Spring 2015

An Investigation Of The Self As Relational And The Propensity For Evil Produced From Indifference Towards Human Relationships

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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE SELF AS RELATIONAL AND THE
PROPENSITY FOR EVIL PRODUCED FROM INDIFFERENCE TOWARDS
HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

BY
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SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY AS REQUISITE FOR
GRADUATION WITH HONORS
JUNE 2015

CARROLL COLLEGE
HELENA, MONTANA
This thesis for honors recognition has been approved for the Department of Philosophy.

Dr. Elvira Roncalli, Director  12 June 2015  Date

Dr. Edward Glowienka, Reader  6/12/15  Date

Dr. Alex Street, Reader  6/10/15  Date
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Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank my readers, Dr. Roncalli, Dr. Glowienka, and Dr. Street, for their continued support and flexibility throughout the writing process. Their honest, thorough, and timely feedback has provided for a final piece of writing that I am proud of. I would like to thank Dr. Roncalli in particular for all of her persistence and patience throughout this entire process. Without her belief in my efforts and constant support, this thesis would never have been written.

I would also like to thank the entire Carroll College Department of Philosophy. I have taken at least one course from every single professor and the entire department is responsible for my pursuit of philosophy. They are experts in their fields and excellent educators that have kindled my search for truth. This love of wisdom is something that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

My first academic advisor, Cheri Long, must also be recognized. She has undoubtedly shaped the tenor of my college experience through thought provoking questions, exceptional advice, and unfailing support throughout my entire college career.

Finally, for my parents and their unwavering, complete support of me. I want to thank my parents in a special way for always encouraging me to pursue what is significant and meaningful to my life.

Thank you.
Abstract

Provoked by Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*, this paper explores the connection between evil and an indifference towards human relationships. Relying heavily on Hannah Arendt and Simone de Beauvoir, I offer an understanding of the self as relational and interconnected. Once the human beings are understood as relational, I will then explore how an indifference towards human relationships leads to a higher propensity for evil.
Introduction

This entire investigation is born out of Albert Camus’ *The Stranger*. It was through this narrative that it seemed that a disregard for human relationships would lead to some sort of evil in the world. The main character, Meursault, is indifferent towards all of his relationships and this ultimately leads to his downfall of shooting a man. It is necessary to show that human beings are interconnected in order to demonstrate how indifference towards human relationships leads to a higher propensity for evil. If human beings are intrinsically relational beings, then a pursuit of the connection between indifference towards those relationships and evil becomes a worthwhile investigation.

Because the human person is so essential to this project, there will be a major emphasis on selfhood as found in *The Stranger*, Hannah Arendt, and Simone de Beauvoir. Through Camus, a sort of negative definition of the self comes to the fore. It is a self that is defined without any emphasis towards the other. Camus will have some very vital information to add in how we understand the human person but only insofar as it shows how a disregard for the relationality of human beings leads to a detached philosophy and narratives such as that of *The Stranger*.

There is a positive account of selfhood understood by Hannah Arendt and further echoed by Simone de Beauvoir. Both philosophers have different intents of their respective works, however, they imply the same conclusion about the human person as a relational being. Hannah Arendt provides a comprehensive understanding of the human condition and an analysis of the human being that is deeply relational. Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes freedom revealing the interconnectedness of humanity. She will
ultimately state that individual freedom is bound with the freedom of others. I propose to use both of their philosophies to demonstrate how human beings are indeed relational beings and that any other understanding of the self is too limiting in the understanding of the human person. Once I am able to show that the human persons is a unique, interconnected being, then it will be meaningful to dive into an investigation about an indifference towards that relationality. In the last section I ask for some leniency to start an investigation about an indifference towards human relationships and evil in the world. This is a section that will just be initial thoughts and possibilities about the connection between evil and indifference towards human connectedness. Ultimately, I wish to show that an indifference towards human relationships leads to a higher propensity for evil.
Part One

Albert Camus

In *The Stranger*, Albert Camus presents a character, Meursault, whose indifference leads him to the worst possible outcome of death. Meursault is an indifferent man who remains substantially unchanged when faced with decisive moments in his life. At the end of the story he finds himself condemned to death because he shot a man. Throughout *The Stranger* we discover that there is a relationship between this indifference and immoral acts. What is the nature of this relationship? Camus has illustrated for us the combination of human traits that lead to a connection between evil and indifference and we find the disastrous outcome in the character of Meursault.

Right away we are told of the death of Meursault’s “Maman” (mom, mother). On the first page Meursault notes that, “Maman” died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don’t know.”¹ He does not know when his “Maman” died. This is the woman who gave birth to him, who raised him and cared for him. He not only is indifferent towards when “Maman” died but also towards finding out. This has led me to believe that an intentional ignorance is part of indifference that leads to evil. By forced ignorance I mean an ignorance that someone has the capacity to fix but chooses not to. For example, Meursault has the capacity to know when “Maman” died but he chooses to live in ignorance of this fact. Because he has the capacity to rid himself of this particular ignorance it is an ignorance that he wills. He, as an indifferent man, allows for this intentional ignorance because he doesn’t care. Eventually, we find Meursault doesn’t care.

¹ Camus, *The Stranger*, 3.
about certain things because to him the answers are inconsequential and do not matter.

When a person does not choose to accept the intrinsic relationality of human beings, that person loses the very key to his/her own humanity. Human beings are interconnected and it is through this relationship with others that one fully understands personhood. It will become apparent that the character of Meursault has a blatant disregard for other human relationships and this proves to be catastrophic for him as a human being.

Once Meursault is notified of “Maman’s” death, he is then asked to attend the funeral and on the train to the place of her death he encounters a soldier. The soldier asks Meursault if he has been traveling long. Meursault responds, “I said, ‘Yes,’ just so I wouldn’t have to say anything else.”\(^2\) Meursault intentionally lies to avoid conversing with the soldier. Along with his intentional ignorance, Meursault also forces isolation through lying to others for the sake of his own convenience. By his inability to be honest with the soldier, he demonstrates selfishness of putting his needs before the just act of being honest. Meursault sought his own desires to not talk. He could have said he had not been traveling long but was tired. Instead he chose to lie, to end the conversation. I believe it is because of his indifference towards life that allows him to lie for his own benefit. This attitude has allowed him to believe that the conversation he could potentially have with the soldier is meaningless. It has also allowed for him to believe that there is no difference in value between honesty and deception. Most importantly, this example demonstrates Meursault intentionally isolating himself from others. A person that is indifferent towards human relationships does not have a regard for relationships, therefore this person isolates himself from others. The indifferent man has convinced

himself that others ultimately do not matter and therefore he can live in isolation even though people may constantly surround him.

Another illuminating passage is found shortly after his mother’s death when Meursault arrives at the home where “Maman” had been staying until her death. It is there that we discover Meursault did not visit “Maman” a lot in the last year in part because “Maman” was used to the home and mostly because, “…it took up my Sunday—not to mention the trouble of getting to the bus, buying tickets, and spending two hours traveling.” This once again shows an indifference towards the human relationships in his life, particularly his mother. If he were not indifferent but rather deeply affected by his relationship with his mother, then he would either deeply desire to visit her and maintain that relationship or he would detest a closer relationship with her. Instead, of either of the previous options, he just doesn’t go because it is inconvenient, just like it was an inconvenience to talk with the soldier on the train. For Meursault, a man who has chosen indifference, the level of convenience then dictates his actions.

We also find selfishness in the character of Meursault at the vigil before “Maman’s” funeral. A woman has begun crying and it is discovered that “Maman” was her very dear and only friend in the home. Instead of feeling compassion, suffering with this woman, Meursault is upset with her. When she finally has control over her emotions, Meursault notes harshly, “She sniffl ed a lot. Then finally she shut up.” The one seemingly positive aspect of this incident is that Meursault is provoked to seemingly care about another. No, not with compassion but at least he seems to no longer be indifferent. But once again, this is actually another incident controlled by the level of convenience

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3 Camus, *The Stranger*, 5.
felt by Meursault. The woman was annoying him, inconveniencing him, and therefore he felt something but he continues to maintain his indifference towards his relationships with others. He does not care about this other woman. Through these examples, I have come to the conclusion that Meursault’s selfishness is born out of an indifference towards human relationship. His lack of care for others has led to a very selfish attitude. But it is not just selfishness that an indifferent man suffers; it is that he also cannot have compassion. That is to say, he cannot suffer with other human beings. He has not developed the capacity to have a deep connection with another human being that can often be strengthened by suffering with another. This loss of human connectedness can lead to, and does in the character of Meursault, great vice. At first it is just a streak of selfishness that is exhibited by the main character, but eventually this indifferent man becomes a murderer. It is import to note that it must be Meursault’s indifference that has led him to make all the choices he does, including killing a man. It is not simply that he is a liar, a selfish man, or a murderer because he is all of these and more. Indifference is Meursault’s state of being that links all of these characterizations together.

Another attribute of Meursault, the indifferent man, is an attitude that things don’t really change. One would argue that the death of a mother changes one’s life. Maybe not significantly in the sense that it is catastrophic, though for some that may be the case, but the death of a loved one should stimulate some change. However, upon Meursault’s arrival home he remarks, “It occurred to me that anyway one more Sunday was over, that Maman was buried now, that I was going back to work, and that, really, nothing had changed.”5 He seems to believe that ultimately things hadn’t really changed. That leads to

the question why does he believe that? It would seem that his apathy has once again left him unaffected. I think an indifferent being has lost what fundamentally makes us human. That is an apathetic and indifferent being has lost connectedness with humanity, lost the possibility of change, lost an understanding of the self, and has therefore lost what it means to be human.

To further explain my above point, humans are fundamentally interconnected and relational beings. This connectedness is a relation between oneself and others. Everyone is in relationship with others and it is precisely in those relationships with others that we cannot be indifferent if we are to be human. That is where Meursault loses his morality so to speak; he ceases to be human when he no longer cares about his relationships with others and even a relationship with himself.

The main character, Meursault, finds situations, experiences to be meaningless. Multiple times he claims that things don’t matter. Meursault says many times things like, “I thought about it; it didn’t matter” and “It didn’t mean anything” when talking about important matters. A specific example is when Meursault finds himself in a relationship with Marie. When asked if he loves Marie, Meursault responds that, “…it didn’t mean anything but that I didn’t think so.” Later when asked to marry Marie, “I said it didn’t make any difference to me…” Again when asked if he loved her, he says: “I answered the same way I had last time, that it didn’t mean anything but that I probably didn’t love her.” When then asked why he was willing to marry her, “I explained to her that it

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8 Camus, *The Stranger*, 35.
10 Camus, *The Stranger*, 41.
didn’t really matter and that if she wanted to, we could get married.”

His answers are so peculiar because, in the eyes of Marie, his actions were that of a person who was in love or at least that of someone who cared for her. Not only that, but his responses also show an indifference towards Marie and marriage. We see another example with Marie when she continues her discussion about marrying him, “Then she pointed out that marriage was a serious thing. I said, ‘no.’” Meursault demonstrates how things that traditionally have meanings ascribed to them are now devoid of meaning, if someone chooses to be indifferent towards those “meaningful” things.

When asked to testify on behalf of Raymond, an abusive pimp, who is being charged with violence towards a woman, Meursault states that, “It didn’t matter to me, but I didn’t know what I was supposed to say.” Camus is illustrating for the reader a very clear picture about an indifferent man. Meursault is not concerned about the well-being of the woman or that Raymond be held accountable for his crime against another human being. Instead he is just concerned with what he should say. He doesn’t care about the people involved. He only cares about knowing what to do, not caring about why he is doing it. He is very indifferent because he has no care for his relationships with others. He does not care whether his actions towards others are beneficial or detrimental to the other human being involved. It is this particular indifference towards human relationships that leads Meursault to evil.

Later, when at the beach, Meursault and his friends run into the brother of the girl that Raymond beat up and his friends, a fight is about to happen and Raymond pulls out a

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12 Camus, *The Stranger*, 42.
gun and it is at this moment that Meursault comes the conclusion, “It was then that I realized that you could either shoot or not shoot.”\textsuperscript{14} He continues on to remark, “To stay or to go, it amounted to the same thing.”\textsuperscript{15} These are the conclusions of a man who has a disregard for his relationships with other human beings.

After shooting a man multiple times, Meursault is prosecuted for murder and during the investigation he is asked many questions which he answers in a peculiar way: “I probably did love Maman. But that didn’t mean anything.”\textsuperscript{16} Because of his responses, his lawyer doesn’t seem to understand Meursault’s outlook on life and so Meursault is going to defend himself to the lawyer but then decides, “…really there wasn’t much point…”\textsuperscript{17} It is as if he forgets that he is on trial for murder. He will be sentenced to death if he doesn’t demonstrate that the murder was at least unintentional. But in the end, he determines that it is not worth it. Meursault definitely does not care about how he relates to others and he doesn’t care why his actions are wrong. He has, for years, gone through the motions until finally he does something that results in the possible end to his life.

To shake him out of his self-destructive attitude, the magistrate tries to bring meaning into Meursault’s life through God. Meursault’s response is once again that it really doesn’t matter and he recognizes that this belief in God is “…his belief, and if he were ever to doubt it, his life would become meaningless.”\textsuperscript{18} Meursault has an opportunity to have a conversion of heart. In \textit{The Stranger}, it is brought up that criminals who have done the unthinkable are compelled by the image of God to seek forgiveness or

\textsuperscript{14} Camus, \textit{The Stranger}, 56.
\textsuperscript{15} Camus, \textit{The Stranger}, 57.
\textsuperscript{16} Camus, \textit{The Stranger}, 65.
\textsuperscript{17} Camus, \textit{The Stranger}, 66.
\textsuperscript{18} Camus, \textit{The Stranger}, 69.
show remorse for their wrongdoing. In Meursault’s case, however, he is completely unaffected and remains indifferent, believing that life is meaningless. This is an interesting point about indifference. Indifference seems to be a peculiar approach to situations because the one who is indifferent cannot be swayed for or against a side. The indifferent person remains unchanged and unaffected by others around him. The criminals mentioned before were immoral but they were not indifferent, therefore, they could at last be compelled to see the principles of a moral life. However, indifference does not allow for that movement and we see that illustrated by the character of Meursault. The danger in an indifferent man lies in the fact that he lacks a code that could compel him to lead a moral life.

Perhaps the most impactful part of *The Stranger* is this section towards the end, as it illustrates how Meursault approached his life and other human beings

> Nothing, nothing mattered, and I knew why. So did he. Throughout the whole absurd life I’d lived, a dark wind had been rising toward me from somewhere deep in my future, across years that were still to come, and as it passed, this wind leveled whatever was offered to me at the time, in years no more real than the ones I was living. What did other people’s deaths or a mother’s love matter to me; what did his God or the lives people choose or the fate they think they elect matter to me when we’re all elected by the same fate, me and billions of privileged people like him who also called themselves my brothers? …The others would all be condemned one day.¹⁹

The only unity of humanity, for Meursault, is that everyone is condemned to live and to die. There is no way out and no meaning. A further understanding of the character of Meursault is found when he talks about his relationship with his mom, “…*Maman* and I didn’t expect anything from each other anymore, or from anyone else either.”²⁰ This shows how the character of Meursault didn’t expect anything from anybody for he was alone, living his life as his own without others.

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¹⁹ Camus, *The Stranger*, 121.
Indifference towards other human relationships is extremely detrimental as we can see demonstrated by the murderous character of Meursault. Meursault was simply indifferent towards the relationships in his life. He did not care either way what or how his actions might impact others in his life. At first this simply meant lying to a passenger on a train but soon led to murdering another human. Perhaps, had he not found himself in the situation of shooting a man, Meursault would not have shot him. Once again, an indifferent man is only affected by convenience. Meursault could shoot the man, so he did. He did not once ponder if he should shoot. He only noted that he could shoot or he could not shot. He was not compelled by hatred or anything to shoot. He was completely indifferent but totally capable of taken another man’s life. This is how indifference towards human relationships can lead to a higher propensity for evil.

Hannah Arendt

Imagine the world and all the different things or parts that make up this entity on which we live. Now imagine the world’s history, in particular the human history. Remember all the ways that humanity triumphed so to speak. Think of hard working parents, providing for their families. Think of communities coming together to provide disaster relief. Recall all of those willing to risk their lives to save others; either in times of war or just times of civil unrest. Imagine the conflicts and wars that decimated communities. All those times that the same human beings were able to commit such great evils. The factors or conditions that bind or are given to humanity are understood as the human condition. Particularly in *The Human Condition*, Arendt states in the introduction:

What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought,
and thoughtlessness – the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of “truths” which have become trivial and empty – seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.21

Recognizing that this was written in the past and that there is potential for our recent fears and newest experiences to be different, I ask that one assume that they have not varied significantly. Hannah Arendt was writing post WWII, atomic weapon era and quite frankly we are still living with the repercussions and fears developed during that time. The area of the world where the fear originates may be different but the fear of great evil is still a concern in our contemporary lives.

Also, it would be beneficial to point out that Hannah Arendt asks us that we think about what we are doing. This is a very similar proposition to the idea that indifference must be dealt with. In her work, Arendt wishes to do away with thoughtlessness. Thoughtlessness can be thought of as similar to indifference because both traits are blatant disregards for human relationships. Thoughtlessness is different from indifference but the repercussions are similar in that both could result in human action that is terribly destructive and detrimental to the rest of humanity and life on earth. I claim that there is a relationship between indifference and the propensity for evil. In order to show this I will present Arendt’s understanding of the “human condition” as it rests on an understanding of the self as relational. Therefore, a disregard towards human relationships can be understood as bad and leading to a higher propensity for evil.

In discussing the human condition, suggests that it is made of “three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action. They are fundamental because each corresponds to one of the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to

21 Hannah Arendt Intro
man.” For Arendt, labor is the activity of human biological processes. It is activity that
is life itself. Then there is “work” which corresponds to the unnatural entities of human
existence. This is the activity that accounts for all the ‘man-made’ things of the world.
Then, there is “action” which Arendt defines as corresponding to the condition of
plurality. I will focus on “action” because it is “…the only activity that goes on directly
between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human
condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the
world.” This realm of action corresponding to plurality is the place where one finds
Arendt’s understanding that human beings are relational beings in a plurality, not alone,
not isolated and unaffected by others. This is very important and it further supports my
thesis that an indifference towards human relationships leads to a higher propensity for
evil. By showing that humans are relational, relying on the work of Arendt, it will
become evident that indifference towards human relationship is problematic.

To best understand Arendt’s thought and how humans are interconnected, we
need to understand Arendt’s notion of plurality and its correspondence with action.
Arendt explains, “Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same,
that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived,
lives, or will live.” This means that even though Hannah Arendt believes that humans
are all interconnected and in relation to one another, she also wants to preserve the
uniqueness of each person. Arendt does not claim that man is alone and isolated but she
does not claim that one man is the same as another. She says it well when she explains,

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“Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of equality and distinction.”

Humans are equal as in they are human but no human is the same as anyone who has lived, lives, or will live and thus there is a uniqueness to each human that makes humanity distinct. She defends her conclusion about the equality of humanity by suggesting, “If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them.”

She continues on to demonstrate how one must understand humanity as distinct as well: “If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate, identical needs and wants would be enough.” This demonstrates how humans can maintain a level of individuality without being completely isolated without any relations to others. Arendt shows that the need for speech and action to be understood and communicate with others implicitly demonstrates the reality of unique human beings amidst the plurality of human beings that characterizes the human condition. So it is important that in a plurality, each human being is understood as equal and unique because this then allows for interconnectedness of humanity. Human beings are connected because they are understood as equal but they are also distinct which allows for them to be individuals within the web of humanity.

Furthermore, Hannah Arendt gives a clear definition of what it means to be a person. For her, to be a person requires speech and action by means of which we insert

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25 Arendt, The Human Condition, 175.
26 Arendt, The Human Condition, 175.
ourselves into the human world. To give a negative definition she states, “A life without speech and without action, on the other hand…is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.” Since speech and action are so important to understanding selfhood, let us now clarify what Arendt means by this.

Hannah Arendt explains, “To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word archein, “to begin,” “to lead,” and eventually “to rule,” indicates), to set something into motion (which is the original meaning of the Latin agere).” This component, activity ‘action’ is key to inserting oneself into the world. It is what makes someone a someone. She further explains, “If action as beginning corresponds to the fact of birth, if it is the actualization of the human condition of natality, then speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals.” Thus not only is action necessary but so is speech in order to insert oneself into the world.

Therefore, if the world and the human condition is such that human beings are all equal while at the same time free to speak and act uniquely to insert themselves into the world, then what are the characteristics of this world that is already in motion before a person asserts herself into the scene through speech and action? Hannah Arendt then explains how humanity is supposed to deal with a world that already has individuals speaking and acting in the plurality of the human condition.

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28 Arendt, The Human Condition, 176.
29 Arendt, The Human Condition, 177.
30 Arendt, The Human Condition, 178.
In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt claims that the human condition is the whole of humanity with no separate, solitary individuals who have their own free will to act in such a way that is completely isolated from the rest of the world. They are, however, beings that are unique but their actions have an impact on others. Arendt demonstrates that “…the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, its actor and sufferer, but nobody is its author.”\(^{31}\) This is the human condition as a plurality. As people we become actors on a stage already set for us with no isolation from the rest of humanity. Hannah Arendt gives us a great visual of the plurality of the human condition by explaining that “The realm of human affairs, strictly speaking, consists of the web of human relationships that exists wherever men live together.”\(^{32}\) Humanity, this plurality of acting and speaking individuals that are in relationship with one another, becomes a web of sorts. This is how one can understand the relationality of humanity with the unique, distinct insertion of a person into the stage already set. This helps us better understanding that an indifference towards human relationships can possibly lead to a higher propensity for evil. If human beings are intrinsically connected, then the relationships between one human to another becomes more vital than ever before. In her analysis of humanity as plurality, Hannah Arendt brings to light the uniqueness and distinctive aspects of the equality of human beings. This analysis allows her to then talk of the stage already set that free, distinct agents can act with the understanding that there is already a plurality of other actors on the stage. Because human beings are interconnected and in constant relationship with others, then

an indifference or even a thoughtlessness towards these relationships makes someone more susceptible for immorality. The relationships between human beings are so important and so innate to the identity of an individual that any form of disregard for these relationships is detrimental.

One of these forms of disregard is thoughtlessness raised by Arendt. Another form that I suggest is indifference. Both are similar in their disregard for one’s relationships with others. Thoughtlessness is different because it is a lack of choosing to be aware of the human condition. Thoughtlessness is maintaining that lack of awareness while indifference is not simply a lack of awareness but a lack of empathy as well. Indifference is worse than thoughtlessness because a thoughtless human could still have compassion or empathy for another even though he is unaware of his condition. An indifferent man is not only unaware of his relationality but he also lacks empathy for others. The ability for a thoughtless man to be empathetic is the difference between thoughtlessness and indifference. Now a thoughtless man may not be aware of his ability or of his acting compassionately but he still has the capacity to do so. Unfortunately, for the indifferent man, he lacks the capacity to empathize. As mentioned while discussing The Stranger, the indifferent man has willed himself into isolation from others. He can no longer have compassion for another because he has, through indifference, isolated himself. Arendt’s suggestion that thoughtlessness is an issue is still a disregard for other human relationships but the problem of thoughtlessness is not as troubling as indifference because thoughtlessness allows for compassion. I will explore this notion later in the thesis. To reiterate, thoughtlessness and indifference are both a way of disregarding other human relationships. However, thoughtlessness implies an individual has the capacity to
care about others while the very definition of indifference does not allow for the individual to care at all for another. Either way, this disregard for human relationship can only be seen as detrimental if we sufficiently demonstrate how human beings are interconnected.

To show how human beings are interconnected I will rely on Arendt’s analysis of forgiveness and promises. Her analysis is the most illuminating to her philosophy about the interconnectedness of humanity. The idea of promises and forgiveness is key to understanding the intrinsic relationality of humanity and will thus further help my case in showing that human beings are indeed relational beings. Hannah Arendt asserts that the activity of action is “irreversible” and “unpredictable.” If we understand the world as a stage already set and humanity as actors, we can begin to understand why Hannah Arendt comes to this conclusion. To further illustrate, lets use the example of improvisation. In the performance style of improvisation, or improv, the actors are actually referred to as players and there are no scripts. Every performance is an impromptu scene usually sparked by an audience suggestion of sorts. This means that there is no rehearsing for the players but rather spontaneous action. Often times, because this is ultimately a performance for the sake of entertainment, there is a director that ends scenes once they’ve ‘died.’ This means if one of the players has made a choice that epically failed when presented to the audience the director has the authority to stop the scene and move on to maintain a level of entertainment. So how does a player know what choices to make and what choices not to make? The answer is simple: one makes choices and then learns what works and what doesn’t based on the reactions/consequences that follow. The tricky part is that in one instance one choice will work and then another time it won’t. This is
the unpredictability of improv that makes each performance spontaneous and new.

Another aspect of this performance style is trust of the other people on stage with you. To be able to perform and even recover from ‘mistakes’ (possible scene killers), the troupe must trust one another to keep a scene alive and entertaining. This leads to the one way an improve troupe can prepare for a performance, relating to each other. The one way to prepare for an impromptu performance is to get to know and trust and care about the other humans involved in the show. The reason being is if you are in a scene with another person then the entertaining factor of the scene does not rely solely on you but also on the other person. In improv there is this idea of give and take. It is here that one trusts the other to make a choice or action that is completely irreversible and the person making the decision can trust that the other is going to ‘play along’ to maintain the believability of the scene. An improv troupe must have a great relational dynamic in order to be successful and the reason is that improv, like the world we live in, is unpredictable and irreversible.

The example of an improv performance is only a microcosm of the reality of humanity. The reason it is not a complete picture of reality is that to some extent the director has just enough control to ‘start over’ and the audience participation gives just enough predictability to eliminate some of the randomness. However, ultimately I think this is an accurate example of what Hannah Arendt is trying to convey when she equates human beings to actors on a stage already set. Like an improv performance, life is impromptu and when a player joins a scene she cannot reverse what has been done but instead must integrate herself into the scene already set and do so in relation to the players already out on stage. The performance also mirrors life in its unpredictability but
a troupe can guard against this by establishing strong relationships with each other. The same principle goes for life. There are two concepts that make our world more predictable and allow for someone, even groups, to be freed from irreversible action. These two principles are that of forgiveness and promises.

In our world we see numerous concrete examples of promises from the intimate pinky-promise of two friends to the legally binding written promise found in an apartment lease. We also see forgiveness upheld as preferred to vengeance that is often associated with immorality.

By examining the ability to forgive and the ability to make promises, the relationality of human beings becomes all the more evident. Hannah Arendt describes each individually as such:

The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility – of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing – is the faculty of forgiving. The remedy for the unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises.\(^{33}\)

The necessity, therefore, for both forgiveness and promises is established by the world we live in. To further this account specifically with forgiveness, we turn to another passage in which Arendt states, “Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.”\(^{34}\) This once again further establishes the necessary function of forgiveness in a world of irreversibility. I will utilize Arendt’s term “free agent” just to represent the human condition of a human beings ability to act freely, though not without consequence in relationship to other human beings.


\(^{34}\) Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 240.
Though it may seem a given that we have promises in our world, I wish to show that promises are a necessity for free agents, much like forgiveness, to speak and act to maintain their existence in the plurality of the human condition. Turning again to Arendt’s own words, we read:

> The unpredictability which the act of making promises at least partially dispels is of a twofold nature: it arises simultaneously out of the ‘darkness of the human heart,’ that is, the basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow, and out of the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act.\textsuperscript{35}

This unpredictability is the price of freedom but it is one that can and is often overcome by the faculty of promises. As stated earlier, promises can take many forms at different levels of authority but it is of common understanding that promises are made and only meaningful if upheld. For promises are the only defense against the unpredictability of a community of people whom all have the same capacity for action.

> Man’s inability to rely upon himself or to have complete faith in himself (which is the same thing) is the price human beings pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all.\textsuperscript{36}

This once again demonstrates the necessity for promises in our world of free agents.

Once again, free agents only refer to the unique and distinctive individuals that contribute to the plurality of the human condition. This quotation also alludes to the next step in my argument that humans are relational beings.

First it was necessary to establish the necessity of faculties such as forgiveness and promises. This conclusion then leads to the necessity of human interconnectedness and relationality. To explain better I once again point towards the work of Arendt who states, “Both faculties, therefore, depend on plurality, on the presence and acting of

\textsuperscript{35} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 244.
\textsuperscript{36} Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, 244.
others, for no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself; forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one’s self.”

If forgiveness and promise making is necessary for free agents then it also follows that these acts must be between, in relation to, at least two individuals. The necessity of forgiveness and promises leads to a necessity that people are relational beings. To further explain, the faculties of forgiveness and promises must exist in the context of relation. These faculties are ways of relating with other human beings. Therefore, the necessity of these particular relations points to the necessity of relationality among humanity.

**Simone de Beauvoir**

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Simone de Beauvoir opens with the concern for the ambiguity of the human person and his/her condition in the world by bringing up examples that have shaped humanity to this day. She describes all people as having “felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition.” To illustrate this ambiguity of the human condition she uses the example, “Though they are masters of the atomic bomb, yet it is created only to destroy them.” Essentially, her work is concerned with a post WWII world filled with technological advancements in weaponry that have the capacity to annihilate the entire world in which we live. She is also addressing the condition of our lives, which she asserts, is this ambiguity. If we follow de Beauvoir on this path, we will find that she eventually links one’s freedom with the freedom of the other. This once

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again, demonstrates an intrinsic relationality between human beings. Though she approaches this question of identity and the human condition differently from Hannah Arendt, she draws the same conclusions about identity of the self and its relationship with others. Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis will further solidify just how bound the human person is with other human beings thus further supporting the thesis that any disregard for human relationships leads to a higher propensity for evil in the world.

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Simone de Beauvoir claims that the human person lives in the condition of ambiguity. This is the condition of humans desiring to be purely external or purely internal. It is the pull between those two desires that illustrates our reality as human beings.\(^{40}\) It is crucial to understand the ethics of ambiguity insofar as it explains why freedom is so important to de Beauvoir. From her understanding of freedom, one is then able to see how human beings are related and our freedom is tied to the freedom of others.

Simone de Beauvoir’s understanding of the existence of the human person asserts that freedom is a major component of that understanding.

Another component of the human person is his or her existence. For de Beauvoir, one must assert his/her identity into the world. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, de Beauvoir provides the example of the artist.

In order for the artist to have a world to express he must first be situated in this world, oppressed or oppressing, resigned or rebellious, a man among men. But at the heart of his existence he finds the existence which is common to all men; he must first will freedom within himself and universally…\(^{41}\)

In the first sentence we see how de Beauvoir suggests that one must be situated in the world to exist. There is nothing about existence that is detached from the world we live

\(^{40}\) Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 1-2.

\(^{41}\) Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 78.
in. This is the point de Beauvoir is trying to make in the first part of the quote above. This quote is a key connection between de Beauvoir and Arendt. It is very similar to Hannah Arendt’s understanding of the human condition as a stage already set. Both Arendt and de Beauvoir find importance of individuals inserting themselves into the preexisting conditions of the world. De Beauvoir emphasizes freedom above all else and it is through the necessity for freedom that de Beauvoir demonstrates an intrinsic need for humans to be relational beings. Arendt will not turn to the necessity of freedom to demonstrate the interconnectedness of humanity; instead, she uses the conditions of the world as irreversible and unpredictable to show how the human condition is a plurality. Though these are two different approaches of each philosopher, the conclusions they draw about the interconnectedness of human beings will be the same. Both Arendt and de Beauvoir through their own distinct investigations arrive at similar implications about selfhood as interconnected with the rest of humanity. It is in this way that we start to see similarities between Arendt and de Beauvoir that are not explicitly stated.

After exploring the similarities between Arendt and de Beauvoir in the situatedness of human beings in the world, it is important to show just how de Beauvoir arrives at an understanding of the self as relational, interconnected. Turning back to the quote above, we find that Simone de Beauvoir moves from insertion of the individual into the condition of the world to willing freedom. This freedom is not only willed for the self but also universally for all others. All human beings have to will freedom for themselves and for all others. This means that freedom is something that humans must be in constant pursuit of. By freedom, de Beauvoir is not talking about something devoid of meaning but rather that “freedom realizes itself only by engaging itself in the world: to
such an extent that man’s project toward freedom is embodied for him in definite acts of behavior.”  

So essentially, for de Beauvoir the human person is in a state of ambiguity that requires a constant will for freedom. Again she gives us an understanding of freedom, “…for man it is a matter of pursuing the expansion of his existence and of retrieving this very effort as an absolute.”  

For de Beauvoir, willing freedom is the same as willing selfhood or existence. Therefore, if one’s freedom is bound with the freedom of others then one’s existence is bound with the existence of others.

The key idea from de Beauvoir is that the will for freedom cannot simply be at the individual level. She also requires that freedom be willed universally. The necessity for the universal will for freedom in her philosophy implies that there is a relationship between the individual and the whole of humanity. Simone de Beauvoir requires that all are free for one to be free, as in, “…the individual is defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals; he exists only by transcending himself, and his freedom can be achieved only through the freedom of others.”

This means that humans are interconnected because everyone’s freedom is bound to the freedom of others. We are not just self-serving individuals willing our own personal freedom but rather humans are individuals that must will the freedom of others for the individual’s freedom is bound up in the freedom of others.

An equally illuminating point of de Beauvoir’s philosophy is all that leads up to the understanding of freedom, which includes oppression and liberation to freedom. In the ideas of oppression and liberation one can see how de Beauvoir starts with an

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42 Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, 78.
43 Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, 79.
44 Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, 156.
understanding of the self as interconnected and relational. She starts her argument with a counter to absurdism suggesting that “Every man is originally free, in the sense that he spontaneously casts himself into the world. But if we consider this spontaneity in its facticity, it appears to us only as a pure contingency, an upsurging as stupid as the clinamen of the Epicurean atom which turned up at any moment whatsoever from any direction whatsoever.” To consider this spontaneity in its facticity is to understand it through the facts of our lives. Facticity means we are the facts of our past but we are not bound by this past. Human beings have the ability to transcend their current state and that is facticity. So the freedom de Beauvoir is speaking of is not a random freedom of absurdism, but rather to be free means that one wills it and one does not simply have freedom. The movement of transcendence is moving out of facticity toward a goal. This is the movement of freedom. Concretely, this means that freedom is tied to one’s existence as one “casts himself into the world.” Then as a counter to another understanding of freedom she says, “If a door refuses to open, let us accept not opening it and there we are free. But by doing that one manages only to save an abstract notion of freedom. It is emptied of all content and all truth. The power of man ceases to be limited because it is annulled.” This is a counter to the understanding of freedom as obtainable in every situation by everyone. De Beauvoir wishes to have a stronger interpretation of freedom that actually leads to individual and universal freedom not through absurdity or through emptying freedom of its concrete reality. That being said, now that we have somewhat of an understanding of freedom it is pertinent to discuss de Beauvoir’s understanding of identity.

45 Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, 25.
46 Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, 29.
Simone de Beauvoir understands human beings to be capable of living in certain stages of existence. Naturally, she starts with the child mentality. She describes “The child’s situation [as] characterized by his finding himself cast into a universe which he has not helped establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit.”\(^47\) This idea of a world preexisting that one must act within is similar to Hannah Arendt’s understanding of the stage already set. The difference in de Beauvoir is how she will suggest a human being approach this reality. This is why freedom is so important for de Beauvoir’s understanding of human beings. She utilizes freedom to illustrate how a self becomes a self in the world. As it will be shown, those selves are truly selves when they understand their connectedness to freedom and do not run away from the ambiguity created by freedom. Freedom will create ambiguity because that is our condition as humans is that of ambiguity. Therefore, freedom allows for one to experience her ambiguity and to understand it as such. To further the point of my work, it will also be shown that this individual understanding of the need for freedom then becomes a universal need for all people. It is in this that we arrive at the conclusion that one’s freedom is bound with the freedom of others and that ultimately one’s freedom is one’s very existence. Therefore, a human being’s existence is bound to the existence of others.

Going back to the example of the child, we can understand how an actual child lives in this initial state. De Beauvoir continues with her analysis of human beings by suggesting that adults can live in this child-like stage. These are people who are so oppressed that they do not know there is a possibility for their freedom. However,

\(^{47}\) Beauvoir, \textit{The Ethics of Ambiguity}, 35.
“…once there appears a possibility of liberation, it is resignation of freedom not to exploit the possibility, a resignation which implies dishonesty and which is a positive fault.”

In regards to adults that are in the child stage, if they have no opportunity for liberation then it is not their resignation of freedom but rather still oppression, even if they can be imagined satisfied with their lives. However, as soon as liberation is possible, an adult in the child state must pursue the freedom set before them, otherwise then they have chosen to give up their freedom and remain a child.

Then she continues to describe the possible outcome for those that do leave the child mentality behind. It is possible that man transitions from child to adolescence and then to what de Beauvoir describes as the sub-man.

But the sub-man arouses contempt, that is, one recognizes him to be responsible for himself at the moment that one accuses him of not willing himself…He is afraid of engaging himself in a project as he is afraid of being disengaged and thereby being in a state of danger before the future, in the midst of its possibilities. He is thereby led to take refuge in the ready-made values of the serious world.

This understanding of human beings is not fully human for de Beauvoir describes them as sub-men. This is, however, an option for a human being to become if one chooses to run away from the freedom and the reality of the ambiguity of the human condition. It is the sub-man that is most detrimental to the freedom of others and the existence of others for, “He will proclaim certain opinions; he will take shelter behind a label; and to hide his indifference he will readily abandon himself to verbal outbursts or even physical violence.”

This means that the sub-man can be easily swayed into whatever position someone in power wishes to use the sub-man. These so far are all negative understandings of the self but through these stages one can begin to see how de Beauvoir

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50 Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 44.
arrives at the conclusion about freedom and existence as interconnected. If it is not characteristic of human beings to be accepting of the world they are put into or to abandon selfhood for fear of the reality of ambiguity of his condition, then we begin to see how selfhood, according to de Beauvoir requires a constant choice to choose freedom in the ambiguity instead of hiding behind labels or the serious world. As her work is aptly named, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* demonstrates how the ethical life is lived in the ambiguity and therefore in the freedom of one’s existence. So it follows that in regards to the sub-man, de Beauvoir states, “Ethics is the triumph of freedom over facticity, and the sub-man feels only the facticity of his existence.”\(^{51}\) Freedom leads to the ethical for de Beauvoir and that is why freedom is so important for de Beauvoir’s ethics.

The sub-man is not the only stage of denial for de Beauvoir. There is also room for the crossover into the serious. The serious can easily turn into the tyrant and oppressor. First let’s turn again to the text to see how this transition is made from pawn to oppressor.

Thus, fundamental as a man’s fear in the face of existence may be, though he has chosen from his earliest years to deny his presence in the world, he can not keep himself from existing, he can not efface the agonizing evidence of his freedom. That is why, as we have just seen, in order to get rid of his freedom, he is led to engage it positively. The attitude of the sub-man passes logically over into that of the serious man; he forces himself to submerge his freedom in the content which the latter accepts from society. He loses himself in the object in order to annihilate his subjectivity.\(^{52}\)

In a feeble attempt to escape the subjective ambiguity of the natural condition of humanity, one turns to an object for escape. The interesting part about the serious man is that “The thing that matters to the serious man is not so much the nature of the object which he prefers to himself, but rather the fact of being able to lose himself in it.”\(^{53}\) It is no longer even about the object that he runs to for escape but the fact that it is an object

\(^{51}\) Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 44.
\(^{52}\) Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 45.
\(^{53}\) Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, 47.
that he can lose himself to and therefore attempt to escape the ambiguity, subjectivity of
his condition. As de Beauvoir states, “There is the serious from the moment that freedom
denies itself to the advantage of ends which one claims are absolute.” These passages
illuminate that the serious man can get lost into objects and de Beauvoir uses the example
of the military. When one devotes and identifies, even losing one’s self, to the military,
then one loses oneself if the military is ever taken away. She uses the example of the
retired general who is now dull because he is detached from the object that he used to
escape his subjectivity. On the flip side, if one has continued access to this end then it is
necessary for one to continuing pursuing it further to maintain one’s objectivity. This is
how the pawn or sub-man can transition to the tyrant or serious man. Both
understandings of the self are delusions to the truth about the human condition.

Simone de Beauvoir believes that human beings are truly free if they live in the
subjectivity and ambiguity of their condition. I think it is here that one recognizes that
individual freedom is not absolute but rather subjective and dependent on the freedom of
others. As de Beauvoir states, “To will oneself free is also to will others free. This will is
not an abstract formula. It points out to each person concrete action to be achieved.”
This is exactly how the freedom that she calls for transitions into a need for the freedom
for others and therefore, leading to the interconnectedness of humanity.

If one takes what Simone de Beauvoir has claimed seriously, then once again we
find that human beings are relational beings. One is not simply just an individual but
rather humans are distinct individuals living a plurality of existence as unique,
interconnected relational beings. Very similar to Hannah Arendt, Simone de Beauvoir has

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arrived at a similar conclusion about the intrinsic relationality of human beings. I think there should be some merit to the reality that two different philosophers discussing the human condition, who emphasize different aspects, still arrive at the same conclusion at least about the interconnectedness of human beings.

Therefore, if human beings are interconnected then any disregard for the other is not good. Let’s again turn to Simone de Beauvoir’s philosophy. If we remember, she states that an individual’s freedom is contingent on the freedom of others. That means that a disregard for the other implies an enslavement of the self. So for example, if someone were to be indifferent towards the oppression of others then that person is allowing for himself to be oppressed as well. This oppression is wrong. Therefore, a disregard for these relationships with others leads to wrongdoing. Thus, an indifference towards human relationships leads to a higher propensity for evil in the world.
Part Two

Connections

It should become apparent by now that human beings are interconnected, unique beings that are bound to each other while also maintaining their identity as free actors on the stage of the world set before them. Human beings are relational beings. Therefore, if a human person has some sort of disregard for other human persons then that individual is having a disregard for part of that person’s identity as a human person. Indifference towards human relationships leads to a higher propensity for evil in the world.

One might argue that evil doesn’t actually exist. I imagine some may suggests that evil is a meaningless term. I would like to approach this issue from a very pragmatic perspective. By the term evil, I am referring to all the wrong doings that occur in the world. For example, atrocities like the holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and other crimes against humanity. These, and many other historical events not mentioned, are not to be dismissed. One is greatly mistaken if he/she ignores these events or redefines them as something other than evil just to satisfy some metaphysical fancy. Given evil, what is its connection to indifference?

By indifference I mean a disregard towards other human relationships by denying our fundamental condition of being in relationship. I do not suppose that an indifference towards what color one paints his/her wall leads to a propensity for evil. Turning back to the great narrative given in The Stranger, Meursault is a great example of a human being who is indifferent towards the human relationships in his life. To further this point I wish to use a thought experiment/example.
Imagine a man named Joe. He is a respected man in his community. He is a law-abiding citizen. He is known by his family and friends to be a good person. There is nothing “wrong” with Joe. But if Joe suffers the same condition as Meursault from The Stranger, then Joe is more likely to commit an evil act than if he regarded the human relationships in his life. To further explain, it is not a necessary truth that Joe will suffer the same fate as Meursault just because Joe has indifference towards the human relationships in his life. I am only claiming that Joe has chosen to put himself at a disadvantage if he does not care about the relationships in his life. He is disadvantaged because he is more susceptible to actually committing evil acts if he does not care about those in his life. He is more susceptible because often the personal care for or about another individual promotes the good. If he lacks the promotion of the good within him, then he is at a disadvantage when the opportunity for evil arises due to his choice to deny his fundamental condition of being in relationship with others. As I stated before, Joe will not necessarily commit evil because of his indifference, but he does have a higher propensity for evil if he lacks that which draws one towards the good.

Now one might be asking, what is “the good?” By the good I am just referring to what would typically be considered the morally correct action to take. Yes, there are many definitions of morally correct action, however, I just wish to argue that “the good” exists. I am acting under the assumption that not only evil exists but also that good exists and that there is a morally correct action for any given particular instance. There is a morally correct action to take at each and every particular moment of our lives and whether that moral act can be universalized or not is an entire other discussion. For the
sake of this thesis I wish to assume that “the good” or morally correct action is within human capacity and should also be strived for.

This is important because not only does Joe as an indifferent man have the capacity for great evil; he also has the capacity for great good. I only wish to suppose that Joe is disadvantaged towards obtaining great good if he is indifferent towards his relationships with others. Say for example, Joe is a soldier in the United States Military during the Second World War. If he indifferently just follows all of his orders he will most likely do good in trying to obtain liberation for those oppressed. However, if Joe does not care about the lives he encounters he may perhaps commit evil along with the greater good.

In attempts to better explain the connection between evil and indifference, I will use the analogy of a garden. Let evil be represented by a nasty weed. Let the soil represent the human person. Finally let’s have a beautiful flower be representative of the good. If each individual person were responsible for his or her life only, then this garden would consist of many pots with only an individual’s soil in each. In this case, it would not matter whether weeds or flowers grew in the soil of each individual. Whether one pot had weeds while another had flowers would not have much bearing on the garden. However, humanity is not individualized like that. As it has been demonstrated, humanity is interconnected and in constant relation with one another. That means for this analogy that the garden is actually a large bed of soil. And as is the case with most gardens, some soil is better suited for growing flowers than others. Those that represent fertile soil are those individuals within humanity that care deeply about those around them. They are those in humanity that are living up to their humanity. Now, this means that those within
this sphere of fertile soil can grow either weeds or flowers. Most will opt for flowers and typically any that do grow weeds are cultivating them under the impression that the weeds are flowers. This is suppose to signify that most people convinced to participate in evil acts or to be immoral have been convinced with the understanding that they are actually doing good. So the soil of these people may be covered in dandelions instead of daffodils. A note on weeds as evil, weeds in this analogy have shallow roots to better represent the condition of evil. As I have proposed that weeds only grow under the falsity of flowers, then their falsity does not go deep into the soil and can be eradicated easily if shown that it is truly a weed. For example, if one realizes that he is growing dandelions instead of daffodils then he will presumably get rid of the dandelions in order to grow daffodils. This is not the case for the indifferent man. The indifferent man has soil that will grow both dandelions and daffodils. However, the indifferent man does not care what grows in his soil. He has failed to recognize those around him as intrinsically part of his existence. I say this because in a garden, weeds are eradicated for the overall good of the garden. With an indifferent man, he will have no desire to eradicate weeds even if he recognizes them as such. He allows flower or weed to grow and because of that he endangers the whole garden by allowing evil to take root and cover more ground that it should.

Government

For a different example, imagine a nation in which the individuals of the government make all the decisions (as is typical for an organized nation). What does this governing body have to do to maintain control over the population it is governing? The population must be kept content and satisfied. If not, then the citizens will presumably
revolt. So how does this government keep its citizens satisfied? The government begins to control different aspects within the nation. The government starts by making sure basic needs are cared for or at least that any people with any money or influence are taken care of. Then all the government must do to maintain control and continue to expand its control on the nation is to make the citizens complacent. I propose that governments easily control citizens who are indifferent towards human relationships in their lives. I do not simply mean the immediate relationships that surround us, either as familial or friendships, but rather the broader relationship to the rest of humanity. When a government has effectively divided its citizens from the rest of the world, then it is truly in power of that nation and its inhabitants. It is not only a physical division but also a mental one.

When a government has cut off its citizens from the rest of humanity then it begins to have full control over its inhabitants. How might a government gain complete control without its citizens noticing and thus rebelling? The answer I propose is key and ties directly into this thesis. A government must simply keep citizens indifferent towards the rest of humanity and even indifferent towards those human beings they see everyday living in poverty. All a government must do is convince the majority of its population that certain people aren’t people and thus citizens can stop “worrying” or caring about those marginalized. If a government can make poverty, violence, oppression, and the like disappear from the cares of the majority of its citizens, eventually those citizens will begin to believe that those woes do not actually exist or at least the woes do not need to be fixed.
A government can do this by controlling the information given to its people. If enough propaganda is circulated eventually, as consumers, the people will not be able to sort through what is correct or incorrect. The people will no longer be able to make distinctions between good and bad because they do not know what is true or false. When a country has access to information that has two sides in direct conflict on what is true and what is false, it will begin to overwhelm the population. The constant attempt and failure to distinguish fact from lie will become so burdensome that the people of that country will stop caring. They will stop caring about the individuals suffering great tragedy. They will stop caring about whether Russia is invading Ukraine or not. All that the people will care about is their own individual lives. And as we saw in *The Stranger*, when one begins only caring for himself out of indifference towards others, he is more likely to do what is convenient. Unfortunately, sometimes what is convenient is immoral and causes harm to another. In the case of a citizen of a governing body, this indifference may be used to sacrifice freedoms or go to war because it is more convenient for all of the individual lives of the population to just go with the flow of what the government has declared.

**Proposed Solution**

An indifferent man is not bound to his indifference forever. I believe there is a solution or a way out for those enslaved by indifference. What I offer is not a complete solution by any means. All I wish to do is raise some ideas about how to possibly combat indifference and its connection to evil in the world. When an individual is indifferent, she does not care about her relationships with others. In disregarding her relationality with others she has consequently also lost her humanity. So another way to phrase this
question is: how do you restore someone’s humanity? I propose that the solution may be connected to suffering.

Often times, we think of suffering as bad and something to be avoided. There is an old saying from John Ray that “misery loves company.” And I wonder if he was onto something. I perhaps don’t mean it the same way that Ray intended but I think his sentiment may help against indifference. Let’s look at the word compassion. The word passion means to suffer while com means with. Compassion means to suffer with. So when John Ray suggested “misery loves company” perhaps we could think of it as no one likes to suffer alone. The act of compassion is the act of entering into someone else’s suffering. As I have stated before, suffering is not something that we seek out. It is because we don’t seek out suffering that when someone intentionally does seek it out to suffer with another, it is meaningful. This begins to imply that one bound by indifference requires an action of another to free that person from indifference.

Perhaps in the face of suffering and indifferent person may be pulled out of his complacency. Or even, as suggested by The Stranger, if one shows compassion towards an indifferent man, perhaps the indifferent man can be brought back into caring for others. To explain, in The Stranger, Meursault is on trial for his life and his friend was on the stand trying to defend Meursault as a person. Even though Celeste did not have the evidence to prove Meursault’s character, he still got up in front of everyone in defense of a murderer. As Celeste is on the stand, stuttering and suffering for the sake of Meursault, we get a glimpse of humanity from Meursault. In this brief moment he states “…Celeste then turned toward me. It looked to me as if his eyes were glistening and his lips were trembling. He seemed to be asking me what else he could do… I made no gesture of any
kind but it was the first time in my life I ever wanted to kiss a man." I believe this glimpse into a possible redemption for the indifferent Meursault is caused by Celeste’s compassion for Meursault. If one sees Meursault as the villain of The Stranger, then Celeste should be seen as the hero. He is the one person in Meursault’s life who has willingly, explicitly showed compassion for Meursault. The other characters may have felt pity but none so explicitly and publically showed compassion for Meursault.

So what is it that makes Celeste the champion? His moment of humiliation on the stand to testify on behalf of Meursault was a public, explicit demonstration of his compassion for Meursault. It is Celeste who tries to restore Meursault’s humanity. It is Celeste who testifies as if Meursault is human. All the others allow him to be regarded as something other, a monster. This moment of The Stranger for me is the most redeeming moment of the whole narrative. Throughout the whole piece, one feels disgusted with Meursault’s indifference and his actions that follow, then leading to a feeling of disgust for the whole character of Meursault as a man. Then we encounter this witness of Celeste trying to convey Meursault’s humanity and it is Meursault’s reaction to Celeste’s compassion that is so refreshing. As I have said, throughout most of the book, the character of Meursault is repulsive. Meursault’s reaction to Celeste’s empathy is the most redeeming moment for Meursault. We get a glimpse of his humanity.

Compassion seems to be a way of re-linking human beings to their humanity. Going back to “misery loves company,” there is also truth in that those who suffer together tend to unite and bond over that suffering. So if one suffers with another, then they have a history and their lives are linked in a very concrete way. I do not mean to

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56 Camus, The Stranger, 92-3.
suggest that we all need more suffering in our lives. What is needed is more compassion and empathy for the other. As the character of Meursault illustrates, an indifferent man cannot escape his fate without the other. It was Celeste who helps, though briefly, Meursault seem human. It was the act of another human being to help an indifferent man feel for another again. So it is up to us to recognize our relationality and to break into the indifference of others through compassion and empathy. The indifferent man has willed his own isolation and has become so self-enclosed that he is bound to the condition of indifference for the rest of his life. It will only be through the action of another that could possibly shake him out of indifference towards other human relationships. I believe the only way for the other to help her fellow man is by demonstrating empathy and compassion for him. To meet other individuals with compassion is to link them to your existence and your humanity. Thus, restoring theirs.
Bibliography

