilism, despair, totalitarian regimes
- Meaninglessness of life and erosion of cultural values
- "Man is a useless passion" (Sartre)
- Phenomenology
- Atheistic movement of the transcendent ego

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855)

- Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic
- 19th century proto-existentialism
- “Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom”
- Man’s simultaneous life as an individual in spirit (eternity) and as a citizen in society (time)
- Optimism as illusion, despair
- Philosophical analysis of Christian faith
- Theistic, faith as hope, edifying



Faith as True Ethic

- Kierkegaard values faith above all else
- The pilgrimage of faith
- *'the belief that in God the impossible is possible, that in Him time and eternity are one, that both life and death are meaningful. **Faith is the knowledge that man is creature [...] and yet responsible and free.** It is the acceptance of man's essential loneliness, to be overcome by the certainty that God is always with man; even 'unto the hour of our death'.*
- Faith through despair ➡ Genuine freedom

Faith as True Ethic

Tro: faith/belief

- ❖ In the development of the self through the stages of life (the pilgrimage of faith), the experience of faith changes. *As the individual reaches the ethical stage of personal commitment to others and the moral law, faith is committed to reason and the moral order of society, becoming a "reason to produce the social good".*
- ❖ Furthermore, in faith the individual becomes the universal, ceases to be isolated, becomes meaningful and absolute; hence *in faith there is a true ethic*. And in faith existence in society becomes meaningful, "too as existence in true charity".

Small Discussion Group Questions

- What are some of the strengths of Kierkegaard's theistic approach to philosophy as opposed to later atheistic approaches to philosophy, like those of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir?
- Are there some weaknesses or limitations in Kierkegaard's approach to achieving genuine freedom?
- What are some of the strengths of Kierkegaard's idea of faith as true ethic? Are there any drawbacks to this approach?
- What do you think about Kierkegaard's emphasis on social responsibility as part of true ethics/genuine freedom?

Looking Forward: Wednesday 1st October 2025

- ❖ KIERKEGAARD'S IDEA OF THE ORIGINAL SYNTHESIS
- ❖ SELFHOOD
- ❖ SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
- ❖ KIERKEGAARDIAN ETHICS
- ❖ THE INWARD JOURNEY TO GOD AND "THE LEAP OF FAITH"
- ❖ SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
- ❖ A CHALLENGE TO KIERKEGAARD'S ORIGINAL SYNTHESIS AND THE INWARD JOURNEY TO GOD: SARTRE, DE BEAUVOIR, AND THE FREEDOM OF THE FOR-ITSELF
- ❖ SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
- ❖ LOOKING FORWARD FORWARD: NEXT MONDAY!