

Chapter 17, Creating the Self

Sartre

1. **Human beings = free** therefore acquire our **identity thro our own choosing**
2. Freedom = **'existence precedes essence'**
 - a) All non-humans have their behaviour determined by their essence
 - b) Behaviour of **human beings is not determined**; they are free
 - c) Human situation – **universality of condition** = features common to all human situations within which our freedom is exercised
3. **Rejects Christianity** – we're not made to a formula by a god who conceives of human essence
4. **Bad faith** = to believe values, purposes, or behaviour are determined:
 - a) Protects us from the burden of freedom = a form of cowardice
 - b) Properly human life is one lived 'authentically' in awareness of our freedom

De Beauvoir

1. **Problem**: how can women be genuinely self-defining subjects free of bad faith
+ acknowledge oppressive social and cultural influences
 - a) We are **free to invent ourselves** – nothing biological, social or cultural determining our self-identity
 - b) But **social oppression**: women = the 'second sex', the 'perpetual Other' of man therefore cannot experience the consciousness of freedom
2. **Answer: departs from existentialism**
 - a) Freedom can be limited by social conditions
 - b) It's not nec bad faith for women's consciousness to be affected by such conditions
3. But existentialism cannot embrace social, political, cultural influences like patriarchy to explain women's oppression without allowing **other factors** in that might explain apparent bad faith e.g. class and race discrimination
4. **de B's solution = women are capable of transcending their situation by becoming more like men** v. contemporary feminists – assert the value of femininity + irreducible 'difference' women present a male-dominated society

Kierkegaard

1. Central to individual existence is our **subjectivity**, characterized by freedom
 - a) **Great illusion = 'objective' thinking** – denies our subjectivity and freedom
 - b) **Subjectivity** = capacity to freely, passionately commit ourselves to a way of life
2. Can't make these choices rationally = **irrational, passionate 'leap'**:
 - a) Most subjective form of human existence = **Christianity** – there's no rational justification for faith = completely subjective commitment
 - b) **20th cent existentialism = mainly atheistic** – but it takes from K the focus on the individual and on personal, free choice

Chapter 17, Creating the Self continued

Nietzsche

1. **Attacks the Cartesian idea of the self** as an indivisible, immaterial soul:
 - a) Soul isn't distinct from the body; it's the effect of largely **unconscious drives**
 - b) What is seen as unitary, autonomous, **rational self = the effect of a multiplicity of unconscious forces**
 - c) **Self = a socially induced fiction**, making human beings reliable, predictable, conformist herd animals, depriving them of independence and individuality
2. This = foundation for the 'higher man', the '**overman**':
 - transforms himself by organizing his drives to become an autonomous individual, able to live independently of the ideals of the majority
3. **Existentialism** – self = something we have to **invent**, but rejects concern for unconscious drives – individuals can consciously choose themselves
 - v. **N = questions the centrality of the conscious, rational self**, stressing unconscious drives which can only be shaped through hard work and discipline

Freud; Existentialist psychotherapy (R.D. Laing)

1. **Unconscious** = basis for understanding human action:
 - a) **Contains all the basic instinctual drives** – seek immediate satisfaction, regardless of external constraints
 - v. b) **Conscious self** seeks to satisfy basic bodily needs differently, through realistic transactions with the environment – so balances the demands of the instinctual drives for immediate satisfaction, and the constraints of external reality
2. **Ego/Id/superego model**:
 - a) **Primary conflict** = superego allied with the ego v. the desires of the id
 - b) Denial of instinctual satisfaction is achieved through **repression** – if too severe, desires find indirect expression in neurotic symptoms
3. **Can never restore the conscious self's sovereignty** – can strengthen the ego and gain degree of control but there will always be an irrational core of instincts
4. But **existential psychotherapy** (Laing and others):

Aim = to restore the primacy of the conscious self

 - a) Existentialism **rejects accounts that reduce human beings to determined objects**
 - b) Existential psychotherapy – people with psychiatric disturbances treated not as objects, broken mechanisms, but as conscious, free subjects – refers not to the underlying cause of neurotic symptoms, but to **what the person intends** therefore use of notions like 'bad faith', 'distraction', 'pretence' to explain certain psychological states

Chapter 17, Creating the Self continued

Marx

1. **Material conditions v. individual consciousness:**
 - a) Human beings must **work** on nature to survive so successive forms of class society emerge
 - b) and with them legal and political forms + forms of consciousness: religion, philosophy, **ethics** = **ideological** – serving to justify those conditions
 - c) therefore **individual consciousness** = largely determined by one's economic interests and class position
2. But possible for conscious self to **recover some of its sovereignty:**
 - a) Human beings ≠ merely products of their social world – they **make this world through their productive activity**
 - b) **Alienated** from themselves and from living properly human lives by oppressive social and economic arrangements – no longer produce collectively and consciously
 - c) But **final phase of history = overcoming these conditions** – result = classless society of communism in which individuals work collectively and consciously
3. M reformulates the conscious self not as an individual but as a **collective subject** – human beings can and ought to be the collective, rational producers of their way of life

Marcuse

1. Human beings = **collective, conscious authors** of their way of life
2. In contemp society capitalist **exploitation** has become more intense
3. Incorporates **Freudian ideas:**
 - a) Freud – **renunciation of instincts = condition of civilization:** self-preservation in the face of nature requires individuals to repress instincts and redirect them into work
 - b) Marcuse – **repression need not always be required:** development of productive forces and technological capacity under capitalism is removing society's need to enforce instinctual repression
4. Problem: in contemporary society **instinctual energies are no longer simply repressed but manipulated** e.g. advertising, mass media etc., encourage people to find pleasure in the commodities the existing system produces
5. **Instincts:**
 - a) Still provide a basis for revolt, but since power distorts them, such **revolt involves a qualitative change in our needs** themselves
 - b) They don't reduce individuals to plaything of unconscious forces (re Freud)
 - **instincts = needs distorted by an oppressive society**, the basis for opposing it, and part of genuine self-realization
 - c) Instincts = thus made **part of the Marxist notion of the conscious, rational self** – instead of being opposed to the instincts, this self now has them at its core

Chapter 17, Creating the Self continued

Structuralism (Saussure, Levi-Strauss, Althusser)

1. Social and cultural phenomena \neq intentional products of human subjects, but **structured systems of elements** with **rules of combination and transformation**
2. Extreme structuralism – self is reduced to a **function of external, impersonal structures**
– but **how can we account for political practice**, resistance and struggle, without some notion of the subject, able to make deliberate choices?

Post-structuralism (Derrida, Foucault)

1. **Rejects the idea that language or social phenomena can be wholly accounted for in terms of structured systems**
– what is denied is not that there is a subject – although this is now peripheral – but that it is **autonomous and sovereign**
2. D – the **subject is a product of the play of language** –
 - a) But unlike Structuralism D sees language as an **open-ended totality** – no sign can have an entirely fixed meaning or play a precise identifying role
 - b) **Therefore I can have no fixed notion of what I am**, because the signs through which I relate to myself have no fixed meaning. So there is no subject in the sense of someone who produces meaning
3. F – the modern subject emerges out of the interplay of social forces giving rise to forms of **social regulation** bound up with **forms of classification (normal/abnormal)** – this turns human beings into certain kinds of subjects that act according to standards of **normality**:
 - a) Individuals seek to determine who they are in terms of these classifications – to discover your true self = to **identify yourself with socially constructed forms of normal selfhood**
 - b) But individuals are not wholly determined by these forms of classification and regulation – **they can resist and modify them**
 - c) Resistance \neq asserting who we are in the face of a society – but = **'refusing ourselves', resisting imposed forms of selfhood that limit what we can do or be**, to create new ways of being
 - d) This **capacity to resist and break away from ourselves** is arguably what the self has become in F's post-structuralist account