

## TO LIVE A PROBLEM: DELEUZE AND EXISTENTIAL POLITICS<sup>1</sup>

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*In this article it is argued that the existential tradition can be understood to be sympathetic to many of the concerns of classical republicanism, and in particular to the classical republican view that freedom consists of securing the institutions that allow for freedom as non-domination – that is, for the ability to live one’s life without the interference of an arbitrary power. In his recent book on Marx, William Clare Roberts has argued that Marx should also be understood in light of the concerns of classical republicanism, and in this article that reading is extended to include the work of Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, and Deleuze. In particular, by developing the Deleuzian concept of a problem, wherein a problem is a reality irreducible to the solutions it makes possible, and a reality that subsists within these solutions, the domination and arbitrary power the republicans challenge comes to be understood as a system, or ideology, that presents itself as a solution without a problem, or a forced solution in other words. This reading provides both a new way of engaging the existential tradition with political theory, and it highlights the overlapping concerns of Deleuze with the existentialists, most notably Nietzsche, Sartre, and Camus.*

In his reading of Marx, William Clare Roberts claims that Marx is to be read “as radicalizing the republican tradition for which freedom as non-domination is the highest virtue of institutions.”<sup>2</sup> In particular, Roberts argues that the necessity of achieving our goals in life, if not the very conditions of life itself, by entering the market “renders us,” he claims, “systematically irresponsible for our economic

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<sup>2</sup> William Clare Roberts, *Marx’s Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017) 231.

life.”<sup>3</sup> This is because the impersonal and unpredictable nature of markets interferes with what Roberts sees as central to the classical republican ideal – namely, the “predictable alignment between ‘being good and doing good,’ between the actions that will perfect one as a person and those that will achieve one’s ends.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, when the market becomes the means necessary to do that which realizes our virtue, that which benefits ourselves and others, then the very task itself is at risk of being undermined by powers outside our control. It is for this reason that classical republicanism seeks political institutions where forms of domination and arbitrary power are resisted if not outright eliminated, and Marx, on Roberts’s account, can be seen to fall in line with this tradition.

### Life as a Problem

It may seem to be a stretch to place some of the key figures of the existential tradition among classical republicanism, if it is not already a stretch to place Marx there. Two key components essential to the republican project are subject to severe criticisms from those identified with the existential tradition. First is the importance of predictability with respect to achieving one’s ends, and second is the teleology connected with this predictability. In a letter to his friend Franz Overbeck, for instance, Nietzsche praises the philosophy of Spinoza, in whom he claims to have found “a precursor,” for, among other things, Spinoza’s denial of “the freedom of the will, teleology, the moral world-order, the unegoistic, and evil.”<sup>5</sup> Nietzsche will also speak critically of the transformation, or better deformation, of human beings into that of a predictable, calculable being. As Nietzsche puts it in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, if human beings are to become the “animal with the right to make promises,”<sup>6</sup> then they must “first of all have become calculable, regular, necessary [if they are] to be able to stand security for [their] own future, which is what one who promises does!”<sup>7</sup> In other places, Nietzsche will criticize contemporary moral theories for their “collective drive toward timidity masquerading behind an intellectual front,” with the goal being “foremost that life be rid of all the dangers it once held and that each and every

<sup>3</sup> Roberts 231.

<sup>4</sup> Roberts 63.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1954) 92.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals; Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1969) 57.

<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* 58.

person should help toward this end with all one's might."<sup>8</sup> In short, the unpredictability of life, the dangers of living, are to be eliminated and a predictable, calculable, secure existence is to be sought for "with all one's might." The result, Nietzsche claims, is that we "grate off all the rough and sharp edges from life [...] turning humanity into *sand*? [...] Tiny, soft, round, endless grains of sand!"<sup>9</sup> The "democratic instincts of the modern soul," with its "mediocritization and depreciation of humanity in value," are thus symptomatic, for Nietzsche, of a fundamental "will to *negate* life."<sup>10</sup>

Similarly for Deleuze, who I would like to align with the existential tradition for reasons to be offered shortly, he too criticizes the notion of predictability and he arguably values the unpredictable over the predictable. In reference to what he calls the "crisis in contemporary literature," Deleuze claims the crisis is a result of the "system of rapid turnover" tied to the stress placed on bestsellers, but "[f]ast turnover," Deleuze argues, "necessarily means selling people what they expect: even what's 'daring,' 'scandalous,' strange, and so on falls into the market's predictable forms."<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the sought for predictability of the bestseller – witness the endless stream of sequels, the *Star Wars* franchise for instance – Deleuze claims that "[t]he conditions of literary creation, which emerge only unpredictably, with a slow turnover and progressive recognition, are fragile" (287). There may be "[f]uture Becketts or Kafkas," Deleuze notes, but they will "of course be unlike Beckett or Kafka" (287), and they will not arise predictably – they may in fact go unnoticed. If there is a value, therefore, that Deleuze would call upon, predictability would not appear to be it.

How, if at all, are we to reconcile the classical republican critique of arbitrary power, and its reliance on the predictability necessary to exercise our virtue effectively, with Nietzsche's and Deleuze's critique of the problems they see arising from forcing human beings into predictable molds? Should we even bother attempting to reconcile these two approaches? I believe we should, and the key to doing so is to begin by unpacking what is meant by being *forced* into predictable

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Dawn: Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality* (section 174), ed. Alan Schrift, Keith Ansell-Pearson and Duncan Large, trans. Brittain Smith, *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 5 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011) 127.

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, *Dawn* 127.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (sections 22, 203, 259), ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 22, 91, 153.

<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Mediators," *Incorporations: Zone #6*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone Books, 1992) 287. Subsequent references to this source are given as page numbers in brackets in the text.

modes, the emphasis here on the *forced* nature of this process. We get an indication of how Deleuze understands this process by returning to the same essay where he diagnoses the crisis in contemporary literature. In discussing the “insane quantities of words and images” that bombard us each day on radio and television, and now on social media and the internet, Deleuze points out that “[r]epressive forces don’t stop people expressing themselves but rather force them to express themselves” (288). The flood of words and images, in other words, do not provide us with a smorgasbord of choice from which we can freely choose the words, images, narratives, etc., that best suit us; to the contrary, for Deleuze this flood forces upon us a habit whereby silence is to be avoided, where words and images must fill the voids – no awkward silences! We even feel forced to ask our partners what’s wrong, as Deleuze says a few lines earlier, if they are more quiet than usual. Freedom, therefore, or non-domination in the classical republican sense, is thus to be contrasted with the “repressive powers” that “force” us into continually expressing ourselves, and for Deleuze this comes, for example, when we “have nothing to say,” for only when we have “the right to say nothing,” Deleuze adds, “is there a chance of framing the rare, and ever rarer, thing that might be worth saying” (289).

For Deleuze, therefore, there is clearly a value being asserted concerning this freedom and right to say nothing, for the freedom from repressive forces, a freedom that enables us to frame the “thing that might be worth saying.” Taking these points into consideration, the Deleuzian ethic I will be arguing for could be stated as follows: to live in good faith, or to live in accordance with one’s virtue, is to embrace life as a problem, and this is *good* faith precisely because it is affirmative and embraces the problematic as such and the implications this entails. This is also a faith for one is embracing and affirming a reality that gives us no determinate reasons or hopes upon which to justify our affirmations. One cannot even say just what it is that is being affirmed. By contrast, to live in bad faith is to reject or negate the problematic, to live life as expected, or in accordance with rules, customs, etc., that serve as solutions to the problems of life, solutions to how, when, where, and in what circumstances we should do what is expected of us, and which precisely predetermine what this should be. Such solutions serve, moreover, as solutions without a problem, and thus we have a faith here as well, but now this is a faith in a solution, and a faith that it may indeed be a solution without a problem, or if not so in this case then at least a faith that there is, somewhere, the possible salvation to be had in a final solution.

What then are the implications of embracing and affirming life as a problem? First and foremost, it is inseparable from processes that enhance the life processes that are irreducible to that which is already determinately given. Secondly, and

relatedly, this enhancement of life processes is not to be confused with being a quantitative enhancement. It was precisely the freedom from quantitative increase, from filling awkward silences with determinate words and images, that Deleuze encourages as resistance to those powers that force us to express ourselves. Echoing his call to affirm “the right to say nothing” in order to open a “chance of framing the rare, and ever rarer, thing that might be worth saying,” Deleuze’s response to the crisis of literature is that although “[w]e may congratulate ourselves on the quantitative increase in books, and larger print runs [...] young writers will end up molded in a literary space that leaves them no possibility of creating anything” (287). The enhancement of life processes that comes with the affirmation of life as a problem is thus not a quantitative enhancement or increase; rather, it is nothing less than the process of making sense, which entails, in Deleuze’s theory of sense, both the process of increasing determination (or the move to increased differentiation and determination) as well as the de-differentiating move that tends toward the undermining of identity. Stated differently, making sense involves a tendency both toward the universal, toward that which cannot be reduced to any determinate particular and yet which is the condition of the particular – the tendency that led Nietzsche to claim he is all the names in history – and it involves a tendency toward the particular, to differentiations that can be explicated *ad infinitum*. To affirm life as a problem, as a process of making sense, is thus to embrace a process that is neither universal nor particular, the universal and the particular being abstractions, but it is instead to affirm the provisional, problematic nature of the determinate ways in which things are done, the determinate ways in which things make sense.

To clarify by way of contrast, the rejection or negation of the problematic, or bad faith as I have defined it, is to be characterized precisely by the fact that it does not affirm the provisional, problematic nature of the determinate ways in which things are done but rather rejects any moves which may problematize, moves that may reveal the problems inseparable from the determinate ways in which things are done, determinate ways that are simply solutions to problems they have not exhausted. Bad faith, moreover, is not to be characterized by the way it makes sense of things, but rather by the involuntary, knee-jerk rejection of the encounters that do not make sense. One way to read Nietzsche’s work is as an ongoing effort to diagnose these points of resistance, to provoke the knee-jerk reactions which reveal one’s limitations, the solutions one takes to be solutions without a problem. When one reads through the chapter titles of *Ecce Homo*, for instance – with titles such as “Why I am so Wise,” “Why I am so Clever,” “Why I Write Such Good

Books," "Why I am Destiny,"<sup>12</sup> – one's knee-jerk reaction may well be negative, an involuntary rejection, or at least that is how many of my students react. To the extent that this occurs, then this involuntary rejection is to be interpreted, for Nietzsche, as being symptomatic of a set of values that take being humble and self-effacing, among other things, to be unproblematic and what makes sense of how one ought to live one's life. This set of values is precisely what Nietzsche identifies as slave morality and the automatic, involuntary aversion to Nietzsche's chapter titles thus expresses a reaction to values that cannot be affirmed by slave morality, and thus values that negatively determine the limits that establishes the very nature of what, from the perspective of slave morality, makes sense of how things ought to be.

Restating Nietzsche's diagnostic, critical efforts in terms of good faith and bad faith, as defined above, then good faith entails affirming the problematic nature of one's own determinate values, or the inseparability of the problematic from these values. When one encounters something that provokes an automatic rejection or negation, and we all do at some point or another, then a good faith response is to affirm the problematic nature of one's own values rather than take them to be unproblematic, or as solutions without a problem – that is, the bad faith response. To flesh out these points further, and to clarify with the help of concrete examples, let us turn to three examples to illustrate what we take to be involved in cases of *good* and *bad* faith. We will turn first to discuss conspiracy theories to exemplify *bad* narratives, and contrast them with what a good faith narrative would entail; secondly, we will turn to Jean-Paul Sartre's discussion of bad faith in order to return our discussion to the existential tradition; and finally we will examine the arguments in *The Rebel* where Camus calls upon what may be called a good faith rebellion to the shattering of the traditional political order that occurred in the wake of the French Revolution.

### **Conspiracy Theories**

On December 14, 2012, Adam Lanza took his mother's assault rifle from a storage chest, shot and killed his mother, and then drove to Sandy Hook Elementary School where he shot and killed twenty children, all between six and seven years of age, and six adult staff members of the school. He then shot and killed himself as police began to enter the school. Not long after this event, the "official" narrative account of what happened came to be challenged by some who offered an alternative account. Most prominent among those who challenged the official

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals; Ecce Homo* 222, 236, 259, 326.

narrative was Alex Jones, a radio host and prominent conspiracy theorist, who claimed the shooting was a “giant hoax,” a “completely fake” event that was staged in order to sway public opinion towards stricter gun control legislation. Jones has since recanted, in part no doubt due to defamation lawsuits that had been filed against him. Jones was not alone, however. James Fetzer, a former professor of philosophy of science at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, has promoted his own version of the Sandy Hook conspiracy theory, among other conspiracy theories – he cofounded Scholars for 9/11 Truth to further his 9/11 conspiracy theory, and he has also supported alternative theories of the Kennedy assassination and the Holocaust, among others. James Tracy, a former communications professor from Florida Atlantic University, has also claimed the Sandy Hook massacre was a “false flag” operation designed to sway public opinion. Tracy would later harass parents of the children who were killed, insisting they prove their child was dead. Tracy was successfully sued for harassment and fired from his tenured position at Florida Atlantic University.

The list of conspiracy theories could continue of course, for it is not a short list, but to focus on the Sandy Hook case for the time being, a point to be stressed is that the narratives conspiracy theorists put forward do attempt to make sense of a certain set of facts, or use some facts as key to their narrative. The supposed “smoking gun” in the Sandy Hook case, for instance, is a photograph of Barack Obama backstage at a Newtown vigil in honor of the victims with a young blond girl sitting on his lap. This girl, the conspiracy narrative goes, is six-year-old Emilie Parker, one of the “supposed” twenty children killed. This “fact,” among others, are then quilted together to construct an alternative narrative, and Fetzer put together several such accounts in his edited collection, *Nobody Died at Sandy Hook*, a book for which Fetzer and co-editor Mike Palacek recently lost a defamation case. In the case of the 9/11 attacks, the rapid pancake collapse of the towers is often pointed to as the “smoking gun” which proves that the attack was staged, for they could not have collapsed as quickly as that without key structural weakening having taken place in advance of the attack (such as cutting a number of the reinforced steel frames of the buildings). In both cases, however, these “facts” have been shown not to hold up to further scrutiny. The girl on Obama’s lap was the dead girl’s sister, and the collapse of the twin towers is consistent with physics because of the incredibly high temperatures of the fires caused by the jet fuel.

The conspiracy theorists, however, will not hang their hat on just a single “smoking gun” fact, but they will attempt to build a narrative that draws a number of facts together that make sense of the event, and they do so in a way that is at odds with the ‘official’ narrative. There are two issues here that are especially relevant to the distinction between good and bad faith that I am setting forth. First,

in addition to the conspiracy narrative account there is often a self-affirmation narrative that further justifies accepting the conspiracy theory. As Claude M. Steele's self-affirmation theory implies, what is crucial is that there be a narrative or "self-system, that essentially explains ourselves, and the world at large, to ourselves";<sup>13</sup> and essential to this explanation is that it should "maintain a phenomenal experience of the self – self-conceptions and images – as adaptively and morally adequate, i.e., as competent, good, coherent, unitary, stable, capable of free choice, capable of controlling important outcomes, and so on."<sup>14</sup> This self-system gets put to the test most notably "[a]fter experiencing a self-threat."<sup>15</sup> Sherman and Cohen found that in response to such threats people

may engage in any number of strategies to reaffirm self-integrity via social judgment. These strategies include comparing the self with a clearly inferior other [...], gossiping negatively about a third party [...], or harshly judging a political ingroup member who fails to demonstrate as much fervor as one personally does [...].<sup>16</sup>

Such strategies are deployed by conspiracy theorists, whose narrative account invites criticism and ridicule, to which they respond by citing the inferiority of the public at large, a public who naively accepts the 'official' narrative whereas they, in a proud moment of self-affirmation and defiance, claim that they have not been duped by the 'official' narrative and have the courage to speak the truth as they see it. A consequence of this strategy, and this is the second, key point, is that many conspiracy theorists remain unperturbed by facts or evidence which debunk their narrative, for they refuse to relent on the self-affirmation narrative that paints themselves as better than those who accept the 'official' narrative. The self-affirmative narrative is thus not a space of reasons, a space where formal and informal rules of inference lead to and justify one's conclusions.

It is at this point where we can begin to clarify the distinction between good and bad faith as we have been setting it forth. Although the conspiracy theorist may well act from a narrative of self-affirmation, their conspiracy narratives quickly encounter determinate facts and evidence that they must reject or exclude

<sup>13</sup> Claude M. Steele, "The Psychology of Self-affirmation: Sustaining the Integrity of the Self," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 21 (1988): 261-62.

<sup>14</sup> Steele 262.

<sup>15</sup> David K. Sherman and Geoffrey L. Cohen. "The Psychology of Self-Defense: Self-Affirmation Theory," *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 38 (2006): 203.

<sup>16</sup> Sherman and Cohen 203.

from their account. If it is indeed true that nobody died at Sandy Hook, then they must reject the reasons why there were so many funerals, so many grieving parents, plus many other facts the 'official' narrative does account for. The conspiracy narrative must thus limit itself to a small constellation of facts from which it spins its narrative and reject those facts which may contest or challenge their account. It is for this reason that a conspiracy theory, understood as we have sketched it here, is to be thought of as being an example of bad faith. This is because such narratives presuppose the truth of their account, a truth that is in essence presented as a solution without a problem. Their 'alternative' narrative is assumed to be the proper account, and one that rejects or excludes facts that may indeed problematize it. When the knee-jerk reaction to reject or deny kicks in, we see the tell-tale symptoms of bad faith, and yet it is disguised or hidden behind a veil of self-affirmation, but again a self-affirmation that rests on bad faith. Good faith, by contrast, embraces the problematic nature of one's narratives, or the inseparability of the problematic from the narratives that make sense of our life and world. As such, these narratives may well become undone or undermined by changing circumstances, facts, etc. – in short, by problematizations, but they may also come to draw in more facts, more relationships and details as part of the process of making sense. Both tendencies are affirmed when one embraces the problematic nature inseparable from our narratives, or when one is in good faith.

### **Sartre and Bad Faith**

To unpack this a bit more, let us now turn to Sartre's famous discussion of bad faith. The problem with which Sartre begins is explaining how one can lie to oneself. Unlike a normal lie, where the deceiver knows the truth they intend to withhold from the deceived, in bad faith, Sartre claims, "it is from myself that I am hiding the truth."<sup>17</sup> If we know the truth that we withhold from ourselves, then how can we be deceived regarding this truth? And if we are being deceived how can we simultaneously know the truth? After arguing that the psychoanalytic solution to this problem fails, Sartre turns to examples to diagnose what is going on in cases of bad faith. The most common strategy, Sartre claims, is to take advantage of the fact that the nature consciousness simultaneously "is to be what it is not and not to be what it is" (70). Namely, consciousness is nothing but that which consciousness is conscious of, and thus our conscious projects in the world

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956) 49. Subsequent references to this source are given as page numbers in brackets in the text.

simultaneously entail not being what one is conscious of *and* being a consciousness that that is not the object of consciousness. In the case of the woman who responds to the advances of her date – Sartre’s first example – she responds to the man who holds her hand, soon after remarking on how attractive she is, in what Sartre calls a prototypically bad faith move by divorcing “the body from the soul [...whereby] the hand rests inert between the warm hands of her companion – neither consenting nor resisting – a thing” (56). The woman is in bad faith, according to Sartre, or is lying to herself, for she is hiding from herself the true nature of consciousness, including her body as part of her conscious projects, by reducing it to the status of a thing, and yet she retains this truth by being conscious of this thing, her inert hand, neither consenting nor resisting.

The relationship between bad faith and our conscious projects in the world becomes even clearer with Sartre’s famous second example, the café waiter. With the actions of the waiter, his movements that are “a little too precise, a little too rapid,” and his “eyes [which] express an interest a little too solicitous for the order,” we have, for Sartre, a person whose “behavior seems to us a game [...]. He is playing at being a waiter in a café” (59). Sartre admits there are socially defined roles one is expected to follow if they are to attain and retain the approval of others. The “public demands,” for instance, “the dance of the grocer [...and thus] A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer [...].” (59). The same is true for the waiter, and if they fail to play the role as expected they will likely be at the receiving end of public disapproval, and bad tips! As a human being, however, or as a conscious being-for-itself, “the waiter in the café cannot be immediately a café waiter in the sense that this inkwell is an inkwell, or the glass is a glass” (59). If the waiter is in good faith, then they recognize that they are playing a socially prescribed role, and thus one can be a waiter, Sartre claims, “only in the neutralized mode, as the actor is Hamlet, by mechanically making the typical gestures of my state and by aiming at myself as an imaginary café waiter through those gestures taken as an ‘analogue’” (60). One is thus, for Sartre, to maintain a sense of the provisional, staged nature of one’s actions, of the fact that their actions do not follow from any permanent, essential nature. The waiter therefore takes on the gestures, the fast movements, the eyes and expressiveness of a waiter as a role, and performs it with the translucency of consciousness that one is playing at being a waiter. The waiter slips into bad faith, however, when they become either conscious of themselves as a waiter in the same sense that an inkwell is an inkwell – if one assumes, for instance, that they were destined to be a waiter, a philosopher, etc. – or if one is conscious of themselves as *not being* a waiter “in the sense,” as Sartre puts it, “in which this table is not an inkwell” (64). In both cases one is in bad faith, for rather than accepting the

consciousness that is always only involved in projects, and with the facticity of the things with which we are consciously engaged, what is done instead is one either reduces oneself and others to pure facticity, to being-in-itself, or to a pure transcendence where we are none of these things and we thus, to quote Sartre, “leave facticity to find ourselves suddenly beyond the present and the factual condition of man [...]” (56).

By extending and generalizing Sartre’s claim that the café waiter can only be a waiter by analogy, we could say that an essential part of living the lives we live is to embody the roles that are socially expected of us, or to acquire “a feel for the game” as Pierre Bourdieu puts it.<sup>18</sup> For Sartre, the mistake of bad faith consists of turning away from our lives as conscious beings, and hence our lives as engaged in a world of things, including the facticity of our own situation and the roles that are associated with this situation – the expectations of a father, mother, teacher, etc. Good faith for Sartre entails recognizing the freedom or transcendence of consciousness in relationship to these roles. This does not entail denying these roles – saying one is not a waiter, a father, etc., in the same sense that this table is not an inkwell – nor does it entail reducing oneself to being nothing but these roles – for in both cases we have bad faith. We are also not to fall into a cynical attitude towards the roles we play in life, for a cynical detachment from one’s projects simply undermines, for Sartre, the very fact that we are our projects. What we are to do, and this will be what Sartre will focus on in Part II of *Being and Nothingness*, is to live in the translucency of consciousness, or live the awareness that it is in our nature to be what we are not – that is, the projects and socially mandated roles that we are – and not be who we are – that is, the consciousness that is not our projects and roles.

## Camus and Rebellion

Taking our sense of bad faith as living life in accordance with solutions to which there is no problem, we find in Camus’s *The Rebel* a precise date for the advent of a particular form of bad faith – 1789. More precisely, Camus argues that “1789 is the starting-point of modern times,” for with the French Revolution, Camus adds, humanity “wished [...] to overthrow the principle of divine right and to introduce to the historical scene the forces of negation and rebellion [...]”<sup>19</sup> Prior to this time,

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990) 11.

<sup>19</sup> Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 2012) 112. Subsequent references to this source are given as page numbers in brackets in the text.

from the “Inca and the pariah,” to those who endorsed the principle of divine right monarchy, Camus believes that

the problem of revolt never arises, because for them it has been solved by tradition before they had time to raise it – the answer being that tradition is sacrosanct. If, in the sacrosanct world, the problem of revolt does not arise, it is because no real problems are to be found in it – all the answers having been given simultaneously (20).

If a sacrosanct tradition dictates how one’s life is to be lived, and endorses these prescriptions as answers without a problem, then it might appear that it is only with the modern period, on Camus’s reading, where one can live in bad faith, or rebel, which will be a version of good faith for Camus.

Camus’s historicization of bad faith may highlight a key difference between Camus and Sartre. Whereas Sartre indicates that bad faith simply comes as a possibility for conscious beings, for one who simultaneously is what it is not and not what it is, something that presumably has been the case as long as conscious human beings have existed, for Camus the possibility of living with consciousness of life as a problem, and thus a life where one can challenge and rebel against answers and solutions that are forced upon us as if they were incontestable solutions without a problem, is of fairly recent origin. But one should be wary of taking Camus’s historicizing move too seriously, or at least of assuming that it excludes other aspects of life where the consciousness of life as a problem, that is good faith, may well have been a key component of human experience well before 1789. There are a couple reasons for this caution. First, in the Introduction to *The Rebel* Camus states, in rather Sartrean terms, that “[m]an is the only creature who refuses to be what he is” (11), implying that our tendency to rebel against the various ways in which one finds oneself living is not simply a historically recent phenomenon. Camus implies this even more strongly, and again in Sartrean terms, when he claims that “[t]here is not one human being who, above a certain elementary level of consciousness, does not exhaust himself in trying to find formulae or attitudes which will give his existence the unity it lacks” (262). Camus’s point about exhausting oneself in an effort to find the unity our existence lacks recalls his arguments in the *Myth of Sisyphus*, where he claims, and again in general terms that imply a universal human condition rather than a historically specific one, that there is a fundamental disparity between the purposelessness we find in the world and our desire to find, in this world, a unity that gives life a meaning and purpose.

To reconcile Camus's claim regarding the 'universal' nature of human existence as one that involves seeking that which it is not – that is, a unity that gives life a meaning and purpose – with his claim that 1789 is the “starting-point of modern times,” we should note that for Camus what is unique to modern times is the “metaphysical revolt” (25). What emerges in the wake of the revolutions of the late eighteenth century, therefore, is “the metaphysical rebel,” or the person Camus sees as the one who “attacks a shattered world to make it whole” (23). We can thus distinguish between the existential rebel, the person who “refuses,” as Camus puts it, “to be what he is” – that is, a person whose life lacks unity and purpose – and “the metaphysical rebel,” who is more concerned with restoring unity to “a shattered world” than to one's own life. And what was shattered with modern times, according to Camus, is the “sacrosanct,” unproblematic nature of tradition, and most especially the manner in which this tradition helped to provide the unity and purpose human existence lacks.

With modern times, therefore, we could say, a new form of bad faith emerges. In addition to the Sartrean bad faith where one takes oneself to be what one is not – a being-in-itself – or in Camus's version when one takes one's life to have a unity and purpose it lacks, we have post-1789 version that one might call philosophical or metaphysical bad faith. Camus focuses his attention upon this for by replacing the divine right justification of political power a key consequence has been that “[i]f our age,” Camus claims, “admits, with equanimity, that murder has justifications, it is because of this indifference to life which is the mark of nihilism” (6). Having written *The Rebel* just a few years after the close of World War II, the risks that come with this nihilism were palpable.

As Camus understands nihilism, at least in the context of *The Rebel*, it is characterized by “the inability to believe [... and] its most serious symptom is not found in atheism, but in the inability to believe in what is, to see what is happening, and to live life as it is offered” (67). And since 1789 there have been two forms of metaphysical rebellion that have had significant political implications. In the first form the transcendence of God and divine right is replaced by the “transcendence of principles” as Camus puts it. The Jacobin Saint-Just emerges as a key figure here for Camus, and in particular Saint-Just's willingness “to go to his death for love of principle and despite all the realities of the situation [...]. His principles do not allow him to accept things as they are [...].” (129). Saint-Just thus goes to his death, defending the principles of the revolution, oblivious to what was happening on the ground, to the emerging factions and the great distance that separated his principles, principles that were taken as solutions without a problem, and the realities he encountered on a daily basis. In the second form of metaphysical rebellion we have Hegel, and especially Marx, who Camus

claims went further than the Jacobins who “destroyed the transcendence of a personal god” by initiating the “contemporary atheism [that destroys] the transcendence of principles as well” (198). Marx thus throws Hegel’s “transcendence of reason” into “the stream of history” (198). The problem with this move, according to Camus, is that one likewise does not see what is happening, or pay heed to life as it is offered, for this life as lived is simply caught up in historical processes over which one has no control.

It is at this point where good faith enters the scene for Camus. More precisely, Camus rejects the bad faith form of metaphysical rebellion, or nihilism, where one fails to see life as it is, including the problematic nature inseparable from life, and instead sees life as playing its predetermined role in accordance with unquestioned forces, whether these be the force of transcendent principle, or the force of history. In both cases life becomes what it is not, an object, a determinate thing subject to powers that refuse to see the problematic nature inseparable from life – that is, it is a bad faith attitude towards life. As Camus makes this point, he claims that “rebellion, in man,” or what we might call acting from good faith, is “the refusal to be treated as an object and to be reduced to simple historical terms [...]. But man, by rebelling, imposes in his turn a limit to history, and at this limit the promise of a value is born” (250). The form this rebellion takes for Camus is artistic creation, whereby “instead of killing and dying in order to produce the being that we are not,” the being that has the unity which gives life an unproblematic meaning, “we have to live and let live in order to create what we are” (252). This creation of what we are, moreover, is not to be done in accordance with predetermining rules, whether these be determined by transcendent principles or by historical process. For Camus one who accepts life as it is given, and its problematic nature, will be prepared to “renounce nihilism of formal principles and nihilism without principles” (251). As Camus states it, the contemporary rebel “cannot turn away from the world and from history without denying the very principle of his rebellion, nor can he choose eternal life without resigning himself, in one sense, to evil” (287). In other words, in being attentive to life as it is given, including the problems inseparable from life, one must be attuned to that which provokes our thought, our knee-jerk negative reactions, and develop a consciousness or taste for the problems that may allow us to challenge and rebel against things as they are. In doing this we cannot turn way from the world and from history, for it is precisely history and the world that give us that upon which we must exercise our taste for problems. Nor should this taste be done in the name of principles that transcend this life, eternal principles, for in doing so we may come to feel justified in murder as a result of an indifference to life, an indifference that results from valuing eternal principles that are taken to be

superior to whatever we might value or concern ourselves with in this mortal, fragile life.

In closing, let us return to where we began, to the classical republican critique of arbitrary power. As I pointed out, it may seem out of place to attempt to read the existential tradition, as well as Deleuze, as being aligned to the republican critique. On a closer reading, however, we have seen that for Nietzsche, Deleuze, and for Sartre and Camus as well, we can find a notion of bad faith, which entails living a life that rejects the problematic nature inseparable from life, where living is to be in accordance with a series of predetermining solutions without a problem. Moreover, such bad faith living is forced upon us, as we saw Deleuze argue with respect to being forced to express ourselves, and thus to live in good faith, on the account I am offering here, entails a life open to critique, including self-critique as well as institutional and political critique. For instance, when we encounter something that disrupts the ways in which we make sense of things, and if more importantly this encounter provokes a negative, knee-jerk rejection, then the critical, good faith task would be to consider whether that which is being rejected poses a problem to a solution that is taken to be a solution without a problem. The same is true with respect to the critique of institutions and the effort to realize, as Roberts argues was Marx's intention, the "freedom as non-domination [which] is the highest virtue of institutions."<sup>20</sup> What this entails is to press the justifications that underlie various institutional frameworks, to take the narratives that make sense of the practices and power distributions they entail and find those points of resistance, those elements that provoke a knee-jerk rejection, and use this to diagnose the points of transformation that current structures and practices seek to stave off. There thus appears to be sufficient reason to begin to rethink the relevance of existential thought, as well as the thought of Deleuze, to both Marxist and classical republican traditions. I hope to have shown how such a project may proceed.

<sup>20</sup> Roberts 231.