

Nothingness in fight club



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Throughout *Fight Club*, the concept of the separation of soul from body appears in various forms. Whether forced upon others by Tyler or originating organically, the gap created between the essence of a man and the reality of his life reveals a region of the human psyche that remains unexplored. What occupies this space is more pure than the absence of action, it is nothing. It is this entity of “nothing” that Tyler wants us to fear. This nothingness not only enables, but also promotes complacency with the unconscious rat race that is everyday life. Nothingness dulls our ambitions and tricks us into being content with our own uninspiring lives. The narrator of *Fight Club* faces an involuntary internal conflict: the empty space between his mundane existence and his ambition—albeit reckless—forces him to rebel against himself, creating the illusion of Tyler Durden to carry out every action that he himself is too weak to even consider. Each of us has a blank space within us that prevents our soul from interacting with our mind and body. Similarly, each of us has a Tyler within us; though our respective Tylers may be considerably less destructive, we all have the power to unleash our most powerful alter egos and achieve what we truly desire. Thus, the message of *Fight Club* which Chuck Palahniuk seeks to communicate to the reader is to, by any means necessary, find the conductor that will complete the circuit between our dreams and our actions.

The most impactful way to go about this quest is to come face to face with the idea of nothing. “Maybe self-destruction is the answer,” the narrator postulates, conveying his anxiety over the idea of losing everything (49). *Fight Club* embodies the spirit that playing it safe is cowardly. Moreover, it is impossible to defeat an unseen adversary; unless you know what exactly is

tempting you to play it safe, you cannot eradicate that mindset. Tyler soon elucidates, however, that an understanding of what “ nothing” is enables us to fill the void with something that is deeply meaningful: “ getting fired...is the best thing that could happen to any of us. That way we’d quit treading water and do something with our lives” (83). Before Tyler enters the narrator’s consciousness, despite “ little acts of rebellion” like urinating in custard, he is treading water, unable or unwilling to hit bottom (76). Tyler seeks to dispel this exact tentativeness, explaining, “ if you lose your nerve before you hit the bottom, you’ll never really succeed...It’s only after you’ve lost everything that you’re free to do anything,” succinctly articulating the goal of Fight Club, and asking a key phenomenological question: what is it like to experience nothing? Tyler forces several characters to come to terms with the entity of nothing. To Raymond Hessel, the thought of becoming an object to his parents led him to the bottom. Without anything to lose, Raymond has no reason to not pursue any course of action that does not serve his self-interest. “ Fill in the blank,” Tyler asks Raymond, prompting the man who has just hit the nadir of his spiritual existence to connect his aspirations with his physical paralysis; at this point in his life, Raymond is equipped once again with the passion that first inspired him to become a vet (153). A conceptual grasp of nothingness is essential to replace the nothingness within us. It is not an empty space, it must be forced out with meaning; as nothingness is not the absence of purpose, but a destructive quality in and of itself, the only way to create something is out of pure nothing.

The central conflict that faces the narrator is a question of identity that, by extension, encompasses phenomenology and epistemology: in the body that the narrator shares with Tyler, who is real? From an epistemological perspective, the narrator justifies the existence of Tyler as a byproduct of his insomnia (which in itself is a symptom of greater conflict).

Phenomenologically, Tyler is perceived as the narrator in his purest form, uninhibited by social constructs or common conventions. Tyler wants control of himself and his surroundings, telling the nearly-castrated police chief of Seattle that “ the people you’re trying to step on, we’re everyone you depend on...we control every part of your life” (166). Consequently, as a fusion of himself and his alter-ego, the narrator rests somewhere between the control-obsessed Tyler and his own status as the type of person Tyler warns the police commissioner of abusing—someone who stifles their sense of purpose for the greater good.

Similarly, while being driven into a collision by the mechanic, the narrator states, “ I am nothing in the world compared to Tyler. I am helpless. I am stupid, and all I do is want and need things,” underscoring the notion that he is, in a quantitative sense, nothing, and Tyler possesses value (146). As the crash nears, the narrator adds, “ prepare to evacuate soul,” presenting an ambiguous image: is the soul evacuating the body or vice versa? Will the narrator’s death—real or spiritual—free him from his soul, or will it free Tyler from him (146)? That the narrator ultimately comes to understand that his fights with Tyler were psychological melees with everything he hates in his life suggests that the aforementioned evacuation symbolizes the liberation of Tyler from the narrator’s incapable body. Moreover, Tyler is who the narrator

would be without the prevailing self-defeatist attitude of society. Although the narrator insists that Tyler is the other side of his split personality, it becomes clear through his understanding of Tyler—and the subsequent murdering of his boss—that Tyler is his true self, and cannot be repressed. Ultimately, as the narrator says that he “ has to take care of Tyler Durden,” he indicates his revamped set of ideals (197). As he now values himself above all else, the commitment to Tyler, his purest self, demonstrates the clear success of Fight Club: a man’s sense of his meaning and purpose can never be entirely corralled. Furthermore, by committing to his true self, Tyler illustrates that the gap of nothingness can be closed and replaced with phenomenological harmony.