



# 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 Back 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

- ❖ BRIEF REVIEW OF MONDAY'S SLIDES
- ❖ SMALL DISCUSSION GROUP QUESTIONS (FROM MONDAY)
- ❖ 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 (NEXT MONDAY): SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S APPROACH TO FREEDOM; KIERKEGAARD'S FREEDOM IN FAITH; SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS; AN INTRODUCTION TO TIME AND THE UNITY OF TEMPORALITY AND ETERNITY

# 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

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Nihilism

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Engagement versus Detachment

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Existence Precedes Essence

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Freedom

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GENUINE FREEDOM (Kierkegaard)

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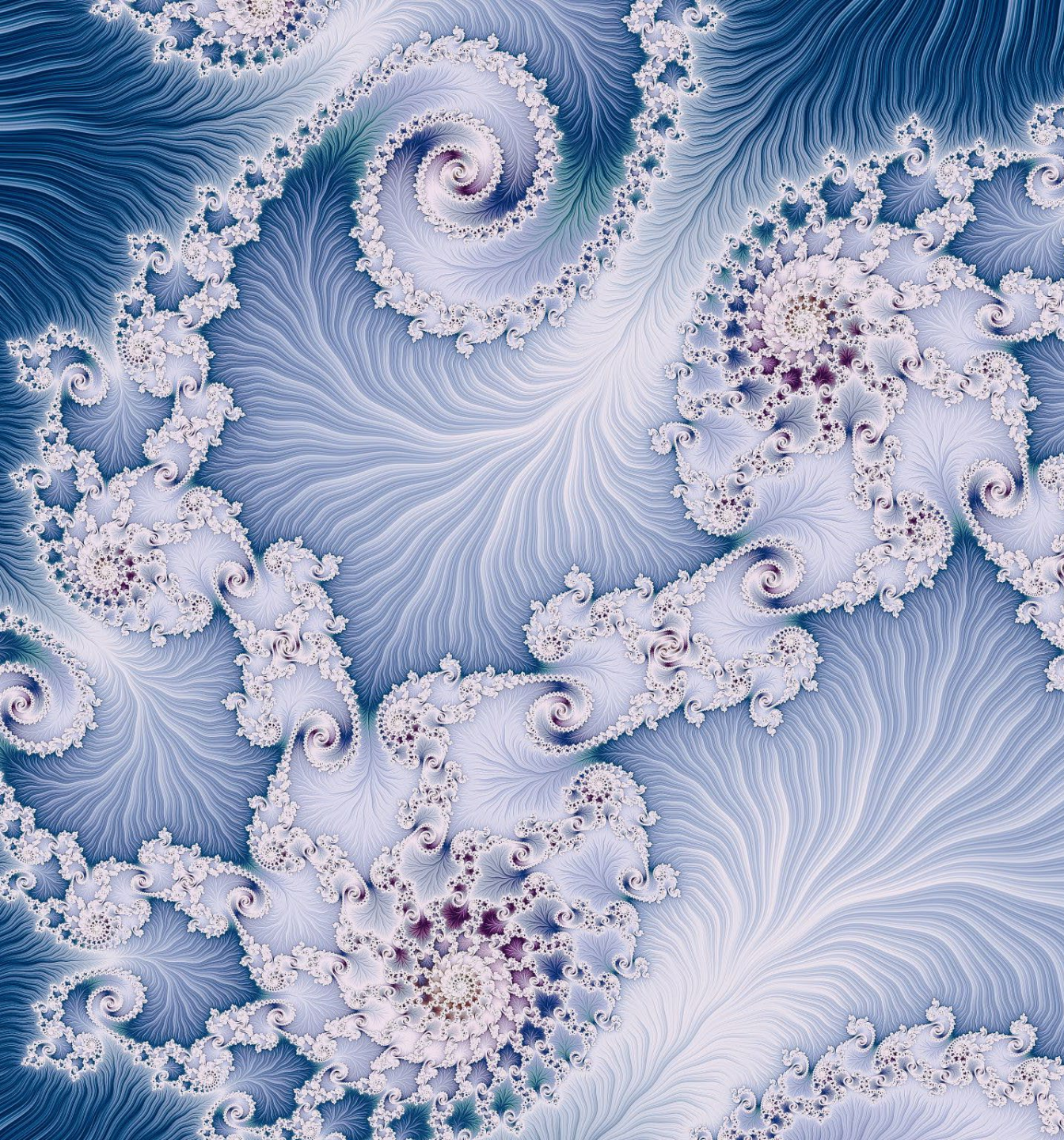
Authenticity

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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

- 19<sup>th</sup> 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

- 19<sup>th</sup> 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

- 20<sup>th</sup> 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
- 19<sup>th</sup> 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?

# Kierkegaard's Original Synthesis

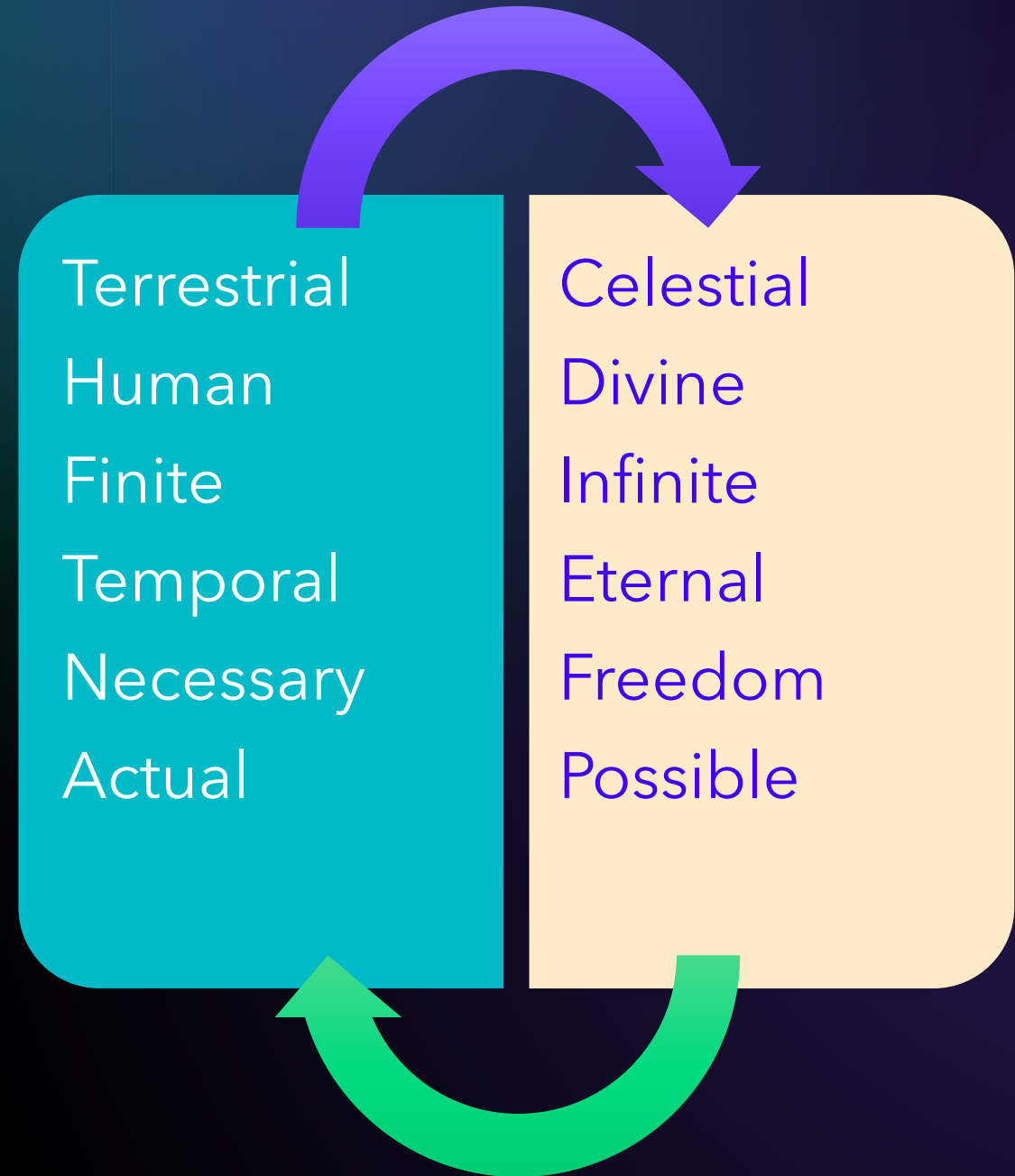
# Selfhood

Self is a spirit – the spirited component of life.

The self [is a] synthesis

The self is a conjoining, [it is] activity driven, a creative act whereby we are making ourselves what we are and what we are to become.

As a fusion of these polarities, the self is a relation which relates to itself, or that in the relation which is its relating to itself. *Not the relation but the relation's relating to itself.*



# Small Group Discussion Questions

- ❖ Do you think of your “self” as a spirit, the spirited component of the life you have lived so far?
- ❖ Is the “self” a conjoining of these binary opposites, activity driven, a creative act whereby we are making ourselves what we are and what we are to become?
- ❖ Which of the binary opposites do you relate to the most, and how does the misrelation between the two cause you despair, or does it?
- ❖ Recall the binary opposites: Terrestrial/Celestial; Human/Divine; Finite/Infinite; Temporal/Eternal; Necessary/Freedom; and Actual/Possible.
- ❖ Refer to the handout as well if you need a reminder of the diagram.

# Kierkegaardian Ethics

- Transformation of the passions: romantic love to marriage
- Marriage as ethical, lends to ethical openness (versus aesthetic concealment)
- The importance of choice for an **authentic life (existentialism)**
- **Choosing aesthetically is not choosing at all; need to choose choice itself, taking responsibility for the person he has become**
- Self-acceptance (facticity in the world) versus self-alienation
- The "I chooses itself"
- Seeking a balance between possibility (too much choice paralyses the will)/necessity (complete absence of choice)
- **Voluntary self-limitation**: devotion to work, his wife, his children less a sacrifice than the source of joy and satisfaction (God)
- The ethical appears to be grounded in social requirements and expectations for Kierkegaard, but.... The religious life also comes into play (and Kierkegaard is highly critical of organized religion!)

# The Inward Journey to God

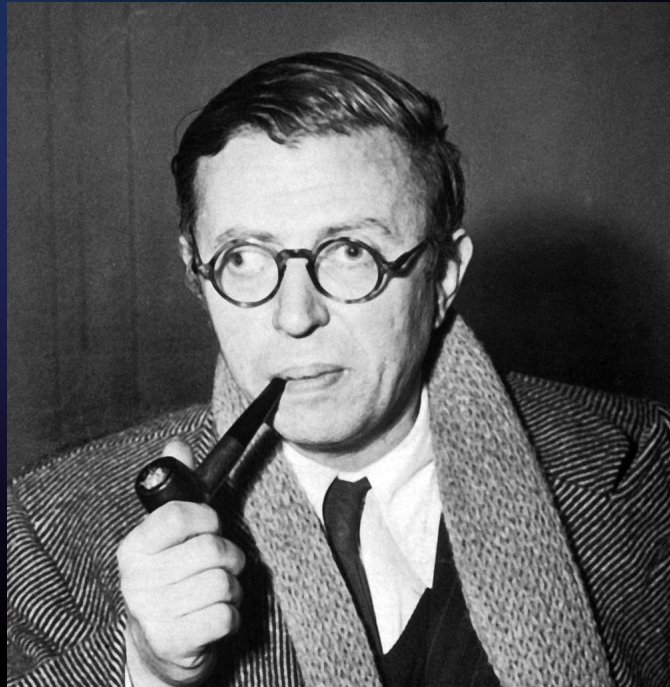
- Despair as a misrelation of the synthesis, a sickness of the spirit
- *The Sickness Unto Death*
- Knowing oneself in relation to God
- Standing before God from within
- The leap of faith towards the Kingdom of God
- The inward journey of despair into hope ➡ Genuine freedom

# Small Group Discussion Questions

- ❖ How does one “stand before God” from within? What does one say to God or one’s higher power; universal Truth, or Intelligent Designer?
- ❖ If one knows oneself in relation to God (the higher self-God relationship relating to the self-self relationship, which is a constant oscillation relating itself to the relation’s relation), how does one move from possibility to actuality when taking “the leap of faith” to repair the misrelation of the aspect of the synthesis which is producing despair in the concrete world (“Here”)?
- ❖ When taking “the leap of faith”, how does one let go of all of the attachments to despair that arise in the often-longstanding misrelation that has been plaguing the individual without their knowledge?

# 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

- ❖ What is the most significant aspect of Sartre and De Beauvoir's challenge to Kierkegaard's "Original Synthesis"?
- ❖ What is the most significant aspect of their challenge to Kierkegaard's inward journey to God?
- ❖ Does their idea of the synthesis work without God?
- ❖ Can the for-itself make meaning out of life without God in the movement of the transcendent ego? Why or why not?
- ❖ Which approach are you most attracted to and WHY?

# Looking Forward: Monday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2025

❖ BRIEF REVIEW

❖ SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S APPROACH TO FREEDOM

❖ KIERKEGAARD'S FREEDOM IN FAITH

❖ SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

❖ AN INTRODUCTION TO TIME AND THE UNITY OF TEMPORALITY AND ETERNITY

❖ SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

❖ LOOKING FORWARD (NEXT WEDNESDAY 8<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER): MORE ON TIME AND THE UNITY OF TEMPORALITY AND ETERNITY; TIME AND ETERNITY; SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS; THE UNITY OF TEMPORALITY AND ETERNITY; KIERKEGAARD'S "LEAP OF FAITH" AND THE PARADOX OF CHRISTIANITY; CLOSING REMARKS: KIERKEGAARD'S GENUINE FREEDOM