

## **Houellebecq, The Elementary Particles**

bruno suffers because he desires too much

cynical view

michel too smart to allow himself to suffer

who are bruno and michel?

- how related?
- what are their professions?
- who are the women in their lives?
  - meets annabelle in german class
  - christiane

what's real, what's really french about this book

sollers is kristeva's husband  
monoprix  
minitel

I want to think about how Houellebecq enters into conversation with enlightenment rationality.

He refers to August Comte (1798-1857)

- advanced principles of positivism  
(rel. to empiricism)
- logical extension of kant
- against metaphysics  
Aristotle, "after" physics

### **What is the role of religion in this novel?**

death of god, bc man appropriates power of life

only hubczejak cynically engages spirituality

for lack of god, humans develop "morality of marseillan beach"

"a sexual social democracy" (182)

- this is an example of the German discipline  
that informed ww1 and II and enabled  
Wirtschaftswunder

### **Are Michel's theories informed by positivism? by rationalism? by individualism?**

every cell can be copied  
... so we are immortal thru cloning

life is nasty, brutish, and short (materialism of Hobbes)...  
so nature deserves to be wiped out in  
a holocaust (page 29)

## **How might the theory of “elementary particles” apply to society?**

### **How does Hubczejak interpret Michel’s work?**

mankind must disappear to give way to immortal species  
... a species which has outgrown individuality,  
separation, and evolution

convinces UNESCO to conduct cloning

new species  
moves beyond “personal freedom,” “human  
dignity” and “progress”

### **What is the last note we have from Michel?**

253/ sky, sea, light converge

### **Where does he die?**

### **Why is Michel depressed?**

sees the possible future, and can’t imagine any way to avoid it

he’s not a monster: he grieves his grandmother’s death,  
even 20 years after

envisions two spheres:

1. being and separation (death, pain)
2. non-being and destruction of individual  
... he chooses this one

doesn’t he want personal freedom? don’t all the suicides want control over their own  
death?

if humankind can control birth, maybe the only agency  
that remains to us is suicide.

Michel’s theory of human freedom

quantum theory must directly impact on human events (page 104)

77/ quantum uncertainty of transfer of electrons

but human behavior is rigorously determined

only in rare cases (acts of grace) does free will arise

good teacher: jean cohen

38/ sees nietzsche as progenitor of nazi ideology

--rejection of compassion

--elevation of individuals above moral order

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