 Discussion of Second Lecture on Sartre

**1.**  **Can you give an example from your life or can you develop an imagined example in which one's voluntary deliberation over what to do is not really the key choice but that the result of one's voluntary deliberation is really determined by what one's fundamental choice of yourself is?  What is the fundamental choice of oneself in your example?  Show how it can it be changed but only with great difficulty.**

Sartre would agree with the determinist in one sense in that voluntary deliberation is often only a facade. When the individual is considering, deliberating, over choices to make, for example, as to escape or not, the primary choice is not in this voluntary deliberation but in what one's basic values are.

Sartre's existential psychoanalysis holds that a human being's thought and behavior are determined by one's original choice, which is similar to a Freudian determinism in that it is neither rational nor deliberate, and yet the person is free." (Greene, page 205) Sartre holds that each person makes in consciousness of self, others, and the world an attitude towards these factors of life that constitutes one's basic identity or valuation. The openness of consciousness to a world of experiences is for Sartre not a neutral awareness of these experienced realities, but rather a selective awareness, a valuational awareness of the experienced reality in that there is a tendency towards acting in some specified way towards the reality. Sartre is saying that each person makes a pre-reflective choice or valuation of self, others, and the world and that as a conscious act, this choice is necessarily a free act, and therefore able to be changed by the self. However, most people will not uproot their personalities and their worlds in order to change themselves. For example, the man who has been a defeatist all his life will probably not choose to escape from the prisoner of war camp, whereas the man who has chosen himself as a rebel will probably choose to escape.

Discussion of Third Lecture on Sartre

1. **Describe a personal experience of anguish or create an example of anguish similar to that described by William James and Sartre from the lecture or  reflect upon one or two of the three great negative experiences of melancholy, evil, and the sense of personal sin, as described in the last paragraph below:**

**Sartre comments on Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's views on anguish. Kierkegaard describes anguish as an apprehension of one's own freedom. Sartre says that this is correct. Anguish is a different experience from fear. Fear is fear of something in the world, like bombs. But anguish is the emotional apprehension of myself, what I fear I might do or not do. Sartre gives the example of an army recruit. "The recruit who reports for active duty at the beginning of the war can in some instances be afraid of death, but more often he is afraid of being afraid; that is, he is filled with anguish before himself." (*Being and Nothingness*, paperback, p. 35)**

**Heidegger describes anguish as the apprehension of nothingness. Whereas fear is fear of something definite in the world, anxiety or anguish is an all-embracing fear of nothing in the world and of everything, precisely because it is fear of one's own nothingness. As Sartre explains, anguish is consciousness of my future possibility, seeing it as dependent upon my own choice, not certain of my ability to realize that possibility. If nothing compels me to realize that possibility which I see, then nothing prevents me from failing to realize that possibility. Nothing in the world determines me either way; I become aware of myself as not a thing but as something unstable, unsure, something radically free, something afraid of its own freedom.**

**One key experience of myself as nothingness and freedom occurs in the existentialist apprehension that I myself choose my own values. Sartre writes, "Values in actuality are demands which lay claim to a foundation." (Ibid. p. 46) But if the foundation of values were found in facts, then what would be valuable would be determined by facts and my will would not be in control of its own values; my will would not be master of itself. But if my will is the source of values, then this foundation is a foundation that can be changed at any time and it is possible for me to have no values whatsoever. "It follows that my freedom is the unique foundation of value and that nothing, absolutely nothing justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values. As a being by whom values exist, I am unjustifiable. My freedom is anguished at being the foundation of values while itself without foundation."(Ibid.)**

**Also, I didn't put this in the lecture, but William James not only used profound belief in and free choice of the efficacy of his own freedom to overcome his dread and anguish; he also used choice of religious belief to overcome his dread and anguish.  This review about a new book on James is helpful:  
  
The book’s second chapter [from *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*by Charles Taylor] discusses two such phenomena. One is the plight of the twice-born or sick soul, which reaches a state of assurance that all will be well only after passing through “the three great negative experiences of melancholy, evil, and the sense of personal sin” (37). Taylor thinks that these three forms of spiritual anguish continue to haunt our world. Even if James’s readers, who are commonly educated nonbelievers, do not themselves feel a sense of personal sin, they will be aware of the rapid growth of evangelical Christianity, in which this sense is very acute, throughout the world, but particularly in Latin America and Africa. The horrors of the twentieth century have, of course, made evil an oppressive presence in the lives of reflective people. Indeed, as I see it, recent books such as Marilyn Adams’s *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* and Claudia Card’s *The Atrocity Paradigm* testify eloquently that even academic philosophers feel impelled to respond to evils that threaten to render the lives of both victims and perpetrators meaningless. And melancholy, which Taylor construes as a sense of the loss of significance, remains a source of agony in the modern context. On his view, its distinctive shape now is “not the sense of rejection and exile from an unchallengeable cosmos of significance, but rather the intimation of what may be a definitive emptiness, the final dawning of the end of the last illusion of significance” (39-40). James thinks that the experience of the twice-born soul is deeper and more truly religious than the healthy-minded optimism of the once-born, and on this point Taylor is prepared to credit him with extraordinary insight into the spiritual hungers of modern culture.**