

PHIL 3024: Existentialism
T. Parent
Final Project: Last prompt

On the first day of class, I had you write on the following two questions.

1. What is your dream? More precisely, what do you want to do with the rest of your life? (Avoid vague cop-outs like ‘be happy’, ‘be successful’, ‘be a good person’. Be as detailed as you can.)
2. In general, what is the most valuable sort of life? (Again, be detailed.)

For the final project, I want you to consider how various existentialists would respond to your answers. Here is the prompt for you to discuss what Laurie Paul might say.

- Many people will say that it is part of their dream, or part of the best sort of life, to have children (either adopting or having their own). Do you hope to have a child some day? Laurie Paul argues that, whether or not you answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’, your answer fails to be rational. That’s for two reasons: (1) Having a child is *epistemically transformative*: You cannot know what it’s like to have a child until you experience it yourself (just like you can know the taste of Vegemite only after you taste it yourself), and (2) Having a child is *personally transformative*: The experience will almost certainly prompt you to revise your values, meaning you cannot know beforehand what your values will be. For those two reasons, then, having a child (or not) is always chosen in “deep ignorance” and thus cannot be rational. Do you agree with Paul that your decision is not rational? If not, why not? If so, is the non-rational nature of your decision ultimately a problem? Why or why not?

After you have finished responding to this prompt, I would then like you to re-answer the questions I asked you on the first day of class. In this process, note any differences between what you say now, and what you said then. If there are such differences, what explains those differences? (The explanation doesn’t need to pertain to this class! But if part of the explanation does pertain to this class, I’d be interested to hear about that.) If there basically are no such differences, then you might instead reflect on the differences between your answers for 1. versus 2. Are there features of the good life, in general, that are not part of your own vision for your life? If so, why? Or, are there features of your own vision for your life that you do not see as essential to the good life, in general? If so why?