# ND20 – AC – Existentialism

## Framing

#### Existence precedes essence – agents are born into the world without an essence. The only way to reconcile this is through an account of ethics that begins with individual subjectivity. Sartre.

[Sartre, Jean Paul. “Existentialism is a Humanism”] SHS ZS.

Atheistic **existentialism**, of which I am a representative, **declares** with greater consistency **that if God does not exist there is** at least **one being whose existence comes before** its **essence**, **a being which exists before it can be defined** by any conception of it. .... What do we mean by saying that existence precedes essence? We mean that **man** first of all **exists**, encounters himself, surges up in the world – **and defines himself afterwards**. **If man** as the existentialist sees him **is not definable**, **it is because** **to begin** with **he is nothing**. He will not be anything until later, and then **he will be what he makes of himself**. Thus, **there is no human nature**, **because there is no God to have a conception of it**. **Man** simply **is**. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is **what he wills**, and as **he conceives himself after already existing** – as **he wills** to be after **that leap towards existence.** **Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself**. That is the first principle of existentialism. And this is what people call its “subjectivity,” using the word as a reproach against us. But what do we mean to say by this, but that man is of a greater dignity than a stone or a table? For we mean to say that man primarily exists – that man is, before all else, something which propels itself towards a future and is aware that it is doing so. **Man is**, indeed, **a project which possesses a subjective life**, instead of being a kind of moss, or a fungus or a cauliflower. **Before that projection of the self nothing exists**; not even in the heaven of intelligence: **man will only attain existence when he is what he purposes to be**. Not, however, what he may wish to be. For **what we** usually **understand by wishing** or willing **is a conscious decision taken** – much more often than not – **after we have made ourselves** **what we are**. I may wish to join a party, to write a book or to marry – but in such a case what is usually called my will is probably a manifestation of a prior and more spontaneous decision. If, however, it is true that existence is prior to essence, **man is responsible for what he is**. Thus, the first effect of **existentialism** is that it **puts every man in possession of** **himself** as he is, **and places** the entire **responsibility for his existence** squarely **upon his own shoulders**. And, when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that **he is responsible for all men.** .... .... **If**, moreover, **existence precedes essence** and we will to exist at the same time as we fashion our image, that image is valid for all and for the entire epoch in which we find ourselves. Our responsibility is thus much greater than we had supposed, for it concerns mankind as a whole. If I am a worker, for instance, I may choose to join a Christian rather than a Communist trade union. And if, by that membership, I choose to signify that resignation is, after all, the attitude that best becomes a man, that man’s kingdom is not upon this earth, I do not commit myself alone to that view. Resignation is my will for everyone, and my action is, in consequence, a commitment on behalf of all mankind. Or if, to take a more personal case, I decide to marry and to have children, even though this decision proceeds simply from my situation, from my passion or my desire, I am thereby committing not only myself, but humanity as a whole, to the practice of monogamy. **I am thus responsible for myself and for all men**, **and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be**. **In fashioning myself I fashion man**. .... Who, then, can prove that I am the proper person to impose, by my own choice, my conception of man upon mankind? I shall never find any proof whatever; there will be no sign to convince me of it. If a voice speaks to me, it is still I myself who must decide whether the voice is or is not that of an angel. If I regard a certain course of action as good, it is only I who choose to say that it is good and not bad. ... When, for instance, a military leader takes upon himself the responsibility for an attack and sends a number of men to their death, he chooses to do it and at bottom he alone chooses. No doubt under a higher command, but its orders, which are more general, require interpretation by him and upon that interpretation depends the life of ten, fourteen or twenty men. In making the decision, he cannot but feel a certain anguish. All leaders know that anguish. It does not prevent their acting, on the contrary it is the very condition of their action, for the action presupposes that there is a plurality of possibilities, and in choosing one of these, they realize that it has value only because it is chosen. Now it is anguish of that kind which existentialism describes, and moreover, as we shall see, makes explicit through direct responsibility towards other men who are concerned. Far from being a screen which could separate us from action, it is a condition of action itself. And when we speak of “abandonment” – a favorite word of Heidegger – we only mean to say that God does not exist, and that it is necessary to draw the consequences of his absence right to the end. .... The existentialist, on the contrary, finds it extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. .... **For if** indeed **existence precedes essence**, **one will never be able to explain one’s action by reference to a given and specific human nature**; in other words, there is no determinism – **man is free, man is freedom**. Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimize our behavior. Thus **we have neither behind us, nor before us in a luminous realm of values**, any means of justification or excuse. – **We are left alone, without excuse**. That is what I mean when I say that **man is condemned to be free**. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does. ....

#### Agents define themselves through their actions by taking an individual guide to morality. Appealing to external ethical principles will always fail because they cannot account for the particularities of sentiments. Sartre.

[Sartre, Jean-Paul. Existentialism Is a Humanism. 1946, [www.mrsmoser.com/uploads/8/5/0/1/8501319/english\_11\_ib\_-\_no\_exit\_-\_existentialism\_is\_a\_humanism\_-\_sartre.pdf](http://www.mrsmoser.com/uploads/8/5/0/1/8501319/english_11_ib_-_no_exit_-_existentialism_is_a_humanism_-_sartre.pdf)] SHS ZS

As an example by which you may the better understand this state of abandonment, **I will refer to** the case of **a pupil of mine**, who sought me out in the following circumstances. His father was quarreling with his mother and was also inclined to be a “collaborator”; his elder brother had been killed in the German offensive of 1940 and this young man, with a sentiment somewhat primitive but generous, burned to avenge him. His mother was living alone with him, deeply afflicted by the semi-treason of his father and by the death of her eldest son, and her one consolation was in this young man. But **he**, at this moment, **had the choice between going to England to join the Free French Forces or of staying near his mother and helping her to live.** He fully realized that **this woman lived only for him and that his disappearance** – or perhaps his death – **would plunge her into despair**. He also realized that, concretely and in fact, **every action he performed on his mother’s behalf would** **be** sure of effect in the sense of **aiding her to live**, **whereas** anything he did in order to go and **fight would be an ambiguous action which might vanish** like water into sand and serve no purpose. Consequently, **he found himself confronted by two** very **different modes of action**; the **one concrete**, immediate, but directed towards only one individual; and **the other** an action addressed to an end **infinitely greater**, a national collectivity, but for that very reason ambiguous – and it might be frustrated on the way. At the same time, **he was hesitating between two kinds of morality**; on the one side the morality of sympathy, of personal devotion and, on the other side, a morality of wider scope but of more debatable validity. **He had to choose** between those two. What could help him to choose? Could the Christian doctrine? No. Christian doctrine says: Act with charity, love your neighbor, deny yourself for others, choose the way which is hardest, and so forth. But which is the harder road? To whom does one owe the more brotherly love, the patriot or the mother? Which is the more useful aim, the general one of fighting in and for the whole community, or the precise aim of helping one particular person to live? Who can give an answer to that a priori? No one. Nor is it given in any ethical scripture. **If values are uncertain, if they are still too abstract to determine the particular, concrete case under consideration, nothing remains but to trust in our instincts**. That is what this young man tried to do; and when I saw him he said, “In the end, it is feeling that counts; the direction in which it is really pushing me is the one I ought to choose. If I feel that I love my mother enough to sacrifice everything else for her – my will to be avenged, all my longings for action and adventure then I stay with her. If, on the contrary, I feel that my love for her is not enough, I go.” But **how does one estimate the** **strength of** a **feeling**? **The value of** his **feeling** for his mother **was determined precisely by the fact that he was standing by her**. I may say that I love a certain friend enough to sacrifice such or such a sum of money for him, but I cannot prove that unless I have done it. I may say, “I love my mother enough to remain with her,” if actually I have remained with her. I can only estimate the strength of this affection if I have performed an action by which it is defined and ratified. But if I then appeal to this affection to justify my action, I find myself drawn into a vicious circle.

#### Freedom for subject formation necessitates letting others engage in self-creation simultaneously. Manzi 13.

[Manzi 13 (Yvonne Manzi, 1-23-2013, accessed on 11-6-2020, E-International Relations, "Jean-Paul Sartre: Existential “Freedom” and the Political", <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/01/23/jean-paul-sartre-existential-freedom-and-the-political/>)] SHS AK

Having acknowledged Sartre’s focus on subjectivity, and having noted that his focus is entirely on the individual and the ‘wrongness’ of the imposition of outside values upon the individual, one wonders how it is possible for society to continue and for a community to maintain itself. In Existentialism and Humanism,[25] **Sartre** seems to **introduce a** vague **idea of** **community**. “**In willing freedom we discover** that **it depends entirely upon the freedom of others**” and he adds that “**I cannot make liberty my aim unless I make that of others equally my aim**” (2007, 62). This seems to allow the idea that therefore **humans will act in solidarity with each other in spite of a lack of transcendental values**. In Being and Nothingness he explains this further and states that **we have a responsibility towards our freedom and the freedom of others**. By responsibility, he means “**consciousness of being the incontestable author of an event or of an object**” (1943, 553). Because an individual is absolutely free, **when he makes a choice he becomes that choice** and that choice becomes him. The changes he makes in the world because of that choice also become him. In Sartre’s words, “**what happens to me happens through** **me**”[27] and as a for-itself, I must “wholly assume the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it” (Ibid, 554). An example of this is war – **if I am born into a war, I am born into a situation and this situation is what I am**. **I then have to make choices which I am wholly responsible for**. **If I choose to fight in the war** as opposed to desertion or suicide, **I have chosen to continue this war, and this war becomes mine**.[28] This is what Sartre means when he claims that humans are responsible for both their own and others’ freedom.

#### Thus, the standard is consistency with existential freedom.

#### Prefer additionally:

#### [1] Performativity – freedom is constitutive to human subjecthood and any moral theory because the act of adopting an ethical framework presupposes the ability to radically choose.

#### [2] Linguistic inconsistency – it’s impossible to compare competing normative claims since they assume their own legitimacy, meaning it’s impossible to debate between objective frameworks. But prefer my framing because it is a meta constraint that allows for the freedom to debate between framework to begin with. Joyce 2.

[Joyce 02 Joyce, Richard. Myth of Morality. Port Chester, NY,x USA: Cambridge University Press, 2002. p 45-47.] SHS ZS

This distinction between what is accepted from within an institution, and “stepping out” of that institution and appraising it from an exterior perspective, is close to Carnap’s distinction between internal and external questions. 15 Certain “**linguistic frameworks**” (as Carnap calls them) **bring** with them **new terms and ways of talking**: accepting the language of “things” licenses making assertions like “The shirt is in the cupboard”; accepting mathematics allows one to say “There is a prime number greater than one hundred”; **accepting the language of propositions** permits saying “Chicago is large is a true proposition,” etc. **Internal to the framework in question**, **confirming** or disconfirming **the truth of** these **propositions is** a **trivial** matter. **But** traditionally **philosophers have** **interested themselves in** the external question – the issue of the adequacy of **the framework itself:** “Do objects exist?”, “Does the world exist?”, “Are there numbers?”, “Are the propositions?”, etc. Carnap’s argument is that **the external question[s]**, as it has been **typically** construed, **does not make sense**. **From a perspective that accepts mathematics**, the answer to the question “**Do numbers exist**?” is just trivially “**Yes**.” **From a perspective which has not accepted mathematics**, Carnap thinks, th**e only sensible way of construing the question is** not as a theoretical question, but as a practical one: “**Shall I accept the framework of mathematics?**”, and **this pragmatic question** **is** to be **answered by** consideration of the efficiency, the fruitfulness, the **usefulness,** etc., of the adoption. **But** the (traditional) **philosopher’s questions** – “But is mathematics true?”, “Are there really numbers?” – **are pseudo-questions**. By **turning traditional philosophical questions into** practical questions of the form “**Shall I adopt**...?”, Carnap is offering a noncognitive analysis of metaphysics. Since I am claiming that we can critically inspect morality from an external perspective – that we can ask whether there are any non-institutional reasons accompanying moral injunctions – and that such questioning would not amount to a “Shall we adopt...?” query, Carnap’s position represents a threat. What arguments does Carnap offer to his conclusion? He starts with the example of the “thing language,” which involves reference to objects that exist in time and space. **To step out of** the thing **language and ask** “But **does the world exist?”** **is a mistake**, Carnap thinks, **because the** very **notion of** “**existence” is a term which belongs to the** thing **language**, **and can be understood only** **within that framework**, “hence this concept cannot be meaningfully applied to the system itself.” 16 Moving on to the external question “Do numbers exist?” Carnap cannot use the same argument – he cannot say that “existence” is internal to the number language and thus cannot be applied to the system as a whole. Instead he says that **philosophers** who ask the question do not mean material existence, but **have no clear understanding of what other kind of existence might be involved**, **thus such questions have no cognitive content**. It appears that this is the form of argument which he is willing to generalize to all further cases: **persons who dispute whether propositions exist, whether properties exist**, etc., **do not know what they are arguing over, thus they are not arguing over the truth of a proposition, but3 over the practical value of their respective positions**. Carnap adds that this is so because there is nothing

#### [3] Rule-following fails – other frameworks apply external values to determine the validity moral actions, but these values are nonverifiable because they are external and lack evaluative metric to determine their authenticity. De Beauvoir.

[Simon de Beauvoir. “The Ethics of Ambiguity.” Lyle stuart Inc. 1948. Translated by Bernard Frechtman.] SHS ZS.

The failure described in Being and Nothingness is definitive, but it is also ambiguous. **Man**, Sartre tells us, **is "a being who makes himself a lack of being in order that there might be being**." That means, first of all, that his **passion is not inflicted upon him from without**. He chooses it. It is his very **being** and, as such, **does not imply the idea of unhappiness**. If this choice is considered as useless, it is because **there exists no absolute value before the passion of man, outside of it, in relation to which one might distinguish the useless from the useful**. The word **"useful" has not yet received a meaning on the level of description where Being and Nothingness is situated**. **It can be defined only in the human world established by man's projects and the ends he sets up**. In the original helplessness from which man surges up, nothing is useful, nothing is useless. It must therefore be understood that **the passion to which man has acquiesced finds no external justification. No outside appeal, no objective necessity permits of its being called useful**. It has no reason to will itself.

#### [4] External theories fail because we cannot guide actions without understanding the particular circumstance of every agent. Benhabib.

[Benhabib, Seyla. "The Generalized and the Concrete Other: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Controversy and Feminist Theory." Praxis International. 1986. Pg. 38-60.] SHS ZS.

**It is no longer plausible to maintain** that such **a standpoint can universalize** adequately. Kohlberg views the veil of ignorance not only as exemplifying reversibility but universalizability as well. This is the idea that “we must be willing to live with our judgment or decision when we trade places with others in the situation being judged” (Kohlberg, 1981: 197). But the question is, which situation? **Can moral situations be individuated independently of our knowledge of the agents involved** in these situations, of their histories, attitudes, characters, and desires? **Can I describe a situation as one of arrogance or hurt pride without knowing** **something about you** as a concrete other? **Can I know how to distinguish between a breach of confidence and a harmless slip of the tongue, without knowing your history and** your **character**? **Moral situations**, like moral emotions and attitudes, **can only be individuated if they are evaluated in light of our knowledge of the history of the agents involved in them**. While every procedure of universalizability presupposes that “like cases ought to be treated alike” or that I should act in such a way that I should also be willing that all others in a like situation act like me, **the most difficult aspect of any such procedure is to know what constitutes a “like” situation** or what it would mean for another to be exactly in a situation like mine. **Such a process of reasoning**, to be at all viable, **must involve the viewpoint of the concrete other**, for situations, to paraphrase Stanley Cavell, do not come like “envelopes and golden finches,” ready for definition and description, “nor like apples ripe for grading.”29 When we morally disagree, for example, we do not only disagree about the principles involved; very often we disagree because what I see as a lack of generosity on your part you construe as your legitimate right not to do something; we disagree because what you see as jealousy on my part I view as my desire to have more of your attention. **Universalistic moral theory** **neglects** such **everyday, interactional morality and assumes that the public standpoint of justice**, and our quasi-public personalities as right-bearing individuals, are the center of moral theory. Kohlberg emphasizes the dimension of ideal role-taking or taking the viewpoint of the other in moral judgment. Because he defines the other as the generalized other, however, he perpetrates one of the fundamental errors of Kantian moral theory. **Kant’s error was to assume that** I, as **a pure** **rational agent** reasoning for myself, **could reach a conclusion that would be acceptable for all at all times and places**.31 In Kantian moral theory, moral agents are like geometricians in different rooms who, reasoning alone for themselves, all arrive at the same solution to a problem. Following Habermas, I want to name this the “monological” model of moral reasoning. Insofar as he interprets ideal role-taking in the light of Rawls’s concept of a “veil of ignorance,” Kohlberg as well sees the silent thought process of a single self who inaginatively puts himself in the position of the other as the most adequate form of moral judgment. I conclude that a definition of the self that is restricted to the standpoint of the generalized other becomes incoherent and cannot individuate among selves. **Without assuming the standpoint of the concrete other, no coherent universalizability test can be carried out,** **for we lack the necessary epistemic information to judge my moral situation to be “like” or “unlike” yours.**

#### [5] Compatibility – All theories are compatible with and concede the validity of existentialism insofar as the choice to follow a theory is a commitment to radical freedom. De Beauvoir.

[Simon de Beauvoir. “The Ethics of Ambiguity.” Lyle stuart Inc. 1948. Translated by Bernard Frechtman.] SHS ZS. Bracketed for gendered language.

**Existence asserts itself as an absolute** **which must seek its justification** within itself **and not suppress itself**, even though it may be lost by preserving itself. To attain his truth, **man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of** his **being** **but**, on the contrary, **accept the task of realizing it**. He rejoins himself only to the extent that he agrees to remain at a distance from himself. This conversion is sharply distinguished from the Stoic conversion in that **it does not claim to oppose to the sensible universe a formal freedom which is without content.** **To exist** genuinely **is not to deny this spontaneous movement of my transcendence**, **but only to refuse to lose myself in it**. Existentialist conversion should rather be compared to Husserlian reduction: **let man put his will to be "in parentheses**" **and he will thereby be brought to the consciousness of his true condition**. And just as phenomenological reduction prevents the errors of dogmatism by suspending all affirmation concerning the mode of reality of the external world, whose flesh and bone presence the reduction does not, however, contest, so **existentialist conversion does not suppress my instincts, desires, plans, and passions. It merely prevents any possibility of failure by refusing to set up as absolutes the ends** toward **which my transcendence thrusts itself,** and by considering them in their connection with the freedom which projects them.

#### [6] Overcoming oppression – practices of radical freedom come conceptually prior to any strategy against oppression – they assume a vision of ourselves as non-oppressed subjects – that is radical freedom. Gordon 02

[Gordon, Lewis R. “Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existentialist Thought.” (Frederick Douglass as an Existentialist). Routledge publishing. 2002. LHP MK] SHS ZS

Reading exemplified a transgression; it exemplified being able to do what was both denied and forbidden. But the moment the possibility that it could be achieved was raised, **Douglass was thrown into a process of imagining himself beyond his condition**. He became aware that **there was nothing inside him that precluded reaching beyond his circumstance**. His self became, as Sartre would put it, a project. He faced himself in existential anguish. But this realization, that **disobedience raised an anguish-riddled relation to the system of oppression**, also raised the question of how far he should go. **Being secretly disobedient draws the weight of existence onto the self**. Public disobedience needs to be waged at some point as absolute disobedience. Later on, **exemplification of this disobedi- ence** on a group level too the **form of black Union soldiers**. But for Douglass, this absolute disobedience took existential, situa- tional form, which we shall discuss below. We have here, then, the basis of all existential theses: **The human being emerges but must paradoxically be presumed if but for the sake of that emergence**. Kierkegaard urged modern humanity to **break down systemic dehumanization so that authentic individuals could emerge**. But he was aware that such emergence depended upon contexts of universal, and then absolute, preconditions. In the same century, **Douglass explored these issues through the developmental** **reality of human life**: from birth through child- hood into adulthood. His biographies provide details of the struggle of slave children and their grandmothers (since their fathers, mothers, older sisters, and brothers were put to toil as soon as they were able), struggles in which there was effort to nurture the human spirit in an inhumane world. At this point, we find Douglass’s thought bearing many similar- ities to one of his successors, Fanon, who, as I’ve argued, has per- haps written the most influential body of black existential texts. In an illuminating passage of Black Skin,White Masks, Fanon observes that “a black who quotes Montesquieu had better be watched. Please understand me: watched in the sense that he is starting something” (p. 35). “Starting something” is, of course, here an assertion of his humanity. The similarities between Douglass and Fanon lead to a question on the liberating project itself in both’s work, for both start with autobiographical reflections that lead to reflections on violence. For Fanon, the latter is addressed in the discussion of violence in The Wretched of the Earth; for Douglass, it is the fight with Covey. Fanon’s discussion of violence has its early formulation, however, in Black Skin, White Masks. There, Fanon brings to the surface the limitations of the sparks of freedom as struggle for humanity that Douglass experienced in his initial en- counters with written literacy. The clue is in chapter 1 of Black Skin, White Masks, where Fanon discusses language. His argument is, as we have seen in our preceding chapter, a provocative perfor- mance of indirection. He explores what appear to be solutions only to point out their folly: that if they succeed, they have failed. Let us look at Fanon’s argument again, but this time with some additional considerations. He points out that **the location of the human** being **in a colonial, racist world has been displaced**: human being has distortedly **collapsed into white**. Thus, most of the **structural resources** by which the term human is designated **have been infected by whiteness**. **The black then faces the problem of trying to overcome negative blackness** when the linguistic and semiotic resources available for positive identity are white. Semiotically, to resignify oneself out of blackness leads to signifying oneself in terms of whiteness. “Nothing is more astonishing,” observes Fanon in Black Skin,White Masks, “than to hear a black express himself prop- erly, for then in truth he is putting on the white world” (p. 36). The semiotic project must be waged. Something is achieved through achieving what is deemed an impossibility, a feat against nature. **All liberation struggles are to an extent that: a defiance of “nature” as ontological closure.** Something ontological is achieved when black people read and write, when they do that which supposedly cannot be done. Yet the underlying limitation of this view is that it lacks a creative moment. It carries the sense of taking from in- stead of contributing and being entitled to. In Euro-mythological terms, the black’s immediate satisfaction is Promethean. Prometheus has stolen fire.

#### [7] Optimism – an ethics of choice is key to liberation as our standard places its highest faith on one to choose good because it is good, not because they rely on an absurd notion of objective ethics or social responsibility – which would not truly be liberating.

Solomon [From Rationalism to Existentialism: The Existentialists and Their Nineteenth-century Backgrounds, by Robert C. Solomon] SJ MC // SHS ZS

A common argument against all forms of ‘nihilism’, of which existentialism is one, is that it opens the way of all sorts of horrors; it places rape and genocide on the same (a)moral plane as giving gifts and keeping promises. One of the traditional pragmatic arguments against all such philosophies of freedom of choice is the argument that chaos will break loose if people accept it. Existentialism has always been identified as the philosophy with the pessimistic view of man. But what must be evident here is that it is **existentialism** which **places its highest confidence in humanity- that people will choose to be humane as well as human**. It is just those **philosophies and moralities that depend upon sanctions, authority, and ‘given’ values** that **presume man will naturally kill, plunder, pillage**. **Traditional Christianity is clearly degrading to man**. It explicitly **sees him as pathetically unable to resist temptation** **to ‘evil’** without the most horrid of threats. And **British utilitarianism**, with its ‘happy’ view of man, **depends upon the idea of sanctions to make man’s life more than ‘nasty, brutish, and short’.** Even J.S. Mill feels it absolutely necessary to argue with men that it is rational to be moral. The **existentialists argue that there can be no argument to that** **conclusion**. Yet they do not look at their ‘nihilism’ as a gateway to disaster. Some existentialist, of course, particularly Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, don't believe for a second that their ideas will spread beyond ‘a few’. But all apparently believe that **the freedom they seek will lead not to murder and chaos, but to artistic sensitivity, deeply felt religion**, Socratic ethics, or new political and social conscience. **Existentialism does not replace morality** and humane values **but places them on surer ground**. To give up belief in ‘morality’ as a set of a priori or empirically practical principles is not to take the role of the ‘fanatic’. It is to set aside invalid justifications and become moral for the right reasons- because one commits himself. **Existentialism gives us perhaps the most optimistic view of man ever advanced in western philosophy**: **man will, without being ordered**, instructed, forced by man or nature, **chose to be humane**. Sartre’s ‘Existential hero’ and Camus ‘Absurd hero’ are not madmen, and it is more than clear that Nietzsche’s nihilist ubermensch is not a nazi prototype. The existentialist may begin with Dostoevsky’s concern, “If there is no God, all is permitted,” but they soon leave Dostoevsky’s worries behind. **Why should we suppose that man will do ‘evil’ if we remove the forces of authority of the ‘good’**. Perhaps there is no reason, and the existentialists do not even argue the point. In every author, **there is the optimistic and almost simple-minded presupposition that man’s freedom is desirable without qualification**. (This is not to say, however, that freedom is, for the existentialists, an ‘end in itself’. It sometimes appears, in De Beauvoir’s Ethics of Ambiguity, for example, that freedom is the end to which all actions are to be means. But this notion of freedom has no ‘content’ in precisely this sense; it cannot intelligibly function in an ends-means relationship with any particular choices. It is a description of the choice, not the objet of choice. In Sartre, freedom is consciousness, and just as consciousness “cannot be its own object,” freedom cannot be its own object either.)

#### [8] Fluidity – ethics must begin with the cogito and we cannot attempt to model the human experience, which diminishes radical freedom by starting with the presupposition that there is something constitutive to the human identity.

Gordon 15 [Lewis, Afro-Jewish philosopher, political thinker, educator, and musician, Professor at the University of Connecticut in Philosophy and Africana Studies, European Union Visiting Chair in Philosophy; Nelson Mandela Visiting Professor of Politics and International Studies at Rhodes University, South Africa; and Chairman of the Frantz Fanon awards committees of the Caribbean Philosophical Association, transcribed from <https://youtu.be/UABksVE5BTQ>, presenting and discussing his book “What Fanon Said”] SHS ZS

The first thing to bear in mind you may wonder why in the beginning of the talk I talked about philosophical anthropology. And **many people** when they are **trying to talk about social** **change** they **never think about what a human being is** and this is something Fanon pays attention to. **Many people want to have closed conceptions of human beings because** then **human beings can be predicable**. In fact, in fanons writing he gave an example. One of the problems is that when he would walk in reason seems to walk out. **One problem** we have **to** **bear in mind when** we try to **look at** the question of **human beings in terms of rigid closed systems is** that **we often are trying to get as a model of how we work as theorists on issues of social change that are actually based on** what we can call law like **generalizations**. Now what is a law like generalization? It is **when you make sure that whatever you say has no contradiction down the line**. So if you are to say this much [gestures with hand] the next stage must be consistent with that, and the next stage until you are maximally consistent. Do you get that? But here is the problem – and I can just put it in a nut shell- nobody, nobody in this room would like to date, be married to, or be a best friend with a maximally consistent person. You know what that is. Its hell. And this tells you something, because if somebody where maximally consistent, you know what you would say that person is not reasonable. And we have a person here who does work on Hegel that can point out this insight, that a human being has the ability to evaluate rationality. Now why is that important? Because you see the mistake many of us make is **many of us want to push the human being into that maximized law like generalization model**. So when **we think about** our philosophical anthropology, some people, our question about **intersectionality for instance**, what some people don’t understand is **nowhere is there ever a human being who is one** **identity**. People talk about race – **do you** **ever** really **see a race walking**? You see a racialized man or woman, or transman or transwoman. **Do you ever see a class walking**? Class is embodied in flesh and blood people. And we can go on and on. So if we enrich our philosophical anthropology we begin to notice certain other things. And one of the other things we begin to realize is that we commit a serious problem when we do political work. And the problem is this. The question about Wilderson for instance. There is this discussion going on (and allot of people build it out of my earlier books). I have a category I call, as a metaphor, an antiblack world. You notice an indefinite article – an anti-black world. The reason I say that is because the world is different from an anti-black world. **The project of racism is to create a world that would be completely anti-black or anti-woman**. Although that is a project, it is not a fait accompli. People don’t seem to understand how recent this phenomenon we are talking about is. A lot of **people talk about race they don’t even know the history of how race is connected into theonaturalism**. How, for instance, Andalucia and the pushing out of the Moors. The history of how race connected to Christianity was formed. A lot of people don’t understand – **from the standpoint of a species whose history is 220,000 years old**, **what the hell is 500 years**? But the one thing that we don’t understand to is **we create a false model for how we study those last 500 years**. **We study the 500 years as if the people who have been dominated have not been fighting and resisting**. Had they not been fighting and resisting we wouldn’t be here. And then we come into this next point because you see **the problem** in the formulation **of pessimism and optimism is they are both** **based on forecasted knowledge**, a prior knowledge. **But human beings don’t have prior knowledge**. And in fact **– what in the world are we if we need to have guarantees for us to act.** You know what you call such people? Cowards. The fact of the matter is our ancestors – let’s start with enslaved ancestors. **The enslaved ancestors** who **were burning down** those **plantations**, who were finding clever ways to poison their masters, who were organizing meetings for rebellions, **none of them had any clue what the future would be 100** **years later**. Some had good reason to believe that it may take 1000 years. But you know why **they fought? Because they knew it wasn’t for them**. One of the problems we have in the way we think about political issues is we commit what Fanon and others in the existential tradition would call a form of political immaturity. Political immaturity is saying it is not worth it unless I, me, individually get the payoff. When you are thinking what it is to relate to other generations – remember Fanon said the problem with people in the transition, the pseudo postcolonial bourgeois – is that they miss the point, **you fight for liberation for other generations**. And that is why Fanon said other generations they must have their mission. But you see some people fought and said no I want my piece of the pie. **And that means the biggest enemy becomes the other generations**. And that is why the postcolonial pseudo-bourgeoisie they are not a bourgeoisie proper because they do not link to the infrastructural development of the future, it is about themselves. And that’s why, for instance, as they live higher up the hog, as they get their mediating, service oriented, racial mediated wealth, the rest of the populations are in misery. The very fact that in many African countries there are people whose futures have been mortgaged, the fact that in this country the very example of mortgaging the future of all of you is there. What happens to people when they have no future? It now collapses the concept of maturation and places people into perpetual childhood. So one of the political things – and this is where a psychiatrist philosopher is crucial – is to ask ourselves what does it mean to take on adult responsibility. And that means to understand that in all **political action it’s not about you. It is what you are doing for a world you may not even be able to understand.** Now that becomes tricky, because how do we know this? People have done it before. There were people, for instance, who fought anti-colonial struggles, there are people (and now I am not talking about like thirty or forty years ago, I am talking about the people from day one 17th 18th century all the way through) and we have no idea what we are doing for the 22nd century. **And this is where developing political insight comes in.** Because **we commit the error of forgetting the systems we are talking about are human systems**. They are not systems in the way we talk about the laws of physics. **A human system can only exist by human actions maintaining them**. Which means every human system is incomplete. Every human being is by definition incomplete. Which means you can go this way or you can go another way. **The system isn’t actually closed.**

#### [9] There’s an act omission distinction. A. Ethics cannot hold agents accountable for an infinite number of untaken decisions, otherwise that would impair action because agents would simultaneously have an infinite number of obligations. B. Illogical – we wouldn’t hold an agent who chooses a morally repugnant act equally culpable as an agent who chooses not to prevent a morally repugnant act, like saving a drowning baby from a pool. C. Omissions aren’t intrinsic to the will because agents don’t proactively choose not to take certain actions, e.g. you don’t wake up and say, “Today is my day to not donate to charity!” – so we shouldn’t hold agents morally accountable for these omissions.

## Offense

#### I defend the resolution as a general principle – The United States ought to provide a federal jobs guarantee. Spec and PICs are irrelevant because they don’t disprove my general thesis and aren’t necessary to do so under my framework. Affirm.

#### [1] Work is the primary place for self-creation and is necessary for the formation of an authentic self. MacMillan 12.

[MacMillan et al. 12 (Scott MacMillan, Anthony R. Yue, and Albert J. Mills, 2012, accessed on 11-6-2020, , "Both How and Why: Considering Existentialism as a Philosophy of Work and Management ", <https://www.pdcnet.org/pom/content/pom_2012_0011_0003_0027_0046>)] SHS AK

Through an existential lens, **work is viewed as process or related experiences**. Three **experiences** **that** **stand out in** the **existential literature** and that can be used in a philosophy of management are: (1) **work as how chosen beliefs may be put into action** (actioning beliefs); (2) **work as interaction with other people** (being-with-others); **and** most importantly (3) **work as everydayness** (MacMillan, 2009). First, for many people, **work is an opportunity to experience their chosen ‘beliefs in action’**, where **they may ‘choose’ to action their beliefs and**, by these experiences, attempt to **fulfil inner desires and live authentically**. The self (and meaning) is an outcome of action (Yalom, 1980) and **work** for many of us **is the primary place where we can actualise our beliefs**. For example, if we ‘choose’ to consider that making some sort of contribution to others is an important aspect of our authenticity, then work is an avenue where we may fulfil this belief, where we can ‘actualise’ the belief and thus ourselves. **A person may choose to be a teacher as they believe strongly in educating** young people **or an artist if they value creativity**. **Second, almost all work includes an experience of people** (the Other), i.e. ‘being-withothers’. **Since the self is** **influenced by** how **others** see us, **the social aspect of work can be very significant**. The importance of the social component depends on the individual, i.e. the degree to which other people affect our sense of self and how much we enjoy being with others. Some prefer little interaction with others at work while some only enjoy work when they are around other people. Unfortunately, some people who value being-with-others may be in work that is solitary in nature, while others may be in the opposite situation. If this is the case, then the work is incongruent with what they value and will likely have a negative effect on the self. For many people, **the social aspect of work is perhaps the most important one as it seems to provide** **a ‘connection’ and ‘belonging’** that most of us tend to seek out. The consequences of such have implications for an understanding of the dyadic relationship between the manager and the managed in the workplace. Third, **work is about ‘everydayness’, an experience of engaging in various activities,** and **exhibiting our self**. **“Our being is immediately ‘in situation**’: that is, it arises in enterprises and knows itself first in so far as it is reflected in those enterprises. We discover ourselves then in a world peopled with demands, in the heart of projects ‘in the course of realization’” (Sartre, 1956: 39). **The majority of work is composed of a variety of daily activities**, some of which may be enjoyable to us, and others that may not be. **The everydayness aspect of work is** perhaps **the most important one**, **as it encompasses the various components of our work day**. Most important to an analysis of the experience of work is an understanding that **the self is always reflexive, and of how we experience our work and how the workplace transforms our self**. Inevitably there will be ebbs and flows in a life as we exist contingently, and other aspects of our being-in-the-world existence will emerge which will affect work. Despite efforts to live authentically through work, slipping into ‘bad faith’ is always a potential danger and shadows every person’s existence. Little of our existence can be predicted with any certainty and numerous unforeseen events will take place over the years in the course of a life. Some of these events will affect the self positively, such as marriage and children, while others will affect the self negatively, such as the death of a loved one or being fired. The effects of these unforeseen ‘happenings’ of life (that all individuals will experience) are, of course, dependent on how they are interpreted by the individual. **For example, the terrorist attacks of the 9/11** tragedy **resulted in varying states of existence depending on how the experience** **was interpreted by the individual**. For some people it resulted in a major change in how they viewed their work (Wrzesniewski, 2002).

#### That affirms – work is key for people to gain authenticity and a federal job guarantee lets people continue to define themselves in new ways who otherwise would not have been able to.

#### [2] A federal jobs guarantee gives workers more bargaining power because it causes a shift of power from the employers to employees as private institutions need to appeal to an inadequate supply of workers to satisfy their demands. Spross 20.

[Spross 20, Jeff. Spring No.44 "You're Hired!". Democracy Journal, 2020, <https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/44/youre-hired/> //Scopa] SHS ZS

Before getting into the nuts and bolts of how this would work, a word on the broader goals is in order. The job guarantee’s ultimate aim is sustained full employment: A job for every American who could conceivably desire to work, leaving the labor market unable to find enough workers for all the jobs it wants to create. The benefits of the guarantee for the formerly jobless should be obvious. But just as crucial is how it would help all already employed Americans. **When workers compete with one another over an inadequate supply of jobs, they have no power**. Conversely, **when employers** must **compete over an inadequate supply of workers**, **a** subtle but **profound shift happens**. Freed of the fear that they can be cast off into the unemployed and be unable to find a different job, **even the lowest-paid workers can demand higher wages and more generous benefits**. They can **insist on better working** **conditions and schedules**, **and job training on their employers’ dime**. They can **challenge discrimination, harassment, and mistreatment**. Unions and labor organizations are empowered. There’s **more family stability,** **healthier communities**, **more s**ocial trust, **and more participation in civic life**. Practically speaking, this would require driving the labor force participation rate—the measure of people employed or actively looking for work—as high as it can naturally go, and driving the unemployment rate—that portion of the labor force not employed—to 1 or 2 percent. And then keeping them there. That may seem a fantastical goal. But we’ve done it before: During the economic mobilization of World War II, the unemployment rate briefly fell to an eye-popping 2 percent. Then, between 1945 and 1970, the rate spent roughly one-third of its time below 4 percent. It’s no accident this period is remembered as an economic golden age, or that inequality remained low during it. Things have changed since. As of this writing, there are 1.4 job seekers for every job opening. At minimum, our goal should be no more than one job seeker for every job opening; better yet, less than one job seeker for every opening. Yet this is the best that metric has been after eight grinding years of recovery. More to the point, the closest the job seeker ratio ever got to parity was 1.1 seekers per opening, just for a moment at the end of the 1990s boom. The data doesn’t go back earlier. But there are other signs for when parity is close: The late ’90s was also the only time since 1970 the unemployment rate went as low as 4 percent. It’s currently at 4.6 percent—again, the best level since the Great Recession. So even in the fondly remembered midcentury, America’s overall rate of joblessness tended to bob like a cork above the threshold that signals full employment. Occasionally, it dropped low enough to touch it, then rose back up. And for the last 40 years, the cork has basically never touched full employment at all. This multidecade failure has left workers chronically powerless in the face of employers’ demand for cheap, compliant, and disposable labor. It lies behind the vertiginous rise of inequality, the widespread loss of good job benefits, the expansion of financial precariousness to more households, the spread of contract work and the “1099 economy,” and more. Meanwhile, what jobs the economy creates, for whom, and on what terms, is determined by the people who own and control the flow of capital and property. This is the nature of private markets in capitalism. Both the left and right accept this arrangement as a fait accompli, and effectively try to bribe this rarified group into creating employment. The right-wing bribe is tax cuts and deregulation. The left-wing bribe is muscular deficit stimulus, welfare state spending, and public investment. The latter works much better at juicing aggregate demand, which is what makes it possible for employers to profit and gain market share by hiring more. But in both cases, **the power to shape the job itself and to hire remains with the capitalists**. Inevitably, **the most privileged** or attractive **job seekers are hired first**: those who are **well-educated**, who have **histories of stable employment**, who are **free of criminal records**, and (let’s be blunt) **those who are white**. Only after they’ve been employed does new demand for labor trickle down to everyone else. **The last to be** **reached are racial minorities**, those without college or even high-school degrees, those with longer spells of past unemployment, veterans, and those with felony histories. And their turn is far more brief, since it arrives only at the peak of the business cycle. Then, **when the downturn comes, the least privileged are the first to be let go**. The result is a bitter dynamic of last-to-be-hired, first-to-be-fired. Even when they’re working, their bargaining position is perpetually precarious, resulting in lower wages and more exploitative treatment. This is why roughly 5.5 million people are still working part-time when they’d like to work full-time. It’s a big part of why **employers can get away with rampant wage theft, abusive scheduling, racial discrimination, sexual harassment**, unsafe working conditions, **and violations of labor rights**. It’s why wages have stagnated for decades for far too many. That full employment’s absence hits less-privileged Americans harder isn’t just problematic because it’s unfair. It also condemns their communities to repeated cycles of destruction, from which they never have time to properly recover. **The unemployment rate for black Americans**, for example, **is perpetually twice as high as that of whites**—a situation that holds within each education level. Same goes for the unemployment rate of all Americans with a college degree versus those with only a high school education. Conversely, **the beneficial effects of full employment**, when it happens, **are the most pronounced for the least privileged:** It’s when employers are finally forced to cater to the people and communities normally exiled from the economy. Imagine what sustained full employment could do. So it shouldn’t surprise that African-American thinkers are longtime champions of the job guarantee. Martin Luther King Jr. repeatedly called for it. So did Bayard Rustin, another 1960s African-American civil rights activist, and Sadie T.M. Alexander, the first African-American woman to receive a PhD in economics. Today, black advocates of the job guarantee include Duke economics and public policy professor William Darity, Jr. and New School economist Darrick Hamilton. With the post-1970 rise of deindustrialization and globalization, and the policy retreat from public investment, regulation, and antitrust enforcement, the American economy has finally begun treating white workers without college degrees as it’s always treated black Americans. Capital is fleeing the rural and small-town communities where Hillary Clinton lost to Donald Trump by three to one, and where new job growth and business creation during recoveries has all but vanished. Their jobs are falling to foreign competition and automation; their rates of unemployment and earnings are worse; and they’re being buried by their mortgages. While Clinton won less than 16 percent of all counties, the counties she did win generated 64 percent of all economic output. This great economic shift gave rise to the economic frustration that flipped key Rust Belt states, handing Trump his victory. But the President also relentlessly exploited white Americans’ racial fears and anxieties, and the temptations of white nationalism. Combating him will require a genuinely multiethnic coalition; one that can press the anti-racist cause to its fullest, while still giving the white working-class an equal seat at the table. **A job guarantee could lay the foundation for such a coalition based on a shared economic interest.**

6:00