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### Theological Existentialism

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H100  
THE

THEOLOGICAL EXISTENTIALISM

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An Honors Seminar Summary

Presented to

Dr. Robert Stagg

Ouachita Baptist University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Course  
Honors Seminar H71

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by

The Religion and Philosophy Honors Seminar

May, 1970

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The Philosophy and Religion Honors Seminar has studied various theological existentialists this semester, and in order to contrast the views of atheistic existentialists, the views of an atheistic philosopher has been presented. The method of presenting the ideas is to find the actual objective facts of human existence, then to find the bases of hope in the human life, and finally to find the existential category that results from the hope that is generated. Sartre is the atheistic philosopher presented, and he finds all the details of life, then he sees these as meaningless, and finally life is presented as nauseating. By contrast, Paul Tillich finds man in a state of anxiety, through a faith commitment, man is then reunited with God, and then man has the "courage to be." the following philosophers ~~and~~ were studied in the seminar, and a summary of their beliefs are presented in this report.

Fredrich Nietzsche

Abraham Heschel

Jean Paul Sartre

Berdyayev

Soren Kierkegaard

Martin Buber

Paul Tillich

Gabriel Marcel

Jaques Maritain

## Nietzsche

Nietzsche's philosophy was that of the will to power. His basic thoughts on changing values lie in the supposition that God is dead. Faith is an illusion. Faith in God causes man to lower himself, this is the cause of the present catastrophe, He pictures the death of God as a frightful event, but he wills godlessness.

Believing in God causes a defamiation of the world and a fullness of actual life and to an escapism that would abandon the world and the tasks that it imposes. This is all there is. In Zarathustra God is a supposition: I want your suppositions to go no further than your creative wills. I want them limited by what is thinkable. Neither the realm of the inconceivable nor of the unreasonable shall be your home. Thus God was the greatest danger and had to die. As a delusion and product of human trickery, he became the greatest objection to existence. But this illusion not only distracts men from what can actually be achieved; his existence would actually be unbearable for creative man.

## JEAN PAUL SARTRE

Sartre starts by describing every little detail of his actual existence including the actual movements of his fingers and hands. He describes the feeling of a light house wall, the people around him, a "self-made man", etc., and really finds no hope at all for the human being who is attached to this miserable existence. Life is nauseating to him in all respects, and the human being tries to use all types of games to overcome his meaningless existence. These all fail eventually, and one is once again faced with the hopeless and horrible reality of his existence.

The second point is that man sees his life as it really is and finds no hope, therefore he gives up even trying to make sense of his life. There is no hope to the sickening life of the first objective look at life, so man eventually gives up .

The final point of his philosophy is that man finally just accepts life as it comes without questioning its meaning. Life becomes a thing of fate. Man can do nothing to change the hopelessness of it all.

## PAUL TILLICH

The first part of Paul Tillich's theology is concerned with man's existence which is viewed as being apart from God. Since man has treated God as an object, he (man) can not find meaning in life. The relationship between God and Man which keeps meaning in the life of all men is not present because man is split away from God, Mankind tries to find or manufacture some real significance for his existence; however, all that is found is temporary peace within the soul of man. Thus, "anxiety becomes the dominant feature in the life of each man according to Tillich. No man can escape finally reaching the point of despair and discontent. Although the individual may disregard his anxiety, he will be eventually overcome by this fear. Thus, Tillich sees anxiety as the starting point for man's quest for God.

The way to escape the delima of anxiety is to come into a subjective relationship with God. God becomes the object since man studies Him and yet never clearly understands Him. Man is the subject that enters a faith relationship with God, and becomes the one in a right relationship with God just as man was originally intended to be. Tillich sees Christ and a right relationship as the way to a subject-object faith relationship with God.

Once man is in the proper relationship with God, he has the power to overcome his anxiety and to live as he was intended to live. Man comes to have the "courage to be" by being the man he is supposed to be, by having the courage to make decisions, and to have a peaceful relationship with the universe.

Thus, Tillich sees man as having anxiety, as man entering into a faith relationship, and then man is seen as having the courage to be.

## GABRIEL MARCEL'S HOMO VIATOR

Philosophy starts with humility and finitude or wonder at human existence. These elements are coupled with assurance of "presence".

Truth comes through participation in Being, not apart from Being. Only an incarnated self can know truth. This participation is a quest.

Truth is known through participation at three levels:

1. Incarnation—the experience of one's body as one's own.
2. Communion—through love, hope, and fidelity.
3. Transcendence—through the ontological exigence, primitive assurance and "blinded intuition."

Agreement as to truth can only be by witness and testimony.

The significance of communion lies in the fact that the self emerges in communion with others and the Other. The self cannot achieve authentic existence if there is no communion. The danger of mass society and depersonalization is great. Marcel claims that modern society's greatest need is love, hope and fidelity.

Freedom is becoming in actuality what one potentially is in a given situation.

God is the Absolute Thou or Other who emerges out of the experiences of freedom, love and meeting. God is one of the others. If we can't break out of self we can't know God.

Authentic existence is best described as HOMO VIATOR. Man is a wayfarer, a pilgrim who comes to "know" of the existence of God as he wrestles with the struggles of life.



## JACQUES MARITAIN

Jacques Maritain is regarded as the greatest Catholic philosopher of modern times. Born in Paris in 1882 into a liberal Protestant cultured middle-class family, he was converted to Catholicism in 1609. He is regarded as a pre-eminent interpreter of the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

His main question is the problem of referring to fellow-mankind as objects and his desire to know God. His witness is the Biblical revelation, love and faith. His existential answer is then treating others as subjects.

Through my own reading, I have worked out some conclusions of Maritain's philosophical ideas:

1. It is a natural desire to see the First Cause through human reason which makes God a possibility. But it is through the gift of God that transcends nature in which God communicates and we are able to know Him.
2. The idea of separation of God and man is involved in this.
3. Revelation of truth and reason are one.
4. It is only through religion, not philosophy, that we find salvation.
5. Only religion deals with subject to subject relations which is necessary to know God even if through a glass darkly.
6. Love is our dim sort of substitute until union can be made with God.
7. We have two images of ourselves
  - a. The centre of the universe
  - b. One of the herd as the world sees us.
8. But since God is subject, I too am subject and I can love

- me for Him, but not only me but all others around me
9. Only God knows me as I really am. I don't even know myself as He does. Thus because He knows me, there can be justice. Without knowing there could be no justice. Without justice there can be no hope.
  10. Not only does He know me, but He understands me. He may even condemn me, yet He understands me.
  11. Only through the Holy Spirit can He thus know us and in turn we can have love and respect for ourselves.
  12. Yet it is through this same Holy Spirit that we can look to others as subjects, even as we look upon ourselves.
  13. Thus our whole existence is based on love. This is our whole being. Through love we can look at others as subjects which is the only existing matter in the universe.

ABRAHAM J. HESCHEL

Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel, Professor of Jewish Ethics and Mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, is internationally known as a scholar and author. He is the author of many studies on Jewish philosophy and mysticism. Rabbi Heschel was named Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary, New York, for 1965-66.

Dr. Heschel says that man finds himself in his existence and asks himself why. In viewing life and the problems of the world, he asks himself the supreme question, "How to live in a world pestered with lies and remain unpolluted, not to flee but to fight and succeed in keeping the soul unsoiled and even aid in purifying the world?"

The answer to man's problems is not to be found in reason. Reason is limited and cannot bring man the answer. Instead of reason, Dr. Heschel suggests that we use "radical amazement". The answer to man's problem lies behind the pattern and order of the universe. This would lead man to a recognition of God, the creator of the pattern of the universe.

Commitment to this belief in the creator leads man to a life of piety. Piety is a life which points to something beyond itself. This is the wisdom of the ultimate meaning of life. It results in a righteous life of service to man and dedication to God.

## Nicolas Berdyaev

He was a contemporary Russian teacher and writer on the philosophy of religion. He was exiled when he was 25 and was threatened with expulsion from the Russian Orthodox Church at 43. He later became a professor of philosophy at the University of Moscow. In 1922 he was expelled from the Soviet Union. He went from there to Berlin where he set up a school of philosophy. He later moved the school to Paris. He was a very loud critic of the way Russia was being ruled under their type of communism.

He said there were three conditions of man. They are: (1) Master; (2) Slave; (3) Free Man. He talks a lot the place of each of these conditions in his writings. He says that the master can't exist without the slave, nor can the slave exist without the master. In his terms there is no difference between the master and the slave because both are in slavery to something. He says the free man exists in himself. Slavery always indicates alienation. Man wants to be a tyrant, but he must strive to be of himself and not want to rule anyone but himself.

question	witness	answer
WHAT IS A FREE MAN	BIBLE, CHRIST, OTHER PHILOSOPHERS	WILL TO POWER

## MARTIN BUBER

The philosophical ideas of Martin Buber may well be summed up in his work entitled, "I AND THOU".

He was born in Vienna and was influenced by his Jewish background. The intense mystical faith and piety of his Jewish world encountered the world of European modern enlightenment when he returned to Austria in 1898 to study philosophy.

There is no question that Buber's work ranks among the most significant and creative in our day. His central theme is person, the value of persons as distinguished from things. His understanding of person is a theory of relation, of the realm of the between, i.e. of what happens between men in interpersonal encounter.

### QUESTION

### WITNESS

### ANSWER

Man is in the relation of I\* It. Why?

The I-Thou relation with God through the Grace of God.

Man becomes what he is suppose to be.

The main thesis of I and Thou is the radical difference between a man's attitude to other men and his attitude to things. The attitude to other men is a relation between persons. To things it is a connexion with objects.

In the Personal relation I subject--I--confronts another subject Thou. In connexion with things the subject contemplates and experiences an object.

Thus the basic two-fold situation in life is:

I--Thou

I--It.

The content and relation of these two worlds is the theme of I and Thou.

Thou, the other person, is shown to be a reality. It is given to me, but not bounded by me. "thou has no bounds."

When a Thou is truly confronted it becomes an It. To speak of and to act towards another person as if his reality consisted in his being simply a He, that is, an It, is disloyalty to the truth of the meeting with the Thou.

There is one Thou which never becomes an It. The Eternal Thou or God. Though we may speak of God in 3rd person, the reality of His approach is constituted in the fulness of the relation of an I with a Thou.

In truth, God may only be "addressed, not experienced." It is only through the relationship of I--Thou with God that a person can have the relation with others. Once this has been established the I--Thou relation can fall into three spheres:

1. Life with nature
2. Life with men
3. Life with intelligible forms.

This I--Thou relation with God can only take place through the grace of God. You must be chosen by God for this. Then it takes faith on your part. This faith takes place now. Not in the past or in a dream in the future, but now.

To Buber life is useless, except this idea of the possibility of the I--Thou relationship with God.

It's a mystical unity that is hard for us to realize. It goes back to the idea of unity as good and disunity as evil. Nevertheless Buber finds this the answer to the problem of life and the only hope for man to become what he is suppose to be.