

**Where are
we going?**

**Philosophy in the
Anthropocene**

**12. A world that
could be free?**



PRICE ONE SHILLING



MERRIE ENGLAND BY NUNQUAM



LONDON:

CLARION OFFICE, 4, BOUVERIE STREET, FLEET STREET, E.C.
WALTER SCOTT 24, WARWICK LANE, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

‘In my last letter I spoke of the drudgery of Mrs. Smith’s life. ... Take a working-class street of one hundred houses. Consider the waste therein. For the[ir] convenience ... you have:

- One hundred small inconvenient wash-kitchens
- One hundred ditto ditto ovens
- One hundred ditto ditto drying-grounds
- One hundred wringing machines – turned by hand

... At present ask yourself two questions:

1. Is Modern England as happy as it might be?
2. Is *my* England – Merrie England – a better place than the England in which we now live?’



View Over Ancoats, 1895

‘Socialism does not consist in violently seizing upon the property of the rich and sharing it out amongst the poor.

... Socialism is not a wild dream of a happy land where the apples will drop off the trees into our open mouths, the fish come out of the rivers and fry themselves for dinner, and the looms turn out ready-made suits of velvet

... Neither is it a dream of a nation of stained-glass angels, who never say damn, who always love their neighbours better than themselves

It is a scientific scheme of national Government, entirely wise, just, and *practical*.’



‘Under Ideal Socialism there would be no money at all, and no wages. The industry of the country would be organised and managed by the State, much as the post-office now is; goods of all kinds would be produced and distributed for use, and not for sale, in such quantities as were needed, hours of labour would be fixed, and every citizen would take what he or she desired from the common stock. Food, clothing, lodging, fuel, transit, amusements, and all other things would be absolutely free, and the only difference between a prime minister and a collier would be the difference of rank and occupation.’



‘We saw these horrifying pictures of plastic in the oceans and floodings and so on, and everyone was very moved by that. But then it just seemed like everyone went back to normal

... And I couldn't go back to normal because those pictures were stuck in my head. And I couldn't just go on knowing that this was happening around the world.’





Climate

- UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report 2018: we have 12 years to limit climate increase to 1.5C
- Review of 6000 works: 2C+ collapses ecosystems, crop yields and coastal flooding
- So far, with Paris accords: on track for 3.2C+ by end of century (IPCC)
- 200 million climate refugees by 2050 (UN)
- Cascades: rising sea-levels, ocean acidification, desertification, declining food production, heat death, wildfires and tornados, flooding, declining fresh-water, increased global conflict...



‘Here, the facts are hysterical, and the dimensions of the drama that will play out ... incomprehensibly large

... Global warming has improbably compressed into two generations the entire story of human civilization. First, the project of remaking the planet so that it is undeniably ours

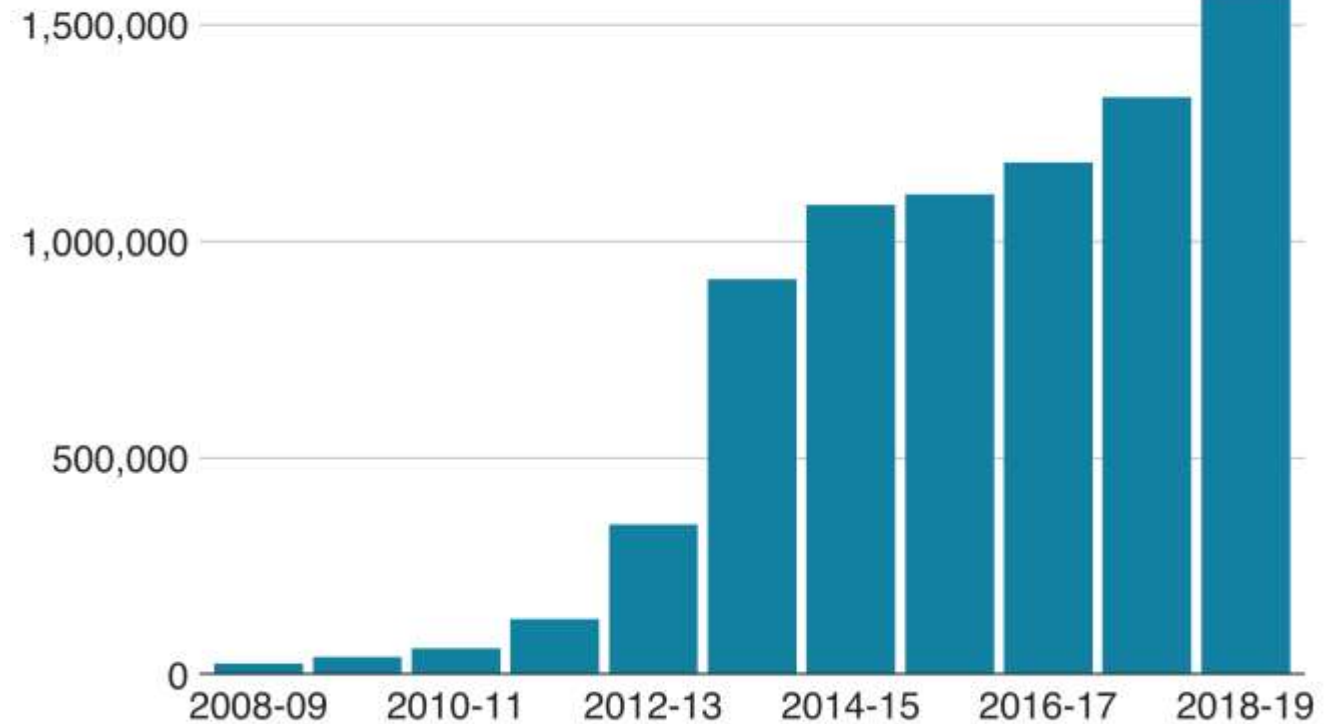
... Second, the project of preserving our collective future forestalling that devastation and engineering an alternate path’

- David Wallace-Wells, *The Uninhabitable Earth*





Number of emergency food supplies handed out by Trussell Trust food banks



Source: Trussell Trust

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Poverty in the UK is 'systematic' and 'tragic', says UN special rapporteur

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‘I believe we may well produce a new type of citizen. A healthy, self respecting, dignified person, with a sense of beauty, culture and civic pride. In the long run that will be the real test.’
– Lewis Silkin, Minister for Planning (1946)




Rounding up

Where are we going? And where should we choose to go?

Please choose one topic or aspect of the course that has most interested you.

Now, imagine yourself in some kind of large collective deliberation about the present and future in London in say 30 years time.

1. What values or beliefs would you insist on championing?
2. How, after this course, would you wish to orient yourself to the present and future?

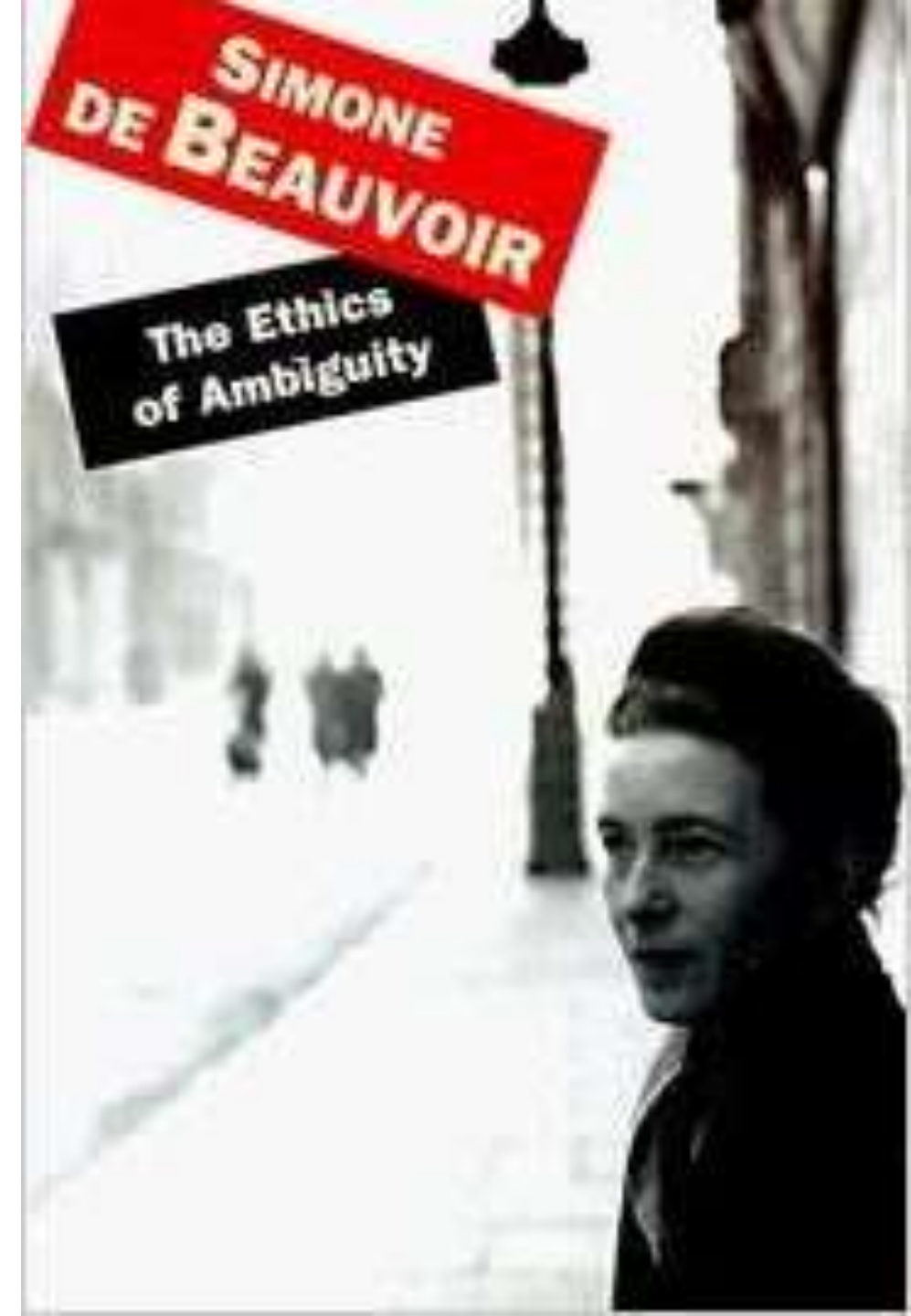
A black and white photograph of a woman with dark hair pulled back, looking off to the side with a thoughtful expression. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a doorway or a hallway with some indistinct shapes.

‘freedom realizes itself only by
engaging itself in the world’

‘It is not a matter of approaching a fixed limit: absolute Knowledge or the happiness of man or the perfection of beauty; all human effort would then be doomed to failure, for with each step forward the horizon recedes a step; for man it is a matter of pursuing the expansion of his existence’

‘it is contradictory to want to save up existence, which, the fact is, exists only by being spent’

‘Life is occupied in both perpetuating itself and in surpassing itself; if all it does is maintain itself, then living is only not dying, and human existence is indistinguishable from an absurd vegetation’



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A woman in a blue dress with a floral sash is standing next to a Frigidaire refrigerator. The refrigerator is open, showing its interior shelves and drawers. Five numbered callouts describe its features:

- 1 Cold-Wall design**—world's most advanced refrigerator! Chilling coils built into walls—air stays still, moist. Foods keep fresh days longer—assured!
- 2 Super-Freezer Chest** stores up to 25 lbs. of frozen foods. Quickdraw Tray releases ice cubes trigger-quick—no tapping, no prying, no pounding, no wet splashing!
- 3 Cold-Wall compartment is BIG.** Glass-top Hydrators protect fresh fruits, vegetables in extra-moist cold; guard taste, appearance, vitamins. Aluminum shelves.
- 4 Motor-Mixer is the simplest cold-making mechanism ever built!** Uses less current than ordinary light bulb. Quiet, self-oiling. Backed by 5-Year Protection Plan.
- 5 A Frigidaire Dealer is near you**—see Classified Telephone Directory. Learn why the "Cold-Wall" is worth waiting for. Frigidaire Division, General Motors Corporation, Dayton, Ohio; Louisville, Ontario.

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RYLCREEM YOUR HAIR



Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*

- An existentialist ethics is based on freedom as an active pursuit of discoveries and projects in the world
- Life seeks to perpetuate and surpass itself
- The future isn't fixed, it's necessarily uncertain and up to us to face and pursue our freedom, and encourage others to do so
 - 'to treat the other ... as a freedom so that his end may be freedom'
- Avoid bad faith, where we pretend not to have any freedom
- Face our freedom in its difficulty and finitude
 - 'the fact remains that we are absolutely free today if we choose to will our existence in its finiteness, a finiteness which is open on the infinite'

- 'If I want the slave to become conscious of his servitude, it is both in order not to be a tyrant myself – for any abstention is complicity, and complicity in this case is tyranny – and in order that new possibilities might be opened to the liberated slave and through him to all men. To want existence, to want to disclose the world, and to want men to be free are one and the same will.'
- 'In order to prevent this revolt, one of the ruses of oppression is to camouflage itself behind a natural situation since, after all, one can not revolt against nature. When a conservative wishes to show that the proletariat is not oppressed, he declares that the present distribution of wealth is a natural fact and that there is thus no means of rejecting it'

EMANCIPATORY POLITICS MUST ALWAYS DESTROY
THE APPEARANCE OF A 'NATURAL ORDER', MUST
REVEAL WHAT IS PRESENTED AS NECESSARY AND
INEVITABLE TO BE A MERE CONTINGENCY, JUST
AS IT MUST MAKE WHAT WAS PREVIOUSLY DEEMED
TO BE IMPOSSIBLE SEEM ATTAINABLE.

K-punk





Mark Fisher, “Baroque Sunbursts”

- ‘The spectre of a world which could be free’ – Herbert Marcuse
- ‘Although their standard of living may not have been particularly lavish, the people of pre-capitalistic northern Europe, like most traditional people, enjoyed a great deal of free time’ - Perelman
- Late 1980s rave culture was a spectre of ‘post-capitalism’ that had to be closed up, replaced by behaviours that encouraged drudgerous work, consumerism and ‘mandatory individualism’
- Paved the way for ‘capitalist realism’, a sense that the way we live and work is inevitable, natural and cannot be changed





‘From time to time, like a diseased eyeball in which disturbing flashes of light are perceived or like those baroque sunbursts in which rays of from another world suddenly break into this one, we are reminded that Utopia exists and that other systems, other spaces are still possible.’
– Fredric Jameson

‘The fundamental ambiguity of the human condition will always open up to men the possibility of opposing choices; there will always be within them the desire to be that being of whom they have made themselves a lack, the flight from the anguish of freedom; the plane of hell, of struggle, will never be eliminated; freedom will never be given; it will always have to be won’

- Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*



‘Man ought not entrust the care of his salvation to this uncertain and foreign future: it is up to him to assure it within his own existence; this existence is conceivable, as we have said, only as an affirmation of the future, but of a human future, a finite future.’

... The movement of the mind, whether it be called thought or will, always starts up in the darkness’

- Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*



Thank you

For twelve weeks of discussions that have transformed my thinking, and which will help me write my next book

If you are free next Monday afternoon, some of us will meet to discuss the election result. Let me know if you'd like to join. We will probably get a hot drink in the café of the nearby President Hotel but we'll meet outside Mary Ward Centre. I'll confirm the time in the next few days...

Next term, Mondays 1pm-3pm – [Martha Nussbaum: Feeling, Fragility, Flourishing](#). This is likely to fill up, so register soon if interested

Have a wonderful festive break!