

Existentialism & Authenticity

Sisyphus55

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Sisyphus: Hey, guys. Welcome to the Sisyphus 55 podcast. Today we're joined by Olivia Sun, Ali Sun via. I'm sure you know of her channel if you want to introduce yourself a little bit for people. That don't know.

Olivia: Yeah. So my name's Olivia. OliSUNvia is my channel. Like he said, I do philosophy video essays. I was on this podcast once last year before and so I'm back again because this office wants views and I never know what to say after that when people ask.

Sisyphus: I mean, what's? Your because you're you're not just doing YouTube, you also you're in a university also.

Olivia: Oh, OK. Right. Yeah. OK. Outside of YouTube, I'm in my last year of my undergrad studies. I'm a philosophy specialist. I'm trying to get into the Masters program as well as law school this year. So fingers crossed that that works. Out, yeah.

Sisyphus: Cool. And I guess on that note, what I wanted to talk about today was I guess broadly how you got into philosophy, but specifically kind of existentialism and that route, because both of us have made videos on existentialism, and I guess I'm kind of curious. Did you have some sort of existential crisis or some sort of? Personal kind of kind of questioning values and meaning and stuff that, because a lot of people, I mean, I went through that. Like in high school and early 20s so.

Olivia: Mm-hmm. Well, I'd love to hear your story after I tell mine.

Sisyphus: OK.

Olivia: But it's pretty funny because I don't know why I was this, but when I was 6 years old, I already would constantly have nightmares about the world ending. Like you can ask my mom. I would constantly have to ask her to sleep with me because. I just wake up crying No, the world's gonna end and. I'm also gonna die.

Sisyphus: Like what? What ways were you imagining the world? Was gonna end like.

Olivia: I I don't know if I can't really recall cause I was six years old, but my 6 year old imagination was definitely thinking. Like massive natural disasters or somehow the the world is shattering. She actually bought me a book when I was 8 years old called how to Stop worrying. It was it was in a self help book for adults. But she got it for me, yeah. So I think I've always had some sort of dread about existence and death, even from when I was little. Definitely preteen and teen years came up because. I think a lot of people in their teen years start to feel really insecure and question where their worth or value comes from, and I find often that leads to people being ohh, so what's the point of me living or what if I just died? What's the purpose of any of this? So yeah, I think taking. All of that really seriously in my teen years. Got me really interested in existentialism when I discovered it.

Sisyphus: OK, that's interesting. So so it was mostly kind of a anxiety based kind of, yeah, catastrophizing kind of I guess dealing with uncertainty.

Olivia: Yeah, that's a big part of it. And also just I was, I was insecure as a kid. I mean, I talked a little bit about it in my video on the desire to be sad, but I really just had a low sense of self worth and I think that leads people to question, you know, the purpose of their existence.

Sisyphus: Oh, that's interesting. Yeah, because I've always wondered, kind of about the link between self esteem and interest in existentialism because you're in some way you're trying to gain control over the, the the fear of uncertainty by really looking at other people who have thought about this in the past. But it's. Also, kind of wallowing in it or you're kind of further going into it because it's not a lot of people have a lot of solutions for. It it's more. Like, you know, Kierkegaard, there's the leap of faith is one. And like I guess we can get into it later. But yeah, starch or where you create your own meaning commit where you kind of rebel against the meaninglessness of it.

Olivia: Right.

Sisyphus: All of those seem a lot to deal with, especially if you're also. Yeah, just having kind of basic self esteem issues. Yeah, OK, that's interesting. Do do you remember which thinkers you kind of gravitated towards specifically?

Olivia: I mean, I think I really, really liked search when I first learned about him, and then someone beauvoir you know, after, because I think I feel people always. Find out about each. Those two, together,

of course, Kamau, because who doesn't read the mythicist of this when they first get into Policy and existentialism in particular. I think just Sartre's idea about everyone having this, fundamentally free core and being able to actually do anything you want, that was really appealing to me at a time where I felt I didn't have control over my life. And I kind of maybe felt there was either this path I could take in life or this path and it was freeing to hear someone say oh, no way. Like, you could really go beyond that.

Sisyphus: Yeah. Do you think it's kind of that emphasis on authenticity that a lot of the existentialists share at the end of the day, is they're very it's a consistent theme of they feel a lot of people are really, lying to themselves about things or they're being coerced socially to do things that that isn't their true. Essence. Kind of.

Olivia: Yeah. So I wouldn't say they would talk about essence because they have that whole existence precedes essence slogan. But I do think if you think about the historical context about which existentialism emerged from, I feel there was a lot of questioning authority at that time. Of the rise of more secular communities, so stopping obeying a divine authority, and then also World War One and World War 2. Where people saw maybe the problems of having one absolute leader. And so I think existentialism. Yeah, definitely has sort of you disobey. Authority because just following norms or one person might lead you to an inauthentic self.

Sisyphus: Umm how and how? Would you kind of characterize authenticity?

Olivia: That's really hard. I've thought about it for a long time because. There's In the to talk about there being an authentic self almost seems you have to presume that there is a self that exists before you work on it, and I don't really know how true that is, especially because a lot of peoples conception of what their self is might come from socialization or norms that might actually be harmful or untrue. UM. But I mean, if you think about Sartre or some other existentialist thinkers, they have the ideas about inauthentic life being one and where you really you really cultivate that radical freedom. And you try to act with your freedom and recognize that you are free at all times. And that you don't define yourself by a set category. So you don't say. Oh, I am a lawyer, or oh, I am a I am an Olympic swimmer and I am always going to be a swimmer. And then if you I don't know, get into an accident and then you aren't able to use your legs anymore. You should be able to refocus your life and say no being somewhere didn't define me. I can do something else. Outside of that. So I think maybe the dynamic, the ability to change might be.

Sisyphus: Is is authenticity.

Olivia: Yeah. At least to some of. These thinkers, but personally for my own belief, I'm not quite sure I have a. Good grasp of it. I don't know. Do you have an idea of it?

Sisyphus: I mean, actually I think I didn't think about it before, but the idea of change or adapting is kind of a good, I think that's a good threat in existentialism is because it's. I feel the existential school is one of the most courageous regarding they're able to be ohh there actually is no meaning or there is no kind of larger systems we should look at and people should be people should really follow what they want to do, which could be potentially scary. It's how do you actually justify? You mean anything if there's no right, meaning in the universe? UM and all of society's values are not really useful or not really legitimate. But then it's They take on the task of how do you then justify action or existence? And I think regarding change it's almost that. It's that idea of Hope also it's with Star Trek. It's ambivalent. It's authenticity or some sort of human flourishing or self actualization through. Being yourself or creating your own meaning and then with Camus. And then that's a form of change in a way. And with Camus, it's this weird, rebellion. Like it's this kind of staunch position against the meaningless of things by in a paradoxical way, embracing it. And then what I really and it's not. Like he's not referenced that often, but Gabriel Marcel, who's a Christian existentialist, he kind. It's similar to kamoo. He has this idea of strange hope. Where you you There's something inherent about human beings where they hope for things regardless of what that object of desire or hope is, we will just continually for the most part, try to justify our own existence. And he almost fully leans into that. And he says that's. Kind of where In a roundabout way, but that's where, God is. Or that's where that is the essence of existence. Is this

weird, or just that the the human spirit to just continually try to justify being and. To do so does involve this process of becoming or some sort of change or something that. I don't know if that really makes sense, but it's kind of kind of, yeah, I guess the sort of focusing on the process rather than some sort of destination or salvation or something that seems to be something to do with authenticity. But that's way too vague. And that seems something that's Like each person would have to find for themselves, because existentialists don't tend to make steaks or claims about what that would look necessarily.

Olivia: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don't remember who said this anymore, but. Just about the act, the activity of becoming rather than just being in a stable sense, I think there's a lot of focus just on telling yourself OK, I am constantly in a state of becoming rather than just to be. And I think that that was. A helpful mantra, at least for me. UM, when I was trying to get out of feeling stuck in one one place, yeah.

Sisyphus: Yeah, I I mean also I think looking at searches, idea of bad faith might be useful in defining what authenticity is if you want to maybe introduce. What that is?

Olivia: And just just generally, it's kind of similar to what we were talking about, living inauthentic existence. But starch has this idea about either acting in good faith or bad faith. And so to act in bad faith would be the example I said before. Just saying, oh, I am just. A swimmer and that is all I am. That's what defines me to act in bad faith is to think that you are a static being that can be defined by some sort of essence and to reject the idea that you. Have the ability, the freedom to change that. And so I guess on the flip side, to act in good faith would be to recognize that freedom, to use it. Yeah, I don't know if you have anything else. You want to add on that.

Sisyphus: No, I think that's a good. I mean, yeah, he talks about it a lot and It's uh, existentialism as humanism, I think, is the main essay. And I guess going off of what you said, it's an it's an emphasis on kind of. Not necessarily that idea of you can be whatever you want, but more so you don't really know what you're capable of, so don't completely limit yourself to just one specific thing or one specific definition. It reminds me also of in Daoism, the idea of genuine pretending where you. Like attached to certain roles in a very kind of serious formal way but with the full acknowledgement internally that this role is completely it's it doesn't actually mean anything at the end of the day. So so it's kind of really emphasizing the the importance of play. So I don't know. I don't know how much. That relates specifically to bad faith, but I always find that as a. Constructive addition to it because it's kind of it's showing it's so useful to not just be completely nihilistic and don't adapt any roles but but if you're going to adapt these roles fully give it you're 100% but also it it doesn't define who you are at the end of the day 'cause I think people could end up being they get too attached to specific roles or specific identities. And yeah. And I think as you kind of mentioned at the start, the idea of a very rigid essential identity. You know, a lot of people aren't comfortable with with that, at least intellectually, even though that's kind of how we operate.

Olivia: Day-to-day? Yeah. I mean, I've been taking a course on Michelle Foucault and been going a lot into his work, and it's been really interesting. I'm finding, a lot of connections right now with stuff that I've read from him, for example. You brought up the idea of how you just the idea of play without any end necessarily, that you're trying to reach. And I think that's interesting to ask in terms of why. Why are we so obsessed with finding a purpose an end goal for everything? Not just general existence but everything Foucault talks about how it seems the way a lot of our institutions or our spaces, or are structured, is that they're supposed to be some sort of telos that we're supposed to be reaching. And he's kind of why don't we ever give ourselves time to just do things? Without some sort of goal do we ever allow ourselves to do like? I don't know improv dance or not improv dance. That's just an example of it. I don't know if he was into dancing.

Sisyphus: Did you close it? Right, right. I know, I know he would. He would. Party, I think.

Olivia: That was one, right? Yeah. Or taking, I don't know, psychedelics, doing things where you don't really know how it will change you. And I think a lot of people, I understandably are scared of doing things where they don't really know how it's going to turn out, but. I do think that there is value

from doing things without a set Tilos and then maybe it would be helpful to try to view life in a way where you're not chasing for some intended purpose, but rather creating it day by day as you go on.

Sisyphus: Yeah, I think that's something that I that was shared between, Camus, Nietzsche, and Marcel was they were all very against that kind of commonly held religious belief that There's going to be all of this life is basically to lead to the afterlife or lead to some sort of utopia or salvation and niche was very much no Earth is both heaven and hell it. It is as much as you you want to make of it. Basically we have no guarantee about anything beyond that. And it is. It is kind of going back to the discussion of hope of justice Hope in terms of thinking there is some telos or outcome that you're striving for. You know it it's there's no guarantee and it can actually take you away from the present moments and from things that really matter. I really this concept. Been reading this book cruel optimism by Lauren Bartlett, I think. From 2011 and. She's kind of applying this affect theory regarding more political social issues, and she's talking about cruel optimism, which is those objects of desire that we pursue. Thinking that they're going to lead some to some sort of happiness or self actualization fulfillment, but they're also those very things that that actually hinder or flourishing. So you can apply it to basically I don't know, most things I feel I just in in my head it comes up a lot in discussion. It's just people not realizing you know they get what they wish for and then.

Olivia: Right.

Sisyphus: They're unhappy in some way, or they're in an. Even worse, position and. It's not really to say that you should be fully hedonistic, because I also think that that in itself is your kind of pursuing an object of desire. That's going to just, you know, it's it's not very sustainable too. But it's you. You should just get kind of really pay attention to those things that are autotelic or they give you a sense of flow where it. The engagement and experience of them already leads to some fulfillment, and it justifies the act in some way, improv dance, maybe. Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Olivia: Right. Yeah, that which Funko obviously participated in. I mean, again, as you were talking, I was thinking of something else that was brought up about how some. Times. You know, when people try to find meaning in their life, as you said, they can harp on to maybe some categories or skills or activities, whatever it is that actually hinder their and they're flourishing. And I heard about these two different theories as to why sometimes that happens. I don't know if you have maybe an opinion. After you hear them, on which one you think is more plausible, but one of them comes from some feminist literature where it's ohh, why do, because of feminine socialization, a lot of women think that there are certain feminine activities that will give their life some sort of purpose or meaning. But even if women recognize that they're harmful, why do we still feel attached to it? For there's the example of being really good at makeup. And it's you, we know that makeup is created by a lot of patriarchal institutions that want us to feel insecure, want us to spend our money so that, you know, we we can't walk outside ever feeling comfortable just being ourselves. But a lot of women also still find pride and can identify, define themselves as being someone who is really good at makeup and maybe is even a. Makeup guru. And part of it is because things this you put in a lot of effort to acquire this skill, and so it becomes this skill that you're really proud of and that you worked hard. Fun. And we're told that if you work hard on something, then that surely must mean it is purposeful in some way. And so it's really hard to let go of it. So I thought.

Sisyphus: Like kind of sunk cost fallacy is.

Olivia: I don't know if I would say it's just sunk sunk cost, I mean. I can definitely see. Like, that's part of it for sure. But I think also it's just there's something more about I feel for some cost fallacy sometimes it's you actually don't even what you're doing, but you still do it because you spent effort, whereas for this it's it's a skill that you feel proud of and you feel it does make you, I don't know better or more skilled in some way.

Sisyphus: OK, I see.

Olivia: More admirable, but. It's actually harmful in other ways. There was another theory about it from Judith Butler, who says that, well, we need to why do we say, define ourselves in categories oh, I'm a I'm a finance bro and my purpose is to calculate stocks or I'm a gym bro. My purpose gets super

jackd and it's because these categories or these norms are recognizable. By other people in society and what we really want is other people to recognize our existence. And so, for example, if I tell you, oh, I have 80 HD, then you know how to treat it. You know, the accommodations you should apply to me, et cetera. But if I come to you being I have this weird disease that no one knows what to call it and no one really knows what it is. Then no one knows how to act towards you. No one knows what to say to you and you kind of have to suffer alone. And so, yeah, I think I also think that that is one reason why perhaps I've. Over the years gone a little bit less fond of existentialism, just because I think it doesn't do a good enough job of recognizing how systems and societal structures work to. Like work to make us feel we need to find some sort of meaning and how we go about finding meaning. Yeah. Anyways, I talked for a long. Time all of you say something.

Sisyphus: No, no, that's that's really interesting. Well, I do think I mean, Judith Butler's interesting to bring up because they they've been considered gender abolitionist, for example. But but they also recognize going back to the makeup example that there was a quote. That they had the. Was kind of saying I'm not gender abolitionist. Like, there's a kind of variety in how much people experience how close gender identity is to their sense of identity, regardless of whether it's socially conditioned or biological or, you know, whatever. And that's fine, because there's a lot of seemingly harm harmless practices. Some Somebody wearing makeup for the most part, isn't even if the origins might be sexist, it it usually isn't going to lead to it's not the same thing as the, you know wage gap or you know, you could probably make arguments where there's some associations. But if a girl feels fine with wearing makeup, and that's You know it's, it's overall it's not, it's if it's leading to more Happiness, then, unhappiness. Then you know, I can see that argument. And I think in when Judith Butler was making that argument. Kind of an interesting point almost with regards to bad faith, it's what are the requirements for something to be bad faith? Like if you could, if you could tie it to to the fact that it's socially conditioned, is that enough to refute it as an as an aspect of identity that's inauthentic? Because I also don't think just being oh, things. That are natural. Is really a a good argument, and maybe it is the the argument is. To what extent is this helping somebody flourish? Which is such a subjective I feel that's just the subjective experience of the individual. And then I almost think now I'm really rambling. But I think that it kind of goes back to arguments forward against choice feminism, where it's if if a woman is like for example, yeah, if a woman feels Regardless of criticisms about patriarchal norms, if they feel they're comfortable in a traditional role and then they they're arguing that this is helping me flourish. Like, is that bad faith or is that authentic living?

Olivia: Yeah, I mean, Simone de Beauvoir definitely had strong opinions about that specifically I know she thought that even if even if you felt more comfortable in a traditional household, I am the housewife situation, she'd say that's not actually what you would really want. And she she talks. She gives a pretty interesting analysis about how being freed from a a woman's biological state leads to women having the ability to be more free. But yeah, if I was thinking personally, though, I'd say that. I definitely think that when it comes to women who sometimes, maybe they make choices that you could say are in line with patriarchy. UMI do think I would try to give women the benefit of the doubt first that they have done a lot of complex moral reasoning on their own part and they realize that perhaps no matter what they do, it's kind of going to lead to moral failure. And so this is just the choice they've gone with and I think I think In a in a world where a lot of people are just bound in this way, where there's really it's a lose lose situation, it's hard to talk about something being a purely good faith decision or a purely bad faith decision to me. I don't know if there's something in search or other thinkers work that explores this degree of good and bad faith, but yeah.

Sisyphus: Yeah. No, I I don't know it. It's also a similar argument that I I see come up with black conservatives, for example, where I think people on the left, they will say oh you're just being misinformed or used or something that. And there is a. It's. Yeah, it it definitely isn't a rigid binary. It's and you do have to kind of respect the autonomy and agency of people at the end of the day, and you have to kind of give them the benefit of the doubt, at least in my opinion. But yeah, I guess there

are probably sometimes egregious examples where people might be they might have just been misled or there might be other. UM.

Olivia: Yeah. Is Candace Owens acting good or bad?

Sisyphus: Faith. That's a. Relief. Yeah, that's. A great debate topic. Yeah, she seems she's very, very good baby for. So for sure. Yeah.

Olivia: Yeah, yeah, totally.

Sisyphus: Oh, that's interesting. I guess kind of going because never talking about social values you are also interested in. I mean, you're you're going to go to law school. Did existentialism have some sort of? Impact with regards to you choosing to study law.

Olivia: UM, I'm going to be totally honest. I don't think so, at least in terms of the my academic interest and existentialism compared to my academic interest in law. And those two paths. But if I was thinking maybe if I thought about it in a personal choice did me. Getting into existentialism affect what I want to do in the future, then yeah, maybe. Sure, Once I kind of figured out that I am free to do things in my life and I can create meaning. And then I think after that because another limit I think of existentialism, at least the traditional. Versions or the ones from the main the most famous thinkers, is that it's very individual it it kind of conceptualizes the self as this isolated thing that just has this free will to choose whatever it wants at any moment. Mm-hmm. But recently I've been very interested in questions about why we prioritized The moment of choice in ethics why do we think someone is good or bad based on their freedom to do freedom to choose something in a scenario like? Are you like? Why not think about all of the factors that led them to be the person they are? Because I think real moral decision making in the real world, you're not acting from a blank slate, right? You're thinking you're kind of acting on intuition or what's the word? Intuition or instinct based on past experiences, and how you've been raised and things that, and so. All of that. Is to say that. I guess by taking a more zoomed out picture about society in general, I think I've started to think about the self and purpose of existence outside of. Just in my myself as an individual and more so oh, my existence will have purpose if I am benefiting. Others, if my existence in relation to other people is meaningful and yeah, that that inspires me to go into law because I know a lot of people, and rightfully so, think that law is very corrupt and. Doesn't actually do a lot of good, or is not the most practical means to do good, but I perhaps I am too idealistic, but and I think that or I hope that through law I can somehow affect other lives in a good way. And I think that conceiving of this self. And thinking about purpose outside of your isolated self is actually a pretty good way to combat fear about death, because then when you think about, at least for me now, when I think about myself going bye bye one day, unaliving myself.

Sisyphus: Yeah, well hopefully not unaliving... that's...

Olivia: Yeah, just becoming unalive... It doesn't feel it doesn't feel the worst thing in the world anymore, because what's important and what's meaningful is not just me as a one being.

Sisyphus: So you you've come to terms with your mortality is what you're announcing?

Olivia: Yes, everyone, I am OK with dying right now. I've I mean, I definitely think I've improved from my six year old self who was mommy I'm going to die soon?

Sisyphus: That's good.

Olivia: Who was Yeah, I think I'm pretty. Good with dealing with death right now, but. Who knows that that probably. Will be will change 10 years from now when I'm sitting in my law office God, I'm doing nothing but yeah.

Sisyphus: That's. Yeah. No, that's that's fair. I get, yeah. Going back, I guess just with the law school because I was, I was, I had a bit. It gave me a bit of. An existential crisis. And I wanted to. Go into law school and then I. I was in a psychology class and then they they it was basically looking back on it. It was almost psychology propaganda because it was they did a study with law students. Yeah. And they found that the ones. So there's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. So this kind of goes back to kind of. Trying to quantify that idea of authenticity, so intrinsic motivations are very they respect autonomy, agency, people feel what they're doing is what they want to do at the end of the day and it gives them joy. It gives them meaning in their lives. They feel they're doing something. Extrinsic

is usually validation from, external sources and stuff that. Like what are their parents expectations? What are their, you know, partners expectations and so they could people entering into law school, they would measure the extent to which they were extrinsic intrinsic in terms. Of this specific goal. And the ones I mean, there was obviously there was a lot of usually people going interested in corporate law and stuff that were extrinsic and intrinsic was more human rights based law. But they found a really kind of I feel disturbing trend because myself and other friends that I had, they were kind of idealistic. And they're oh, well, we're not going to be those lawyers. But the problem is. Is there was this bad feedback loop where the most idealistic lawyers because because intrinsic motivation is so much more helpful than extrinsic because it's coming from inside so so. They became the most driven and they were the most successful students and then they would enter into law schools and the professors would notice that they're getting really good grades. They're self driven, self motivated and they would start talking to them and then they would get them into internship positions and stuff that. And they would quickly rise the hierarchy of law. To the corporate jobs and what you would see throughout is that there would be a value shift where they would start kind of not all of them but but in general there was a trend of external extrinsic rewards and that I mean that just scared me and then I I was because I was yeah maybe I'm not good enough of a person. To deal with that and I and I think it also speaks to maybe what you were talking about that existentialism doesn't quite. Talk about the the social or institutional specifics that can kind of make people change in terms of, authenticity. Yeah, because I think this is a case of where it's larger than the individual, the individuals actually fully the ones that are fully living their existential selves, authentically, are being rewarded to further and further. Portray themselves right? Almost unknowingly and I I I just thought back to that I was that's kind of disturbing kind of interesting. Yeah, I don't. I don't know what you if you. Have any thoughts on that then?

Olivia: Yeah. I mean, I heard from someone else that a lot of people who go into Ivy League schools for law school, even if they want to do something I don't know, human rights, poverty, law, whatever it is, because the tuition is so ***** expensive. They have no choice but to go into corporate. But after they graduate and it just it just kind of sucks that even people who are trying to. Like you know, do good and direct their freedom, their essential freedom and that manner are being barred from doing so and I think. You know, there are some thinkers who will say who have an extremely radical view of freedom and say, I mean, I guess we would think of them as conservatives now and just say we'll pull yourself up by your bootstraps, right? You know, but I I don't think you can really fault people for.

Sisyphus: Right. Right, radical.

Olivia: Falling into these inauthentic selves of. Because what other choice did they have? And I think that's why it's really important to practice non ideal theories about morality and ethics and realize that sometimes we have to make decisions where there are non ideal circumstances. And how do we navigate that?

Sisyphus: Yeah, it's making me think of the fact that a lot of especially self improvement productivity, I mean. To evoke his name, in every podcast. But Jordan Peterson's kind of use of existentials. Yeah, it is kind of that it it very much kind of disregards the the institutional and social issues that people might face in terms of trying to live their authentic lives and in a way, he's offering a message that's very yeah. Be authentic. Be yourself. Which is very nice. Like clean your room. But it's you're putting so much of the burden on the individual. And it's I don't know maybe their room isn't clean because of. Because of their own issues, maybe they're it's unclean because they have to work two or three jobs to pay off their student debt. And maybe the issue is actually there's, you know, they, they literally just don't have time. And they're their personal hygiene and stuff is slipping away, whether they clean their room or not. It's they have you know. They can sleep for four hours and they're you know, it's it's, it's a mess. And maybe maybe it is actually more of a social or institutional solution where they they need to talk with other workers in their organization or something. Just as an example. But like it's not always just the burden of the individual to make this heroic, defiant. Atomized, push to be themselves. And yeah, be the best person that they can be. There's institutional barriers that probably involve some sort of a. Collective action or something?

Olivia: And I think especially the problem with pushing this kind of atomized idea of existentialism and freedom and whatnot is that it leads to this hierarchy in people's minds about who's valuable and who's not, right. Because some people are just going to have an easier time exercising. With their freedom to do what these self-help gurus tell them to do. Because they have. Like the resources or the upbringing to do that versus some people might have a harder time doing that and also just the factor of luck. Sometimes people are going to get more lucky than others as well in reaching their self-help guru, self-help guru goals. But then if you think that all there is. To being someone that has meaning in our society is to exercise your freedom in the right way. Then when you look at other people who aren't doing it the right way, as some people say, you end up thinking in this hierarchy oh, these people are high value men and these.

Sisyphus: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was with you.

Olivia: People are. See for a low value.

Sisyphus: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And it's kind of quantifying it. And then also it's kind of ironically creating kind of a very inauthentic kind of system because because the advice then becomes very kind of generic and you just have. A bunch of, you know, especially in a kind of men's spaces, just men dressing the same, talking the same, having the exact same views. Like you can end up with this weird. And I feel it's very common since the pandemic is this like almost cult groups where their main ethos is specifically hyper-individualism. And it's but. But they're all doing the same thing. But it's they just see any sort of And any sort of idea of organizing or any sort of criticism against their beliefs as against their own individual liberties. And then that is that just kind of instills their identity even more and they react to basically anything that is against them just just instinctively you do I do see that with the the I guess, the manosphere. And stuff that. Like uh. Just extremely reactionary and I and it's, you know, maybe it started out as being kind of an appeal to authenticity and non-conformity, which I think is healthy, but then it almost kind of becomes conformist and inauthentic.

Olivia: Yeah. I mean, they're not even doing existentialism. Correct. Right. If they're hey, here's this category. You can reach and define yourself by it's not even. It's not even existentialism to that point. But yeah.

Sisyphus: Yeah, we're giving them a lot of. Giving them a lot more. Credit than yeah. Yeah, I guess, yeah. To go back to to law school. I'm. I'm kind of curious. What's like? I was going to just ask you what's? Your what's your? Morality. It's I'm gonna. I'm gonna try to reframe.

Olivia: Erm... 72%.

Sisyphus: Yeah. How moral are you I guess. How is it kind of learning about law and legal institutions and the idea of justice? Well, I guess you would still be retaining some level of skepticism or cynicism regarding the idea of absolute values or pure morality or something that.

Olivia: Right. I mean, I think in terms of law, that's why I see. That's why I wanted to do a masters and then also do law. I want both the theory and. The practical aspects. Because again, I mentioned earlier, we live in a non-ideal world. We can't act as if there are ideal situations, but eventually at some point. I think there's an important question, especially within academic spheres, which. Like I don't know how it is in psychology, but in philosophy it's oh, constant arguing and arguing, you could, you could. Yeah. Like academia in general. You could just never stop arguing. And it's when do you choose to just.

Sisyphus: And I think that's just accurate program, yeah.

Olivia: Like land on a theory or a rule or some sort of policy and justice. Go with it because at some point you're going to have to put things into practice. And I think that's a really difficult question because you could keep criticizing if you wanted to, right. And so I think for law, it's kind of. I'm trying to focus on just listening to people, and I mean in my in my latest video I kind of talk about the difference between viewing morality via a system of general principles versus being more context-sensitive, treating every case as a particular situation and I think. In law, I would love to try to move to that, listening to people who come to me. Really listening to what their particular circumstance is and honestly, the legal system has a lot of really ***** components. Like there's a lot of things wrong

with it, and I recognize that it's too big of a goal for me as one person to change it all. But if I could. I don't know. Like change some sort of procedures within it. That would be really helpful. That would be really great and helpful to other people. We'll see how. Successful I am at. That in 20 years, but yeah.

Sisyphus: 20 Well, yeah, I'll I'll put a reminder.

Olivia: Yeah. So yeah, it's not I'm not trying to say the absolute values in the law are the best ways to apply to ethical situations at all. Yeah.

Sisyphus: But you you would still maintain that there there should be some. Yeah actually to. To to back up a little bit because I'm kind of curious because I have. I have another friend. In the law. School and I've kind of asked him about this. Like, what do you think of free will? Because I feel that's something that does come up, regarding the justices system, making decisions in terms of, looking at somebody's background, looking at the situation, what happens the extent to which they're truly responsible for the action. Yeah, I'm kind of curious. Like what? What do you think of free will? Because that's another thing with existentialism, where it would just immediately kind of negate a lot of their arguments as if if we aren't free at all this is all just completely predetermined and fatalistic.

Olivia: Well, at one point, maybe a few months ago, I would have said I would have, I would have said, yeah, I think people still do have free will. Again, I I really liked existentialism. And I think regardless of whether we really, really do have free will. That's helpful. Practically useful at the end of the day, to think we do have it. Again, I mentioned earlier, being more aware of how particular situations can shape people and how moral decision making isn't really just a blank free will choosing from a state of complete freedom. It's more so Acting on intuition based on everything that's happened before, I don't really know anymore. Like I don't really know how culpable. I think what would help is. Trying to get rid of the binary, at least in law, of seeing someone as either guilty or innocent. I think that's really not helpful because. A lot of the time, then it leads to this adversarial, adversarial relationship where you are trying to, punish someone or let them go free. And I think that it's important instead to recognize that you can definitely hold people accountable. And you can absolutely be angry and upset by what they've done, but you can also simultaneously have some sort of empathy for them, just as another human who's gone through stuff and who has reasons for what they did. I don't think it's helpful or true. To hold these things in, opposition.

Sisyphus: Do you think it would be more useful instead of a guilty not guilty as is high risk, low risk individuals where it's so it's framed less of in terms of Moral weight in what they did, and it's more in terms of how could they potentially affect the rest of society with the background and stuff that. And I mean, that argument could go into kind of talking minority report where it's now you're just predicting people that are high risk but more so people that have committed crimes and then investigating why that happened. And then kind of determining kind of OK, is this high risk or low risk? I don't know if that already exists maybe? In law, or if that's a.

Olivia: I mean, there are definitely. I guess there are degrees of sentences which kind of accounts for if you are, if you committed 7 murders and you're a psychopath maybe. You have a life sentence, you.

Sisyphus: Maybe higher risk than yeah.

Olivia: Know. So I feel the sentence maybe speaks for how how risk, how high risk or low risk. Like judge or jury thinks someone is, but in terms of the actual sentencing, I don't know. I'm. I feel my gut reaction to that was a little wary. I'm just, I mean, you said, the thing about minority report and also just. I'm worried that by labeling people as high risk or low risk, it still doesn't address why people get into these situations or how we come up with our understandings of what is risky or not risky. I think a lot of people. Or taught to. Think that others pose some sort of danger, especially if they fit into certain stereotypes of criminality. And yeah, I just, I don't know.

Sisyphus: Yeah. Yeah, maybe. I mean, I'm trying to think if there would be a better way of phrasing that or a better, better terminology. I'm just cause my my therapist brought up this talking about relationships and stuff that where it was I can usually extend a lot of understanding to somebody, and then she kind of brought up well, yeah, there's there's it's almost the same thing as in a court where there's first degree and second degree where somebody does something deliberate, intentional,

right. Like in the same thing, in in court cases. If somebody has some sort of antisocial personality disorder. Like they're going to do this 100% of the time, they're just, you know, but those that's a very small amount of the population. Most damage is usually caused by second degree things where it's not specifically malintent, but it's more kind of recklessness or just not really well thought out or somebody was angry or just something that. Like, both in terms of relationships. And criminal things, and sometimes at the same time. Yeah. But I think it's really.

Olivia: Bad charging your.

Sisyphus: Yeah, but I was oh, that's kind of useful, at least for me in terms of I was OK. Well, I could just look at it as just this person didn't mean what they did, but it's more just I need to assess my own kind of comfort level being around that person, knowing that this is what they had done before. Yeah, out of that. But you know, there's one thing about kind of distancing yourself person to person. There's another thing about determining whether this person should be locked up for the for the, the rest of society should distance themselves or not person.

Olivia: Right. Right.

Sisyphus: That's why I'm not in law school. Because that's too difficult to me.

Olivia: What's your solution? Lock everyone up. Who fits into your first degree. But have a have a nice circle discussion with the second degree.

Sisyphus: Well, yeah, exactly. Yeah. Treat the the second degree super nicely and no. Yeah. Cause even the first degree. Like walking everyone up first degree would be very kind of denying their. Because there's also the argument to be made with especially when they do. Research on psychopaths, right? A lot of the research is technically skewed to psychopaths that are not great at being psychopaths because they've done something and they were kind of sloppy at it and then they were they were, you know, caught so. And you can't really research people that aren't that aren't caught because a lot of people aren't going to a lot of psychopaths are going to willingly.

Olivia: OK, true.

Sisyphus: Sign up for a for a study on themselves. No. Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah. I mean, that in itself is quite difficult. I guess it's just more in terms of of personal dealings. But yeah, when it comes to the legal system.

Olivia: They're not gonna tell you hey, I'm a psychopath.

Sisyphus: There's just something inherently messy about institutionalizing, you know, human behavior and trying to adjust it, or trying to navigate human risk and accountability and responsibility because it's I do think at the end of the day, our psychology doesn't really allow us for seeing the world in terms of, people not causing. And impacting things we do need to assign some sort of responsibility to other people, even if those people literally they had no.

Olivia: Yeah, for sure.

Sisyphus: Like we somehow find out, in some metaphysical there's some metaphysical evidence that there that we literally just have no free will at all. And these people were just destined to do this thing. We we still just can't I don't know it's it's it's very hard to operate without that it's almost it's a bit of a dead end for me where it's fun to philosophize over but we we kind of just have to run with some idea of at least a little bit of free will.

Olivia: Yeah, I think for sure even if, there's outside of the metaphysical question of whether free will exists or not. Like I don't think we should forget about just the actual phenomenological personal experience people have when they are hurt. You know, if I if someone had a gun to my head and I. Like ran you over with my car. I don't know, so really random. Scenario that popped into my head.

Sisyphus: It was just wait your six year old brain like?

Olivia: Yeah, I was I really want to run over 65 in the future. If I did that to you, I think you would be very justified in still asking me to I don't pay for your hospital bills or like just you know, passes are damages to you even if you know, I was being.

Sisyphus: Thank you. That's very empathetic. Yeah, even if somebody was going to live.

Olivia: The worse to do it. Yeah. Also a second thing I just was curious about since you were asking about law, I was wondering cause you were bringing some stuff about the fallacies and studies or the difficulties of studies with psychopaths. How would studies try to quantify or operationalize things like? Authenticity or how free you were in some sort of? Situation is that possible?

Sisyphus: I mean, you can make the argument that all of psychology is completely BS and none. Of this is. Quantifiable so, and I mean the the the research that I did was primarily kind of trying to extract these kind of humanistic psychology, existentialism, stuff that. And then trying to measure it. So really quickly we were we operated under. Like self determination theory, which basically poses, there's 3 basic psychological needs. There's autonomy, competence, relatedness, autonomy is the one that is going to measure.

Olivia: OK.

Sisyphus: And it's literally defined as you have a sense of volition in your life. So you basically you agree with the actions that you were undertaking. So it kind of it presupposes that there's some level of reflection going on with with your behavior and your actions. And I mean, it's going to it it pretty much mostly involves a lot of self report. Questionnaires. But The thing is that in tandem with looking at these self report questionnaires where people are scoring high in terms of autonomy and then seeing that they're happy and seeing that they have high basically other life. Questionnaires or self report questionnaires and then also looking at kind of more physiological measures low stress, so cortisol measures just looking at their general health, you know do they have kind of high low rates of depression? Autonomy is an extremely strong measure and indicator of it's important to have. In your life. And it kind of goes back to what we were talking about. It's whether there's any sort of metaphysical authenticity when people have the subjective experience of being themselves. They're just, happier and their life is great in general. So.

Olivia: Right.

Sisyphus: And yeah, you can. I mean you can make the argument that somebody's you make a really dark argument, somebody in a totalitarian regime you know, Nazi Germany and stuff or it's you know, Eichmann, he was. He seemed in some ways he he was. A lot of people misrepresent him are it's hold point of that book. He, at least from my understanding of reading it was he seemed very agentic and I I was following orders but I was doing this presupposing that the orders that I was following because I agree with this overall system. So I was. Kind of acting out of a sense of agency and autonomy. And so it it doesn't necessarily mean that just because somebody is acting authentically that it means that they're going to be acting morally at the same time. Like I I think that that's people can jump the shark and be oh, they're gonna be these. Awesome. Like, who knows what it means when people are acting autonomously, necessarily. But you know, it you could be doing awful things and maybe still experiencing authenticity.

Olivia: Right.

Sisyphus: I know you didn't exactly ask that, but. It was just. Kind of I started to think about that I was.

Olivia: No, actually that's really interesting because if you. You cause at first when you said that ohh you can be authentic without acting morally. I was yeah so true. But then if we separate these two, does that mean that some people they're authentic self is just to be bad.

Sisyphus: Yeah, I mean. You would, you would hope not. Like I would hope. Not basically, but. You look at certain people that were highly intelligent and also Particularly evil, the the night stalker and well, actually, he wasn't that intelligent. Bundy. Yeah. The night Stalker was I'm thinking of. I mean, he was very. I feel he was definitely acting authentically. He had sort of a a persona, but Ted Bundy was, you know, fairly intelligent, seemed extremely self aware. And he had also studied psychology and. He seemed he was just very you know, that was him. Like he there was number sort of, you know, not really remorse expressed or anything. It was almost just this was a thing that he was going to do. Like no matter what and he became quite good at doing that specific thing and. You would hope. That, and I mean, that's actually the importance of the other two basic psychological needs is because I don't think

autonomy alone it's kind of it's important, but confidence is that you feel some sense of mastery towards your environment. That's super important also because you need to feel you're able to do things you're able to if you want to be a genetic autonomous you want to be able to actually fulfill those things and then relatedness, which is kind of what would squash any sort of immoral acts, is a sense of belonging and feeling secure amongst other people. And kind of. You know, just sociality. UM, that would make it so If if you have all three of those things according to this theory, you're. Like having a great time and stuff and you're probably not a serial killer.

Olivia: I see.

Sisyphus: So yeah, so I mean that's why I kind of that theory is because they do, they do kind of incorporate it where it's you can't just be autonomous, but there isn't necessarily a presupposition also that autonomy would. Like lead to. To being a really great person, you have to, because the other argument is that these are needs these are so. Relatedness is a need, you need to have some sort of social interaction. You need to have some sort of social well-being and some idea of communion or something. And I mean. Yeah, maybe some people with certain disorders and stuff they don't or disorders or, you know, just proclivities. They don't. Need that but. For the general population, I think I do think it's true that they usually need to have those three things, and then they'd be living. A sort of authentic good life in a. Way. Yeah, OK.

Olivia: I just. Just wondering if. Dangerous in any way to think that for some people, their authentic self is just bad. I'm. I'm trying to think because you could conceptualize authenticity is just. And maybe this is actually the three features that we're talking about maybe. Authenticity as just autonomy would say, hey. Like, who cares about morality but authenticity? The UM as encompassing, the three features you said because I guess to be related to other people in a good way you'd have to not be a killer.

Sisyphus: Yeah, I think I'm just uncomfortable with extending, all all three needs to being considered authentic because I'm there would be a bunch of people that I hate people and they're I don't need people and stuff that. It's you know, I don't want to it it cause there. Then it starts kind of supposing like what? What is the authentic person instead of I guess. Under psychology, what's a generally healthy person according to these studies? Because you can't you at. The end of the. Day. You can't measure authenticity. We would need a. A study where you're comparing a world where there's authentic people in a world where there's inauthentic people, and I don't know what that would.

Olivia: Yeah, because it's a state of becoming, not a static state of being.

Sisyphus: Exactly. Exactly. Yeah, maybe I forgot about that. Well, this was this was about an hour. So I don't know if you have any if you have.

Olivia: Yeah, my I'm going to start charging for the second hour.

Sisyphus: Yeah, this is this is a really expensive podcast. If you have any other kind of topics or questions that you would still to run through, or if you think we've covered the entire breadth of the existential field.

Olivia: I think we did a pretty good job of covering every single possible point.

Sisyphus: That's good. Yeah, I'm sure the comments will also agree with that. Yeah.

Olivia: We talk about for accidentalism. Totally no one will say ohh you. Missed this and.

Sisyphus: No, I've never seen a comment like that.

Olivia: Yeah, yeah. Me neither.

Sisyphus: OK. Alright, well you can check out Olivia's channel in the description and thanks for coming on the podcast. Yeah, right.

Olivia: Thank you for having me.

Sisyphus: Thanks for watching.



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