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“Regardless of the staggering dimensions of the world about us, the density of our ignorance, the risks of catastrophes to come, and our individual weakness within the immense collectivity, 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.

And in fact, any man who has known real loves, real revolts, real desires, and real will knows quite well that he has no need of any outside guarantee to be sure of his goals; their certitude comes from his own drive.”

– Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

From the Editors

It is hard to put into words what I would like to say for myself and on behalf of the amazing individuals that make up this journal. During these times of a grim pandemic and a national outcry for racial equality, I can simply encourage our readers, and everyone around me, to consistently and sincerely ponder the meaning of existence and the value of life therein.

The manner in which you exist and the way in which you view existence impacts the reality of existence itself.

And with that, I leave you to enjoy this fine journal that would not have been possible without the entire Reed editorial team and Hong Kierkegaard Library staff. I cannot thank you all enough. I have been honored to work with all of you and to be able to call you friends.

– Mattias Kostov, *Editor-in-Chief*

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Conversations in Two Parts

Maggie Stock

i.

I grieve the person I was before,
watch her frame-by-frame desecration,
a technicolor body faded;
greyscale heart-scape.

I gaze upon glossy memory
watch her forge me not in fire,
but in a river of salted tears;
a child left on the steps of change.

I wish to shake her trembling hand,
the hand that shredded fragile wings
from where bone breaches skin;
a ridge where battle once waged.

I know in my bandaged heart
she didn't understand
why her mother was so afraid
of wind-gusting days.

I want to grab her by the shoulders,
stand her cardboard-cutout body in a mirror,
point to every edge and hollow,
her fears selfishly devoured.

I want to tell her all the truths,
we'll learn by trial and error,
the abyss of regret and mistake
we'll wholeheartedly leap into.

I wonder if she'd listen.
Would I still be standing then?

ii.

I wonder at who I'll be when my present is
just a dream. I picture, frame-by-frame,
the bloom of a starlit soul into
technicolor heartscape.

I imagine a cinematic sort of journey
the heroine forged in hellfire.
just how many bridges are burned
in exchange for a pair of wings?

I want to shake her firm but gentle hand,
the hand that flung doors wide open,
tightly gripped the reigns of confidence
and jumped headlong into the unknown.

My macrame heart was not built
to understand the pity
laced between the blue of her eyes
which knew I was not built
to withstand the future's burning skies.

If I met her in the heart of all possibility
would she receive me with an embrace?
or would she take me by the shoulders
and shout chastisement in my face?

I want to listen to her secrets,
learn the path of her mistakes,
the curvature of her regrets,
so I can throw my fears away.

I wonder if I'd listen.
If I did, would she still be me?

Again

Malwina Takez

I will draw a path and our shadows will align
for a while so in tune so in pain
I always thought that love is when you see for the first time
but you really see in the end

—I've done it—again
one year in every ten
I manage it—

I will write these funny words and I will laugh with you
and we'll try to forget that death is true
I always thought that love is when you see for the first time
but you really see in the end

—I've done it—again
one year in every ten
I manage it—

Freedom and Oppression

Kevin Poe

The focal point of our ethics is freedom. What is abominable in our hearts are acts in which one individual takes away the ability of another person to choose their future. Lack of freedom is the unifier of acts such as rape, murder, abduction, slavery, and other crimes against humanity. When one's freedom is unjustly taken away, society is outraged more so than any other crime. We feel this way because to take away somebody's freedom is to reduce them. It is a feeling which each of us has experienced or will experience to some degree at some point in our lives. It is to be objectified—turned into an object of use for another. This does not sit well in one's heart. Yet still, there are those who commit these acts of oppressing- to take away one's freedom, autonomy, ability to choose. For every slave there is a master. The only way one is capable of oppressing another is through a process of lying to oneself about the fundamental existence of human nature; a process called "bad faith," according to Jean-Paul Sartre. This idea is only truly understood after studying the philosophy of existentialism.

The prominent existentialist philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir work together to build a comprehensible understanding of oppression at a fundamental level. Sartre lays down an extensive metaphysics that Beauvoir clarifies and expands upon towards an applicable ethics. In this essay I will argue, using the philosophy of existentialism, that oppression is a form of "bad faith." In order to make this argument I will first lay the foundation by explaining the ontological metaphysics of Jean-Paul Sartre. I will then use this foundation to define what the process of "bad faith" is and its relation to freedom. Next, I will define oppression before explaining how the assertion of one's freedom asserts the freedom of others and how this relates to oppression. This will then bring me to my logical conclusion that oppression is a form of "bad faith."

In Jean-Paul Sartre's book *Being and Nothingness* he lays out his ideas about the nature of human existence; our ontology (I will use this word to refer to the nature of our human existence). Sartre argues that what we are, as human beings, is "Being" and "Nothingness." The

first part of our existence is “Being” or our facticity. This “Being” is the physical aspect of our existence. We exist as matter in a world of matter. Think of it as our “it-ness” or our physical nature. The second part of our ontology is “Nothingness.” While we are an “it-ness,” we are also what we are not. Sartre means “Nothingness” on a fundamental level; he states, “I am the self which I will be in the mode of not being it” (*Being and Nothingness* 68). Things exist as they continue not to be the things which they are not. The same can be said for humans. We are who we are in the same way that we are the absence of who we are not. This “Nothingness” also relates to who we are as individuals. We are undefined. We choose for ourselves who we are, what we do, what life means; we are “Nothing.” This “Nothingness” is the foundation of what Sartre defines as freedom.

Because we are not defined, we are free to define ourselves. We are condemned to define ourselves. In his speech titled “Existentialism is a Humanism” Sartre explains this concept by saying “...man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world he is responsible for everything he does” (29). We are chained to our freedom and can not escape from it; we are facticity and freedom. This realization of freedom is then met with a sense of instability as we realize that we are responsible for what we do without any human nature to blame for our good or bad behavior. The ideas of “good and evil” are also seen as unstable as we are now responsible for deciding the good as well as the evil. This responsibility extends beyond ourselves though. It extends to all of mankind. As Sartre states, “I am therefore responsible for myself and for everyone else, and I am fashioning a certain image of man as I choose him to be. In choosing myself, I choose man” (“Existentialism is a Humanism” 24). Our actions speak for humanity and we are responsible for those actions; therefore, we are responsible for humanity. Our responsibility rightfully terrifies many people. We are hit with the sudden weight of this responsibility, which Sartre describes as anguish. It is an anguish which we try to escape from by lying to ourselves that we are, in fact, not responsible. Here lies the foundation of “bad faith.”

This “Being” combined with our “Nothingness” creates our ontology as free beings who are constrained by our facticity. This existence causes a sense of ambiguity within our lives. Simone de Beauvoir, in her book *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, elaborates on this sense of ambiguity by stating, “He asserts himself as a pure internality against which no external power can take hold, and he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things” (7). Both aspects (“Being” and “Nothingness”) are necessary conditions of our ontology yet they create a fundamental tension that humans find difficult to cope with. We are free and not free, in control and controlled, “Being” and “Nothingness.” This ambiguity combined with the weight of our responsibility leads us to “collapse” our ontology into a more palatable way of thinking. This simplification of our ontology is defined by Sartre and Beauvoir as “bad faith.” Sartre describes bad faith as “hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a displeasing untruth” (*Being and Nothingness* 89). It is a lie we tell ourselves in order to avoid the responsibility and ambiguity of our existence.

In this manner, we create a hierarchy in which we recognize one side of our ontology as being more important than the other when, in reality, they are two sides of the same coin. Simone de Beauvoir explains this by stating that “bad faith” is a “matter of eliminating the ambiguity by making oneself pure inwardness or pure externality, by escaping from the sensible world or by being engulfed in it” (*Ethics of Ambiguity* 8). She is saying that through the process of “bad faith” we convince ourselves that we are purely free; an internality which nothing can take hold of (collapsing “Being” into “Nothingness”). Or we convince ourselves that we are not free; we are simply destined to be who we are and that we have no choice but to be what we are and decide what we decide (collapsing “Nothingness” into “Being”). Through “bad faith” we convince ourselves that we are either utterly free or utterly determined. Both of these ways of thinking eliminate the responsibility and ambiguity of our lives yet reveal themselves to be false.

Now that I have laid the foundation of the metaphysical ontology of existentialism and used this foundation to define “bad faith,” I will use both of these concepts to define oppression. Beauvoir,

in her essay “An Eye for an Eye,” defines oppression as an abomination. To oppress somebody is the absolute worst crime one can commit against a fellow human being. “An abomination arises only at the moment that a man treats fellow men like objects, when by torture, humiliation, servitude, assassination, one denies them their existence as men” Beauvoir states (“An Eye for an Eye” 248). Oppression is an abomination because it is in complete contradiction to what we are as human beings. There are two parts to this idea of oppression. The first is what the act of oppression is implying about the ontology of the oppressor. The second is what the act of oppression is implying about the ontology of the oppressed. The two parts contradict each other fundamentally. What the act of oppression implies about the oppressor is that they are absolute freedom (pure “Nothingness”). When an oppressor uses another human being as an object they are implying through their actions that the nature of man is that of pure, un-restricted, internalality.

We, as human beings, can assert our will upon anything-according to the oppressor. Beauvoir describes this as “the tyranny of a freedom that wants to be sovereign” (“An Eye for an Eye” 249). The oppressor asserts their freedom as a force of domination which snuffs out the autonomy of their fellow man. What the act of oppression implies about the oppressed is that men are objects (pure “Being”). When the oppressor takes away the ability of another to choose for themselves their future the oppressor is implying that the nature of man is that they are not free to choose their future. We, as human beings, are not free-according to the oppressor. Yet, the oppressor asserts we are completely free through his oppression.

Now that oppression has been defined as asserting the absolute freedom of man and simultaneously asserting man as an object, we can see that this is a blatant contradiction. Both implications of oppression are a form of “bad faith” as the ontology of man is not pure freedom or pure being- we are both simultaneously. The act of collapsing one’s being into pure freedom leads us to objectify men. This is because the objectification of man will reinforce the belief of the oppressor that they are pure freedom. Yet, by removing the assertion of freedom through the act of oppression the oppressor reveals themselves as a liar to

themselves. A hypocrite. As Beauvoir states "...if the oppressor were aware of the demands of his own freedom, he himself should have to denounce oppression" (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 96). It is only through the act of lying to oneself that one can simultaneously assert one's own freedom while denying the freedom of others. If the oppressor were to be aware of their existence as a fundamentally free being, they would have to assert that freedom upon others. This is the great balancing act of mankind; to be free while respecting the freedom of others. There are those who claim that their freedom is being infringed upon when they are kept from asserting their freedom upon others. Beauvoir argues against this by stating "to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom" (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 91). True freedom has nothing to do with taking away another person's freedom as another person's freedom is the context of my own freedom.

Being free does not mean that we have the right to oppress other people. As I explained in the second point, this belief in the ontology of man as pure, unrestricted, freedom is an example of "bad faith." One can only live life as a free being if one asserts oneself as free while upholding the freedom of others. To do this is to act in accordance with and accept one's ambiguous nature (to be free and limited) rather than escaping this ambiguity through acts of oppression (to be completely free while removing one's own assertion of freedom). Beauvoir states "For a freedom will itself genuinely only by willing itself as an indefinite movement through the freedom of others; as soon as it withdraws into itself, it denies itself on behalf of some object" (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 90). Freedom is only complete as long as it wills itself to the freedom of others. To be oppressive is to be free while simultaneously denying the freedom of others. As long as there is a contradiction in one's assertion of their own freedom they are acting in "bad faith." Therefore, oppression is a form of "bad faith."

When the rapist commits the act of raping somebody they are asserting their freedom as absolute and through this action they are implying the absolute freedom of mankind. Yet, by committing this act of violence, the rapist is denying the freedom of the victim. The victim

is dehumanized and turned into an object of use for the rapist. This act of oppression removes any assertion of freedom and reduces man to an object. This is the absolute contradiction of oppression and the only way to accept this contradiction is through “bad faith.” When the Laissez-faire Capitalist claims that it is the virtue of freedom which allows them to abuse the rights of the worker they are simultaneously asserting the freedom of man and removing their assertion of freedom. They are implying that man is completely free and that man can be completely controlled. This is the very definition of “bad faith.” In order for the oppressor to be capable of suppressing somebody they have to lie to themselves about the very nature of their own existence.

Beauvoir states that mankind must fight this oppression as it is in direct contradiction with our ontology. She says “Whatever the problems raised for him, the setbacks that he will have to assume, and the difficulties with which he will have to struggle, he must reject oppression at all cost” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 96). For there is no greater cost than losing our ability to exist as human beings. This is what oppression seeks to reduce us to; less than human. The root of this oppression is the lie that human beings can be either completely free or controlled. In reality, we are both in control and controlled, “Being” and “Nothingness,” free and unfree.

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Tell Me Where to Go

Marina Al Naser

In the name of all the refugees whom the world refused to take in fearing what they might bring in. In the name of humanity who has been defined by the borders and with the nationality we hold on our passports. In the name of Allan Kurdi, a little boy who died on the Mediterranean shore:

*Tell me where to go
I have no place
I have lost my home
When the war took place
From Syria, I come
Flying on one wing
My wings are broken
And there is no replace*

*I had a warm home
And I had big dreams
My home now cold
And I replaced my dreams
I dreamed of love
Of success, and a strong career
Now I just dream that I find
A place to hide in*

*My country is like Noah's flood
Killing everyones in
And I on a ship survived
But the world won't
Take me in*

*I knocked on the doors at night
I knocked the doors hard
But the world doesn't want refugees
And it threw me into the flood*

*There I am
a little child on a shore
Dead from the flood
Had frozen from the cold
A human being I was
When I was first born
My humanity forgotten
When the refugee title
On my shoulder I wore*

This poem was written based on the incidents of separating the kids from their parents at the U.S.-Mexican borders in June 2018:

*Your children are our children
Dear fellow immigrant
We are not going to leave them there
Hanging in despair
Trying to find their way
In a world full of evil*

*We are not going to leave them cold, lonely and scared
They came here seeking safety, got separated instead
We are not going to discriminate
Because we are American citizens
Our parents were in your place
And we were their children
So if this happened in their age
We would be these children
Screaming, crying in the cage
Looking for the justice hidden*

*Our land is the land of freedom
That's how we started
British groups leaving their homes
Seeking prosperity in the new land adopted
Our land is the land of freedom
For them, it became a prison
Our flag is the flag of justice
For them, it became a ribbon
Our sky is the sky of limitless dream
For them, it became a nightmare*

*This is why for all what our country and history stands for
We, American Citizens, have you to stands for
Because your children are our parents' children*

On Existence and Being

Patricia Egan

It begins with the violent and powerful pull, like the force that occurs after a tidal wave. I am sucked into the sea and thrown around until the waves calm and I gain a bit of control. I say a bit, because ultimately the waves and the current always have power over me. They are the uncontrollables. I must learn to swim with them or spend the rest of my time, my being, fighting them. So I move with the current and I coexist with others who do the same. We, however, struggle to fully understand each other. The waters between us muffle our shouts to one another and thus my screams are heard as nothing but mumbles to them. We try to interpret what one another means; we watch their body language and study their habits. I think I have an idea of who the others are and what they are saying, but there will never be absolute certainty. It's as if, although we drift along and live together, each of us is alone. Still, we scream all the louder. For, while I know I cannot understand them and they cannot understand me, I focus on the unrealistic hope that someone, somewhere can hear me. My being is trapped to exist only in my mind if there is no one who understands. I hope that, both despite and because this person is not close enough to see me, he or she knows who I am simply by the words I speak. I, like the others, am just searching for someone who fully understands my screams and my individual struggles and thoughts—my ipseity. We recognize and choose to ignore the contradiction in this desire. We are fully aware that we shall never entirely understand the others around us because each of our experiences possesses uniqueness and can only wholly be felt by the individual alone. We will never be able to fully explain or understand who each of us distinctively is. Being, then, is individuality to a point of isolation.

Bossa Nova

Malwina Takecz

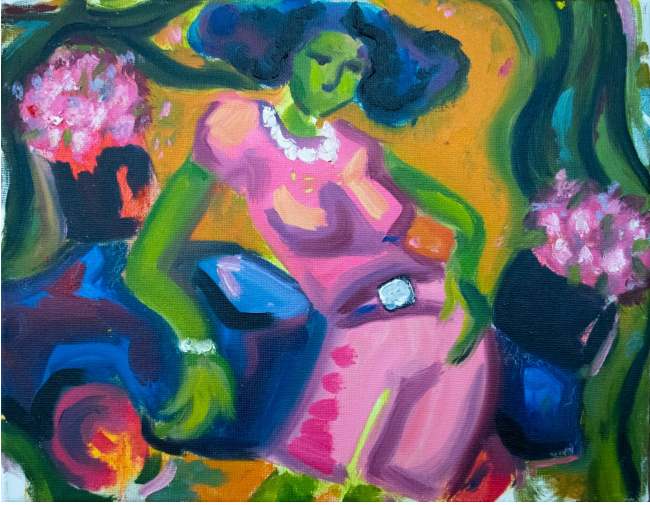
Like bossa nova black invites you
Sleepily drowsily to sway
Now you collapse—and you are ours
And it gets darker with each step

There is no Borges and no Freud
There is no rescue and escape
And you can't find an explanation
Where is the light to light the way

To exist means—walk in the dark
Without complaining how much longer
Fending off the death and the blissful chill
Of uncertainty—with a cold hand

A Familiar Stranger 1 & 2

Jackie Dudley



The Interconnectedness of Faith and Fact

Addison Hinton

Abstract

The question concerning the existence of some type of a higher power, which I refer to as God, has evolved to become inherently flawed in its nature. This evolution is due to the unforgiving quality of empiricism which has deemed all subjective-based arguments invalid. In this paper, I argue not for the existence of a God but rather that the rise in empiricism has made any such conversation on the matter impossible. Over the course of this paper I assert that since God is an intangible entity, arguments based on objective reasoning should not hold precedence, but rather that they should be used in unison with subjective reasoning to come to a more complete truth. Over the course of this inquiry, I first deal with Habermas's Objective Referents, to show that objective reasoning and truth are not synonymous. A discussion on the validity of three philosopher's arguments, William Clifford, William James, and Soren Kierkegaard, concerning subjective and objective reasoning and their connectedness to faith is explored.

The quest of Empiricism, in its search for objective truths, has resulted in the complication of dialogue concerning God. The promotion of objective knowledge over subjective knowledge has produced an incorrect image of the Cartesian dualism of soul and body. By subjective knowledge I mean utilizing the ability to recognize emotions and their role in developing arguments. To accomplish this, the hierarchy of knowledge that Empiricism has created needs to be deconstructed. The belief that soul and body stand in stark contrast to one another and exist in vastly different spheres that do not participate in any mutual interactions is paramount in society. Habermas echoes this idea when he writes, "Surprisingly, though, in the cognitive sciences today we are witnessing a renaissance of the misleading Cartesian image of the monadic, recursively self-enclosed consciousness that stands in opaque relation to the organic substrate of its brain and its genome".¹ The result is the complete erasure of the soul within discursive language. Yet, the world of communication is

¹ Jurgen Habermas, *Between naturalism and religion: Philosophical essays* (Polity, 2008), 15.

composed of much more than objective facts. Habermas asserts that our public space is instead filled with both “inside and outside” or in other words, the subjective and objective ways of looking at the world that everyone possesses.² Consequently, Habermas claims that our conception of the world rests on the difference between the world and the inner-worldly, and so to only prioritize objective knowledge is to neglect an entire aspect of human knowledge, that other aspect being subjective knowledge. Habermas’s main problem with the erasure of the subjective mind is that it portrays the world as being “given” in the same way to everyone, and this of course is false.³

William James also presents a similar problem with Empiricism, stating that in its search for truth it has omitted “concrete, individual experience”, something which to James is inseparable from the greater truth.⁴ Dotterer quotes James’s position on how Empiricism is only collecting what could be described as single-sided evidence. He writes, “Empiricism, on the contrary, lays the explanatory stress on the part, the element, the individual, and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction. My description of things, accordingly, starts with the parts and makes of the whole a being of the second order. It is essentially a mosaic philosophy....’(Essays 41)”.⁵ Here James advocates for a universal that is dictated by the individual as opposed to an individual who is dictated by the universal. The individual experience, according to James, is made up of values, wills, desires, and emotions. He states that “desires are the surest things we know” and claims that they lay at the root of all decisions.⁶ Therefore, the intellectual mind is made subordinate to the will and the passion that drives this will, making it impossible to separate subjectivity from objectivity in discourse.

The dilemma of portraying the soul as lacking any sort of credibility in relation to experience, fact, and evidence, becomes even

² Habermas, *Between naturalism and religion*, 14.

³ Ibid, 31.

⁴ Donald Dotterer, “James and Bowne on the Philosophy of Religious Experience” in *The Personalist Forum*, vol. 6. (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 129.

⁵ Dotterer, “James and Bowne on the Philosophy of Religious Experience”, 129.

⁶ Ibid, 134.

more of a problem when discussing the question of the existence of God, or anything else concerning things which we cannot see, touch, hear, etc. Empiricism has almost succeeded in rendering these conversations obsolete. In doing so, these empiricists are attempting to remove themselves from the most innate characteristic of human experience, passion. Many have come to believe that God must be known by objective fact alone in order to warrant any form of belief. Yet, objective fact does not fully apply to God, much like how it does not apply to intangible sensations. Passion then is a necessary aspect of faith and therefore knowledge. Faith, defined as the trust and belief in something which cannot be proved, also possesses the caveat of potentiality, meaning that the object of this individual's faith could turn out to be truth. Fact on the other hand, is defined as the trust and belief in something which can be proved by empirical, objective evidence. In our modern society we have come to only value the latter form of evidence as accountable and reliable.

As a society, we have forgotten the relationship that faith and fact have with one another. My argument relies on these universal definitions of faith and fact and is as follows: Faith is trust in someone or something which cannot be proved (and so is directed inwards and is discussed subjectively). Fact is trust in someone or something which can be proved (and so is directed outwards and is discussed objectively). God is an entity which cannot be proved (and so is contemplated in inwardness). Therefore, to discuss God's existence one must include faith-based arguments (or subjectivity). It is impossible to separate man from emotion, preconceived biases, and his subjective nature and so to make this separation a requirement for discursive language concerning the existence of an intangible God only serves to halt discussion. My rebuttals are split into two sections: the first deals with the pragmatic dilemma of integrating objective referents into a subjective centered discourse so that discourse can be had and the second deals with why subjective reasoning should be seen as credible and as a logical way to discuss the question of God's existence.

The first problem that arises from a subjective centered discourse is how exactly communicative understanding can occur when no "real" truth can ever be asserted. If there does not exist any type of

truth or fact outside of the self or of individual experience, then all arguments would become stalemates, if they could be had at all. Steven M. Levine describes this problem that many pragmatists fall into as attempting to “secure the notion of an independent reality.”⁷ Levine states that Habermas attempts to solve this dilemma by placing the notion of truth in relation to the concept of objectivity through the median of an active being.⁸ For discourse to be had, one must be able to refer to a universal reference system. These objects are not found through action that is understood in context, but rather in what we as active beings rely on when acting. Levine writes, “Contextualism is ultimately otiose, Habermas thinks, because the certainties that are the origin of our concept of truth are the certainties that acting agents rely on in their practical dealings with an objective world, a world ‘which they presuppose to be independent and the same for everyone.’”⁹ It is not in inquiry, years of investigation, or a high level of education which contextualizes the objective world that one should find these universalities. Rather it is the active being who relies on certainties, or unmovable and unchangeable material objects, that are about the world that can create a non-biased objective referent. Levine writes, “From now on, within action we ‘presuppose the objective world as a system of possible referents—as a totality of objects not of facts.’”¹⁰ These certainties that active beings rely on to exist in the world are our Objective Referents; existing outside of the self but as independent from fact. In other words, these certainties that we all rely on to act become existing objects that allow for a universal reference system to form the backbone for all communication. These referents then allow for communication to occur as well as for subjectivity to still hold credibility, since the objective world is only objects and not truth. In the instance of the question of God’s existence it allows for a rational discussion in how basic terms are understood but subjectivity remains necessary in influencing how these terms interact with one another to form various conclusions.

⁷ Steven Levine, “Habermas, Kantian Pragmatism, and truth” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 6 (2010), 21.

⁸ Steven Levine, “Habermas, Kantian Pragmatism, and truth,” 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

A second objection deals with two of William Clifford's points in his essay *The Ethics of Belief*. First is his statement that thorough investigation must be done, and that sufficient evidence must be achieved before decisions can be made. Secondly, he asserts that we have a moral obligation to this duty of obtaining sufficient evidence. In *The Ethics of Belief* he argues that, "The question of right or wrong has to do with the origin of his belief, not the matter of it; not what it was, but how he got it; not whether it turned out to be true or false, but whether he had a right to believe on such evidence as was before him."¹¹ Everyone therefore has the ethical duty to fully research all decisions, including religious ones, in search of sufficient evidence before forming a conclusion. No one has the right to believe whatever they want and in fact, blind belief can lead to harmful consequences for others. Therefore, concluding something and choosing to believe in something based on subjectivity is immoral. His argument rests on how we come about our beliefs, which for Clifford is through empirical gathering of evidence, which of course stands in direct opposition to my argument. My counter argument here rests on the notion that sufficient evidence is in itself a theoretical term, resulting in the need for subjective reasoning to reach any conclusive definition and subsequently any sort of end point for researching a decision. Therefore, neglecting to form a concrete definition of sufficient evidence leaves this term subject to interpretation.

The most obvious problem with defining sufficient evidence is that it looks different to every person and what qualifies as enough research and investigation varies from individual to individual. Levine comments on this when he writes, "Assuming our procedures of inquiry are in good order—that while we may be assured that most of our beliefs are true, the truth of any particular belief is always conditional. No matter how well justified, a belief may well turn out to be false."¹² In other words, the goal is to continuously revisit our beliefs until we achieve a consensus. Clifford does in fact endorse this viewpoint, writing that society should never stop questioning its beliefs in the efforts to continue progress and to prevent the "sink back into

¹¹ William Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief" in *Philosophy of Religion*, no. 5 (1877), 104.

¹² Steven Levine, "Habermas, Kantian Pragmatism, and truth" in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36, no. 6 (2010), 12

savagery.”¹³ Yet, if this is the case then what qualifies as sufficient evidence will change continuously, based on time period, demographic, etc. It appears then that the only way for Clifford to define a term, such as sufficient evidence, would be for a majority to come to some sort of agreement. In this process, sufficient evidence becomes not objective fact but a theoretical opinion. Subjectivity then becomes a crucial aspect in forming arguments and making decisions. In his failure to define sufficient evidence and to give credibility to subjective evidence, he puts his reader in the position of either staying in a moral state through continuous empirical investigation or an immoral state through simply making a choice. Discussion becomes stagnated because to argue anything one must have formulated a conclusion, or in Clifford’s terms have found sufficient evidence which as I have just stated is impossible with the omission of subjective thinking.

The third objection raised is that simply not being able to factually disprove God does not result in the justification for the omission of factual evidence and turning solely to faith as the only means of discussing God. My above position only serves to be a diversion rather than a direct answer. In other words, since there is no objective evidence for the existence of God, I have decided to make discussions concerning His existence exempt from it. My rebuttal has two parts, first is the absurdity of our current societies fear of error, which only results in the stifling of the individual and the assumption that all experiences are the same, and secondly that in cases where empirical evidence does not exist it is then not only acceptable, but necessary to act on passion alone. William James discusses the importance of both fear of error and passion when debating the question of God’s existence in his essay *The Will to Believe*. He first sheds light on modern societies’ absurd fear of error, a fear which has led to the erasure of subjective reasoning. He states that the desire to know truth and to be free of error are two vastly different ways of looking at a problem. He writes, “We may regard the chase for truth as paramount, and the avoidance of error as secondary; or we may, on the other hand, treat the avoidance of error as more imperative, and let truth take its chance.”¹⁴ Choosing to argue with fact over faith for the

¹³ William Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief” in *Philosophy of Religion* no. 5 (1877), 107.

¹⁴ William James, “The Will to Believe” in *Philosophy of Religion* no. 5 (1896), 110.

pure reason that one is afraid of error is just as absurd as one ignoring factual evidence entirely because one is ignorant. James compares this fear of error to, “a general informing his soldiers that it is better to keep out of battle forever than to risk a single wound.”¹⁵

Our modern society has embedded this fear in us by prioritizing objective reason and discrediting subjective reason, resulting in the stifling of the individual in ways concerning emotion and creativity. Habermas echoes this same notion with his critique of viewing the world objectively. He states that this produces the assumption that all things act and are acted on in the same way, therefore erasing the importance of how the individual internalizes the world around them.¹⁶ Truth, as Habermas states, is found in the gap between the world and the inner-worldly. The fear of error then serves as no form of justification for the omission of subjective reasoning and in fact could produce harmful consequences, since progress would become stagnated if no one decided to take any sort of leap of faith.

James then goes on to illuminate the problem of needing concrete facts before making any decision at all. If no one ever acted on faith, passion, or trust, then progress itself would be non-existent. Every hypothesis, including scientific ones, are built on that person’s faith that their predictions and beliefs have the potential to become truth. James writes, “There are, then, cases where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming.”¹⁷ Faith then proceeds fact. I do not advocate that every step of a decision or of scientific research should be filled with faith, but faith is what is needed to start the journey towards answers. This notion is especially true when no empirical evidence exists. In such cases, it is perfectly acceptable to act on passion. James writes, “That not only as a matter of fact do we find our passional nature influencing us in our opinions, but that there are some options between opinions in which this influence must be regarded both as an inevitable and as a lawful determinate of our choice.”¹⁸

¹⁵ William James, “The Will to Believe,” 111.

¹⁶ Jurgen Habermas, *Between naturalism and religion: Philosophical essays* (Polity, 2008), 14.

¹⁷ William James, “The Will to Believe” in *Philosophy of Religion* no. 5 (1896), 113.

¹⁸ William James, “The Will to Believe,” 111.

For James, there are three categories of choices, live or dead, forced or avoidable, and momentous or trivial.¹⁹ Live hypothesizes are hypotheses that appeal to your sense of knowledge, while dead hypothesizes do not sound familiar.²⁰ Forced, to James, means that no third choice can be selected, and a decision must be made, while avoidable simply means one can choose to remain indifferent.²¹ Lastly, a momentous choice is a choice which one will most likely never encounter again, whereas trivial means the option is not unique and can be revised in the future.²² These options that require our passionate nature James refers to as genuine options, and they are made up of live, forced, and momentous choices.²³

The question of God's existence, James argues, is a genuine option for most and therefore has the right to be acted on out of passion.²⁴ If one possesses a preconceived notion of religion, then the hypothesis of God's existence will appeal to them. The option then is also momentous, in how the supposed gain of believing and the loss of not believing is infinite, as well as forced, since no matter the choice one makes, whether it be to believe or to be a skeptic, it is a decision which influences the gain or loss of that good and either confirms or denies God entirely.²⁵ Asserting then that one needs to remove their passionate nature when discussing if God does exist is an injustice to human nature. James writes, "that a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if these kinds of truth were really there, would be an irrational rule."²⁶ Removing subjective reasoning from discursive language is synonymous with removing an entire half of man's understanding of the world around him, and all arguments that follow from this removal are subsequently illogical.

¹⁹ Ibid, 110.

²⁰ Ibid, 110.

²¹ Ibid, 110.

²² Ibid, 110.

²³ Ibid, 110.

²⁴ Ibid, 113.

²⁵ Ibid, 113.

²⁶ Ibid, 114.

A fourth and final objection that can be made is that human nature is prone to errors and our inclinations, passions, and emotions often cause us to make decisions before thinking, so faith can be misleading. If the only way we can talk about God is through personal passion, then it is not a logical argument. My rebuttal is that the truest thing we can ever know in life is how we feel in relation to something else. It is in this relationship then, as Kierkegaard states, that truth can be found. This argument provides us with a more spiritual interpretation of the gap between the world and the inner-worldly. Truth, for Kierkegaard, is found in the relationship between the knower and the subject, thus placing Habermas's argument in a religious lighting. Objective reasoning only serves to put the knower in no form of relationship to finding answers concerning the question of God in any capacity.

According to Kierkegaard in his essay *Truth is Subjectivity*, he states that having passion towards a subject is what allows for one to be in relationship with the truth. He writes, "The knowing subject becomes a fantastic entity rather than a human being, and the truth becomes a fantastic object for the knowledge of this fantastic entity."²⁷ It is the relationship one has with the truth that is important and not the question of whether it is truth or not. The objective mode of truth-seeking leads one into what Kierkegaard terms a "dialectical difficulty."²⁸ He writes, "The existing individual who chooses to pursue the objective way enters upon the entire approximation process by which it is proposed to bring God to light objectively. But this is in all its eternity impossible, because God is a subject, and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness."²⁹ It is the objective reasoning then which puts one in, not a false relationship with God, but in no relationship whatsoever. Objective arguments for God's existence stand in no relation to the overall question because, as Kierkegaard writes, God is not an object but a subject.³⁰ Reflection rooted in objectivity when concerning the question of God's existence will only serve to

²⁷ Soren Kierkegaard, "Truth as Subjectivity" in *Philosophy of Religion* no. 5 (1813-1855), 116.

²⁸ Soren Kierkegaard, "Truth as Subjectivity," 117.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 117.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 117.

stagnate any sort of discussion and leaves one not with answers but in a constant state of searching.

There also exists a sense of urgency within Kierkegaard's argument. This decision, to choose a subjective mode of thinking, is a genuine option for Kierkegaard because, if the choice to take a leap of faith is ignored or not chosen, then one lives in the paradox of truth for eternity. The subjective thinker is aware of this paradox and, "feels this dialectical difficulty in all its painfulness."³¹ The highest form of truth then, concerning the existence of a subject, is found in passion, for it is the only truth that one can know for certain. He writes, "An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual."³² The gain of choosing passion is infinite and allows for one to know of the concept of God in a way that objective reasoning cannot, making it a momentous decision. The decision then is also forced, in how not choosing faith leaves one inside of a paradox for eternity. Lastly, the decision is a live hypothesis, not just because most people already have a notion of God, but because all humans possess both objective and subjective reasoning and so are familiar with both ways of thinking. Most importantly, choosing subjective reasoning allows for the discussion concerning His existence to be had in its entirety.

In our current societies desire for progress in the realms of science and technology, subjective thinking has been deemed irrational and illogical. With this newly formed hierarchy of knowledge has come the complete omission of an entire half of human experience. The world is not just filled with objective facts but also consists of differentiating interpretations and experiences. Truth then is found in the gap between the world and the inner-worldly. Some may argue, like Clifford, that one has a moral duty to investigate all choices before making a decision, but it is his ignorance towards subjective thinking that puts him in a predicament. Without opinions and passion, a theoretical term like sufficient evidence can never be agreed upon, leaving one in a state of either continuous research or committing an immoral act. One cannot

³¹ Ibid, 116.

³² Ibid, 119.

be afraid of error or of leaps of faith because they are necessary prerequisites for advancements and in this case a discussion on the existence of God. In instances when no empirical evidence can be gathered, we must turn instead to subjective thinking.

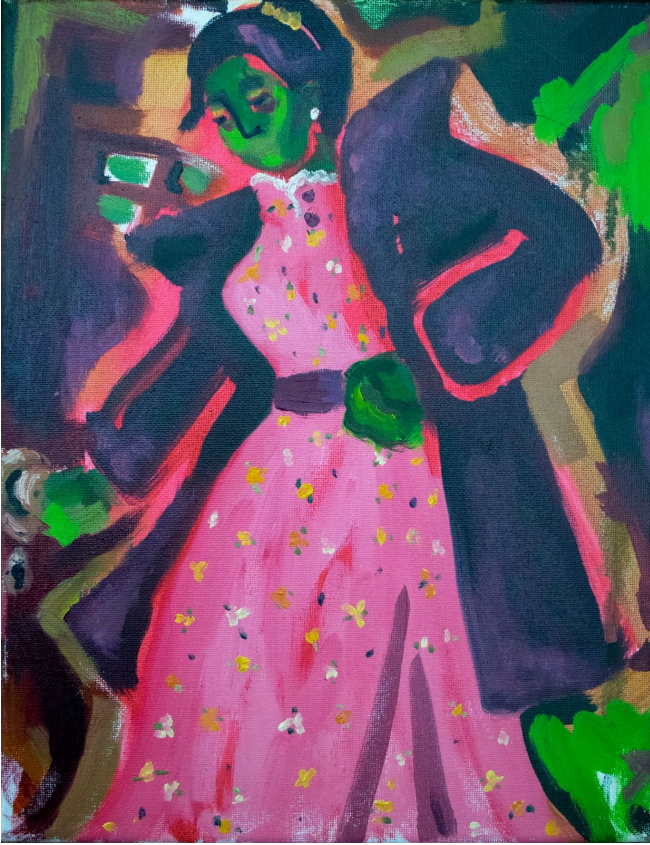
Firstly, a discussion with purely subjective viewpoints can occur with the use of Habermas's Objective Referents, which simply are the certainties one relies on when acting in the world and are not facts. Secondly, for intangible sensations, the only truth we can be certain of is how we feel in our relationship to it. In the case of James, if an option is genuine, which the question of God's existence is, then passion is not only allowed but required in making a decision. In the case with Kierkegaard, we see then Habermas's world and inner-worldly theory play out in a spiritual sense through Kierkegaard's emphasis on having a relationship with the truth. He also states that to prove God through objective reasoning poses a dialectical difficulty that leaves one with no answers and in no relationship with God. Without subjective thinking no conversation about the existence of God would be able to occur, making its inclusion necessary.

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A Familiar Stranger 3

Jackie Dudley



Medecine: Lotte's Prayer

Malwina Takez

I'll borrow your soul dear
I feel it under my fingertips
I'll borrow your soul and
I'll start to pray
I know I know that you're not here

I'll borrow your soul dear
I'll wander through this town
I'll borrow your soul
even if you don't hear

the music is my medicine
the music it makes me feel
the music I know that I received a gift

I'll borrow your soul dear
I will experience your own grief
in the labyrinth of my chest
I drown

the music is my medicine
the music it makes me feel
the music

A Quiet Life of Adventure

Micah Cash

“Harwood Hill, Home of the Million Dollar View!” the sign declared as I turned onto the gravel road of the motel. I had booked my trip to Bennington on a whim the night prior as the walls of my cabin closed in, compressing the remote silence so it might have boiled over. Adventure was the object of my spontaneity, though I suppose a stand-up shower and indoor cooling were peripheral motives. At that time I wouldn’t have dared to call myself a writer, so I told the matron behind the reception desk that I was in school, a lie which hadn’t been true for almost two years. Satisfied, she handed me a key chained to a playing card sized sheet of metal, un-loseably huge, and warned me not to lose it.

The building was eight one-bedroom cottages attached at the hip, ascending in number from left to right, each with a sidewalk porch fronting a single gravel parking spot. Between the lot and the one-lane highway was a groomed green lawn peppered with enigmatic sculptures by local artisans. I pulled my car into Room #5, as the engraved number on my key instructed me, and settled in, eyes and breath heavy from a morning spent on Vermont’s scenic, winding roads. The room had pale blue walls adorned with canvas paintings, price tags and all. How strange to have driven there under the pretense of adventure to lands unseen only to feel perfectly happy in the comfort and solitude of that cheap motel room. The only painting I liked had already been sold. After a long, hot shower I flopped onto the comfortable bed and enjoyed what I still consider one of life’s great pleasures: a midday nap in a private room, fading between consciousness and rest, linens enveloping and askew, daytime cable humming in the background, serene privacy buttressed by fellow travelers right next door. I would cross the globe for a sleepy hotel afternoon.

Around seven I grew restless and went outside for a cigarette and some fresh air. I’d taken to smoking after my mother died. There was nothing she hated more than the smell of burning tobacco, so in a way, it was my tribute to her, this new habit. I could just see her telling me with those wide eyes, “you can smoke when I’m dead!” I got a real

kick out of that. On the drive up I had stopped at a used bookstore. It was in a strip mall somewhere between Stowe and Stratton, and the tattered purple canopy above the door caught my eye; by the time my body could react, I had to swerve across two lanes of traffic just to turn into the lot. It was worth it, though, because it was one of those stores with stacked bins of discarded books and prices posted on yellow laminated note cards that ranged from twenty-five cents to a dollar. In the fifty-cent bin, amidst Portuguese dictionaries and business manifestos and mid-century romances, I found a Henry James novella, *The Beast in the Jungle*, with the look, feel, and scent of a forgotten heirloom. When I checked out, I had hoped the expressionless woman would comment on my distinguished taste, but as I gave her my exact change and said thank you, she only repeated my words back, emphasizing the you.

I took the thin book outside with me on the porch and set it on the short glass table along with my Marlboro 100s, lucky pocket torch, and an extra book just in case I finished the whole novella in the time it took to smoke a cigarette. As the sky changed color I lit up and breathed the smoke in, and it dawned on me that, for the first time in my twenty-four years, no one in the whole world knew where I was. Not my father back home in California, who moved out of our old house a month after my mom passed, resolved to spend his lonely retirement in a gross apartment on a steady diet of Stouffer's dinners and cable news. Since I left college and moved clear across the country, we only talked on birthdays and national holidays. Certainly not my buddies from school, working their twenties away in skyscrapers, either unwilling or unable to find time in their busy schedules to stay in touch. It was hard to blame them for taking my lifestyle choices as a slight. Not even my high school sweetheart, who wrote me a letter for graduation that promised no matter how far apart life took us, we would always remember each other. I still texted her when I got drunk and sentimental, but I'd lost the letter some time ago. I had just finished reading the crisp novella's back cover when a young woman approached the flowerbed in front of me carrying a tin watering can. She was wearing a blue, polka-dotted sundress under her tan gardening apron, and her face was kind and reassuring.

“Hi, how are you sir?” she looked at me for the first time as she carefully spouted water into the mulch.

“Good, thank you. It’s a lovely day”

“I’m so sorry, I just noticed the dead bird.”

I had no idea what she was talking about, but then I looked down to my right and not five feet from my chair was a brown-feathered bird, maybe six inches in length, quite dead on its side wedged up against the wall of my room. It didn’t look gross, really, just lying there in a damp circle on the otherwise dry porch. I struggled to come up with something to say, wanting to respect the solemnity of the object without giving the impression that I was frightened or revolted.

“Oh, my. That’s sad, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it must have flown into the window. I can’t understand why they do that.”

I looked down at the first page of James’ story, words swimming in the haze of smoke that seemed to pour out of the cigarette with renewed vigor. I stared down like that, fighting the magnetic urge to look at the fallen fowl, while she made her way around the bed, now within arm’s reach of me. I was grateful when she broke the silence.

“It’s been so nice lately, but these plants really could use some rain. They’re all dried up.”

“It didn’t rain here today? It was pouring on the drive down.”
“Not a drop. It’s been all sun for weeks. Not your usual Vermont summer. But you’re not from here, are you?”

“I am now,” I managed, chuckling for levity. I continue to be astounded by the lies I told myself to preserve a sense of direction in my life.

She finished her circle around the bed, walked away, and then came back holding a tan dustpan. Without saying a word, she confidently scooped up the bird and took it away, hiding my view of the dustpan with her body. She walked around the corner of Room #8, out of sight, then returned after not much time at all and went right back to watering the next flower bed down the row. Where did she take the bird? I wondered. I felt a pang of sorrow that was completely absent when I first saw the dead thing. I hoped she at least buried it, rather than just heaving it into the garbage, or over some imaginary cliff. I had a vision of her laying the bird in the flower bed, covering it with wood chips, placing a marked rock on top as I made a short but tender speech. I don't feel much for her or the bird, looking back, but I wish I would have at least asked her. It could have been a nice moment. As she continued to go about her gardening, relaxed but meticulous, dirt on her ankles and hands, I was suddenly quite conscious of the obnoxious white of my new sneakers, the stinky sweet smell of the burning ash, the absurdity of the extra book displayed on the glass table as if for show. Out of desperation I asked where this million-dollar view was.

"You've got to go way in the back of the property. Come here." I came. "You see that tower? That's right in the middle of the preserve. From the edge you can see the whole thing. The best place to see it is from the back porch of Public House, that's the restaurant right next door."

I saw the tower she was pointing at. It was a pristine stone obelisk, right in the middle of endless dark green forest. I couldn't tell if it was one mile away or a hundred. "Public House. Is that the best place for dinner near here?"

"To be honest, the food's not so good. You pay for the view. If you're looking for a good meal, I'd suggest this Italian joint in town, Allegro. It's a little pricey, but it's the best around."

"Thanks," I mumbled as I went back to my reading chair. Unable to focus, I looked up an extended summary of *The Beast in the Jungle* on my phone browser while she did some other odd jobs. The story was about a man who carried a crippling premonition that

something terrible and substantial would happen to him in the future. He spent his life detached and inert, but driven by his curiosity for what gruesome fate awaited him. At the end, he dies just as he realizes that his cursed fate was to waste his life waiting for the terror that never came – “he had been the man of his time, the man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened.” For some reason, I didn’t want to leave until the woman was all done with her tasks.

I went to Allegro and sat at the bar. It was mostly empty besides one or two tables and an older gentleman two stools over from me. I usually love dining out alone, but tonight I was in the mood to talk. My waitress flashed me a winning smile when I ordered the special she had just announced along with a glass of red wine, to seem dignified. As I ate, she kept asking me if everything was okay, and each time I wanted to strike up a conversation, but I never did, mechanically nodding and eating and drinking at what I thought was a respectable pace. The waitress had a nice rapport with her coworkers, and all sorts of banter was exchanged as she relayed orders to the kitchen and gave directions to the younger girls. I swear I saw them slipping drinks from the bar, and I almost made a joke, but I didn’t want to get them in trouble somehow. The old man next to me ordered the special as well, and complimented the waitress on the recommendation. They talked for a bit, then he went back to scrolling on his iPad. He was dining alone at this random restaurant in Bennington, Vermont, just like me, but I got the feeling that we were different. He never glanced around the room, and when he finished eating, he pushed his plate away with a satisfied groan even though some of the pasta was left. He put his iPad into his black briefcase and left a cash tip. I shoveled the last few bites in my mouth even though I was already stuffed, then agreed to a second glass of wine I couldn’t really afford.

After dinner I had another cigarette as I walked the streets. The sun was down but it wasn’t too dark yet. I passed an old church with a dimly lit marquee sign, and squinted to read the unevenly spaced letters: WHAT DO YOU WORSHIP? Disconcerting as it was, this at least gave me something to think about as I walked quite a ways, encountering one person after another. I did that thing where you look a stranger in the eyes as they walk past, lingering just a second too long,

but none of them reciprocate the gesture. In fact, they all went about their night as if I wasn't even there—the tall shirtless man mumbling to himself, the pack of friends my age horsing around, the old couple holding hands, the little boy on his mini blue ATV, his mom jogging to catch up. I started to feel like I was in a dream, surrounded by one-way glass. Notice how I floated, completely untethered to any reference point. I thought about bumping into someone, or yelling out, as a test of my solidity. But I didn't, of course, and berated myself for the stupid thoughts. How many people did I use to pass back home or in school, oblivious to their existence, before I left it all behind for my quiet life of adventure?

When I got back to my car it was pitch black outside. Back then, the color of the sky profoundly affected my disposition. As soon as I turned off the main street there was scarcely any light at all, and I could only see what was right in front of me by the dual cones of my dim headlights. I drove past rows of houses shrouded in darkness, and tried to imagine the people inside—filing taxes, making love, facetimeing sons at war, watching newscasters debate the various actions of leaders and criminals and money managers and changemakers. What connected them to me? Either they'd figured out something I hadn't yet grasped, or else the opposite.

I crossed a long bridge over a rocky stream, flanked on either side by flimsy two-foot-tall guardrails that wouldn't put up much resistance were I to clench the wheel with both rigid arms and turn right off, an action I was considering, as I often did. Everyone has at least thought about it when driving alone; hell, I wouldn't trust anyone who said they hadn't. I would never have actually done it, of course, even then, and even though I knew it was for all the right reasons, that night it really pissed me off, the temerity to even consider what I knew I would not do. The curiosity wasn't the death, the fear, the pain, but the feeling after making the choice. What would fire in my brain while the car careened into the ditch? What pattern of phosphenes would press upon my eyelids? My working theory was that I would feel nothing. Anhedonia. At least, nothing different from what I felt driving straight ahead. Wasn't I choosing to do that as well?

I liked to think about the progression: the next morning I'd be found, there'd be local police and a small write up; my dad would get a call and he'd be angry and sad just like with mom, and he'd burrow deeper still; my friends from home would fly out to the funeral with expressions of brief, genuine sorrow, they'd describe me as smart, polite, reserved, and then they'd go to a bar and tell old stories that I was mostly absent from before flying back to their jobs and leases and relationships, all of which they were now a few inconvenient days behind on; if I was lucky my smiling senior portrait might make it on TV, maybe there would be a plaque or something. It wasn't as fun as usual to think about that night and I focused back on the road, arms shaking and hands sweating a bit from holding the wheel like a nervous kid on monkey bars.

I pulled into the gravel drive excited by the respite of my bland, air-conditioned room with the shitty paintings, but as I turned the key I looked at the spot where the bird had lain and it was gone, every last drop drunk by the night air as if the bird's lifeless body had been sustaining the molecular bonds. I hurried inside and had a sudden urge to call someone, anyone, but when I pulled out my phone it dawned on me that there was no one to call. The few names in my contacts who might answer in the first place would be worried and confused that I had called just to talk, and then the conversation would be awkward for both of us, so I ended up just staring at my lock screen for a while like a dumbfounded zombie. I hardly wanted to see late-night televangelists and people driving off bridges on Bennington cable, but I was too agitated for sleep. I watched a few trailers on my laptop with interest but it seemed such an effort to start something entirely new, so I flipped on an indiscriminate episode of an old sitcom that I sort of liked. Lying crooked on the bed fully clothed, only the bathroom light on with its half-open door drawing a crisp line of shadow on the carpet, I thought what a good picture of modernity I might make with the angles of the laptop and my body and the shadow all oblivious to the

“Million Dollar View” right outside.

I must have dozed off because next thing I knew a different episode was playing and the voices were so annoying that I slammed

the screen down. All the inertia of time spent floating and alone rose up in me and I started to think, like I always did. I thought about just what the hell

I'd even done for years now, basking in the glory of finally being free, escaping the cycle of origins, the opulence of youth, the ennui of cubicles, the hypocrisy of revolution, the shackles of commitment, all of them forcing everyone else to take action after action to sustain their microscopic, thoughtless lives. They all had it wrong, I knew it then and I know it now, but when I tried to conjure in my mind's eye what it was that they had wrong, my head went gray, vacuous, frenzied in chaos like radio static. What I would have given, just then, to weep.

I remember my shoes first, their brilliant, assaulting white covered by smears of mulch and scratches of woodchip. Then my fingernails, stuffed with dirt and blood, wondering what they had wrought. I looked down and found myself on hand and knee in the center of the flowerbed, though I wouldn't have called it that anymore, since all the flowers were uprooted, their soil flung every which way around me. The bird. I was digging for the bird, but it wasn't there. Of course it wasn't there. I felt immensely satisfied by my failure, that coin-toss outcome of action, that mark of a life lived rather than considered. Only then I thought of the kind woman whistling as she filled her watering can the next morning.

Leaving

Malwina Takcz

yesternight they are leaving
all in shadows still breathing—am I here
breathing in blue
without you

yesternight they are different
purple sky all above them—tell me why
I cry
in the night

just leave me a sign
your warmth in the morning
the warning
do I still want it
do I

yesternight they are leaving
all in shadows still breathing—am I here
grieving in blue
without you

Philosophical Role of Paradoxes

Jocelyn Callahan

Abstract

Human life is overflowing with paradoxical situations, consequently penetrating the discipline of philosophy. In this essay I will argue that paradoxes occur readily in philosophical matters because of the paradoxical nature of the discipline, the cognitive overcommitment of philosophers, and the attempt to theoretically clarify fact-coordinated concepts. I will continue by discussing why resolutions to paradoxes are bound to differ, specifically drawing on the ideas and methods of Nicholas Rescher. I will conclude the essay with several examples of existential paradoxes including the Self-Deception Paradox, Kierkegaard's God Paradox, Nietzsche's Paradox of Choice, and Camus Absurd Paradox. These examples will illustrate, not only the methods used in paradox resolution, but the pervasiveness of paradoxes in life and philosophy. While the rife nature of paradoxes may be daunting, I will assert that their abundance opens new doors of thought and allows for philosophical innovation.

The paradox is the passion of thought, and the thinker without paradox is like the lover without passion: a mediocre fellow.

– Soren Kierkegaard³³

Paradoxes pervade human life, consequently penetrating philosophical matters. If a paradox can be defined as having seemingly plausible premises that are jointly inconsistent,³⁴ one might be inclined to label the entire discipline of philosophy a paradox; consisting of seemingly plausible doctrines that are collectively inconsistent. These inconsistencies in philosophy arise from the copious amount of disagreement that permeates the discipline. While some may attempt to offer reasons for the continual lack of consensus, they may be overlooking the nature of the field. Definitive answers are not inherent

³³ Soren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments: Johannes Climacus*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (New York, NY: Princeton University Press, 1985), 37.

³⁴ Nicholas Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001), 7.

to philosophy; philosophy is simply not meant to produce final truths.³⁵ This idea is paradoxical in its own right. Philosophers are continuously in search for the truth, but in a discipline that does not engender definitive answers. As we will see, this is comparable to the *Absurd Paradox* considered by Camus, in which it is human nature to seek out meaning, in a life that is meaningless. This paradoxical nature of philosophy should not deter people from asking questions and seeking truths. Like Nietzsche's famous declaration "God is dead", that freed us from objective values, the understanding that the discipline of philosophy is not meant to produce final answers brings about a type of freedom and liberation that allows for continuous and infinite thinking and question asking.

If the paradoxical nature of philosophy gives rise to paradoxes, so too, does the cognitive state of the individual philosopher. Inconsistencies emerge when we begin from a state of cognitive overcommitment; the answers we are prepared to give to some questions conflict with the answers we are inclined to give to others.³⁶ This cognitive overcommitment is facilitated by the data or information that is employed in philosophical matters. This data includes things such as common-sense beliefs, traditions, the views of well-informed experts (of the day), opinions that make up the worldview (of the day), and lessons from everyday life.³⁷ Cognitive overcommitment becomes too easy. The information collected from these sources all bear some level of cognitive pressure, for they can all be plausible.³⁸ When we regard too many contentions as plausible, inconsistencies occur, and subsequently give rise to paradoxes. An example of this overcommitment can be seen in the *Form/Matter Paradox*:³⁹

- 1) Reality is one (homogenous)
- 2) Matter is real
- 3) Form is real
- 4) Matter and form are distinct (heterogenous)

³⁵ Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems: An Essay on the Grounds and Implications of Philosophical Diversity* (Pittsburgh, PA: 1985), 12.

³⁶ Nicholas Rescher, *Aporetics: Rational Deliberation in the Face of Inconsistency* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 102.

³⁷ Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, 18.

³⁸ Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, 19.

³⁹ Nicholas Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution*, 127.

This is a clear example of cognitive overcommitment, premises (2) – (4) infer that reality is heterogenous which contradicts premise (1). It is impossible to commit to all of these contentions without falling into inconsistency.

Furthering the idea that philosophy is paradoxical in nature, paradoxes also appear to arise when philosophers attempt to clarify. To clarify is to make something less confusing and more comprehensible, yet in philosophical matters it can lead to inconsistency. An aim of philosophy is to try and make sense of the actual world, thus the concepts at issue are coordinated around facts (or presumed facts) that have an empirical foundation.⁴⁰ Because these concepts have a basis in fact, a philosopher's attempt to add theoretical clarity creates inconsistencies. The fact-coordinated concepts we try to grapple with resist the theoretical precision that philosophy strives for.⁴¹

It is undeniable that paradoxes occur readily in philosophical matters, but how are they to be handled? When confronted with a paradox, something must be abandoned to restore consistency. This can be done through choices of priority; what one chooses to abandon is a matter of precedence and assessed plausibility. With this in mind, there are bound to be different resolutions because prioritization can be accomplished in many different ways.⁴² In an attempt to resolve a paradox, Nicholas Rescher suggests the method of weakest-link abandonment.⁴³ In doing this method, one must prioritize and rank the conflicting theses, subsequently abandoning the premise that has the lowest priority and plausibility.⁴⁴ But different philosophers implement different priority systems, thus the weakest-link is bound to vary. Once again let us turn to the *Form/Matter Paradox*:

- 1) Reality is one
- 2) Matter is real
- 3) Form is real
- 4) Matter and form are distinct

⁴⁰ Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, 45-47.

⁴¹ Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, 55

⁴² Nicholas Rescher, *Aporetics*, 104.

⁴³ Nicholas Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution*, 27.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution*, 27.

Pluralists, such as Anaxagoras, would consider premise (1) the weakest link, abandoning it on the basis that reality is composed of many elements. Premise (2) would be the weakest-link for idealists, including Plato, who believed that the nature of a thing was in its Form or idea, rather than its matter.⁴⁵ Atomists would abandon premise (3), considering it to be the weakest-link due to their belief that the world is composed of many particles, ultimately dismissing the idea of form.⁴⁶ Lastly, those who assent to the Dual-Aspect Theory would consider premise (4) the weakest-link, consequently abandoning it.⁴⁷ This illustration shows that different philosophers have different priorities, ultimately creating different weakest-links. This example also demonstrates how philosophical doctrines become entangled in paradoxes and how these paradoxes assist in the persistence of disagreement among different schools of thought.⁴⁸

When confronted with a philosophical paradox, in which all the premises are plausible to some degree, complete abandonment of a premise can be unsettling. One way to resolve this troubling situation is through the utilization of distinctions. Instead of completely abandoning a premise, the introduction of a distinction enables us to maintain an informative stance while providing answers to our questions.⁴⁹ When making distinctions, we are modifying, rather than abandoning. This modifying not only aids in the production of answers but allows for new questions to be asked. Distinctions are a source of innovation that allow for new ideas and topics to be brought to the table.⁵⁰

The best way to illustrate the general principles that are at work in resolving philosophical paradoxes is through examples. Let us begin by considering the *(Static) Self-Deception Paradox*. The idea of self-deception is inherently paradoxical because to deceive is to know the truth and to be deceived is to not know the truth, meaning one

⁴⁵ James Mannion, *Essentials of Philosophy: The Basic Concepts of the World's Greatest Thinkers* (New York, NY: Fall River Press, 2002), 19.

⁴⁶ James Mannion, *Essentials of Philosophy*, 7.

⁴⁷ Nicholas Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution*, 128.

⁴⁸ Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, 29.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems*, 68.

⁵⁰ Nicholas Rescher, *Aporetics*, 124.

would be in a position to know and not know simultaneously. The paradox is as follows:

- 1) X deceives X into believing p (hypothesis)
- 2) X must believe $\sim p$ (by definition of deception)
- 3) X believes p (from 1)
- 4) X believes $\sim p$ (from 2)
- 5) (3) and (4) offer a contradiction

As with any paradox, there are many routes to resolution (which I have previously discussed). One way to approach this paradox is to highlight the ambiguity in the term “believes”. In philosophical matters, paradoxes of ambiguity and equivocation occur readily, due to issues of terminology.⁵¹ The utilization of distinctions can come to the rescue to restore consistency without full abandonment. To resolve the paradox, we can remove the ambiguity from “believes” by making a distinction between strong belief, where one is explicitly aware of their consciousness, and weak belief, where one is conscious but not focused on it.⁵² With this distinction the claim “X s-believes p and X w-believes $\sim p$ ” is no longer a contradiction.

While this distinction may have resolved the paradox, as mentioned earlier, distinctions often bring new questions to the table as well as new inconsistencies. There is a cycle that occurs beginning with the detection of inconsistent commitments. This is followed by the removal of inconsistency through abandonment. In an attempt to maintain an informative position, a distinction is introduced. This leads to the reintroduction of abandonment due to the revisions made by the distinction, leading us right back to the detection of inconsistent commitments.⁵³ The distinction between weak belief and strong belief starts to steer us toward this cycle. Questions begin to arise, such as, can you deceive yourself into weak belief or strong belief? To deceive, do you have to strongly believe what you are deceiving about? And can you strongly believe the negation of what you are deceiving? With these questions a new paradox can arise. Let us consider the following:

- 1) X deceives X into s-believing p

⁵¹ Nicholas Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution*, 122.

⁵² John Turk Saunders, “The Paradox of Self-Deception”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 35, no. 4 (1975), 564, doi:10.2307/2106755.

⁵³ Nicholas Rescher, *Aporetics*, 123.

- 2) X must s-believe $\sim p$
- 3) X s-believes p
- 4) X s-believes $\sim p$

The previous paradox was only resolved by strong believing p and weak believing $\sim p$ (or vice versa), thus we are once again met with a contradiction if both p and $\sim p$ are strongly believed. In resolving this new paradox, we could abandon premise (1) on the basis that you cannot deceive yourself into strongly believing something. One could argue that, in self-deception (or deception in general), an individual is not able to decide whether they are deceiving themselves into strong or weak belief, it is simply impossible to intentionally deceive yourself into strong believing something because the strength of the belief cannot be determined by the one doing the deceiving. Another route to resolution would be abandonment of premise (2). Because X is deceiving themselves into strong believing p, they must weakly believe $\sim p$. Only by weak believing $\sim p$ (i.e. being conscious but not focused on it) is X able to deceive themselves into believing the contrary (i.e. p).

Let us turn our attention to *Kierkegaard's God Paradox*,⁵⁴ which can be written as follows:

- 1) It is rationally appropriate to worship God
- 2) A rational being will not – cannot – worship something he does not properly understand
- 3) Man cannot properly understand God

In paradox resolution, when attempting to determine the weakest-link, it is beneficial to prioritize each premise then lay it out in a priority ranking. Of course, depending on the philosopher, this priority ranking will always differ. For Kierkegaard, premises (2) and (3) are facts of life, while premise (1) is problematic,⁵⁵ therefore his priority ranking would be [(2, 3) > 1]. With this ranking, premise (1) must be abandoned. Kierkegaard's rationale for premise (1) abandonment concerns itself with his conclusion that the belief in God's existence is irrational. For Kierkegaard, to believe in God is to believe in the absurd, but a true believer is willing to accept this and dedicate themselves to a way of life without any rational basis to do so, thus

⁵⁴ Nicholas Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution*, 119.

⁵⁵ Nicholas Rescher, *Paradoxes: Their Roots, Range, and Resolution*, 120.

achieving what he terms “inwardness”.⁵⁶ Kierkegaard states “The absurd is precisely by its own objective repulsion the measure of inwardness of faith”.⁵⁷

Another option for resolution would be to attempt to restore consistency on the basis of the ambiguity in the term “properly understood”. The term “properly” can be viewed in two ways, it can mean either satisfactorily or, in a strict sense, exactly. While man cannot understand God exactly, man must, at the very least, satisfactorily understand God, due to the persistence of religion. Man’s understanding of God must be acceptable enough for the continuation of religion. Through empirical observation, man can properly understand God if the term is believed to mean satisfactorily. This line of reasoning could also bleed over into premise (2). One could argue that a rational being cannot worship something he does not understand exactly, but he is able to worship something he understands satisfactorily. Once again, more questions arise, such as, who decides what counts as satisfactory understanding? Is it to man’s satisfaction? Or God’s satisfaction?

Next let us turn our attention to Nietzsche’s *Paradox of Choice*. His famous statement “God is dead” asserts that there are no longer objective values, thus we are free to create our own.⁵⁸ But perhaps this liberation is so free it becomes cage-like, creating a paradoxical situation where one is so free that they become unfree. The paradox can be laid out as follows⁵⁹:

- 1) With no objective values we become free [to make our own choices] (hypothesis)
- 2) The possibility of freedom depends on the ability to make choices – if we can’t choose, we are not free (according to the definition of freedom)
- 3) Without objective values there are infinitely many choices, none of which are “right”, thus making it impossible to choose
- 4) From (2) – (3) we are not free (due to our inability to choose)

⁵⁶ L. Nathan Oaklander, *Existentialist Philosophy: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 17.

⁵⁷ L. Nathan Oaklander, *Existentialist Philosophy*, 42.

⁵⁸ L. Nathan Oaklander, *Existentialist Philosophy*, 77.

⁵⁹ L. Nathan Oaklander, *Existentialist Philosophy*, 79.

5) Premise (4) contradicts (1)

Premises {(1), (2), (3)} are an inconsistent cluster. Premise (1) is the hypothesis and premise (2) concerns itself with the definition of freedom, both of which have a high level of priority.⁶⁰ Premise (3), at best, could be a reasonably warranted contention. The priority ranking would then be [(1, 2) > 3], making premise (3) the weakest-link. One route to resolution would be to abandon premise (3) on the grounds that choices can be made arbitrarily, that is, one can make choices even if they do not believe they are valuable. Nietzsche would dismiss this resolution by denying that arbitrary choices are free and genuine. He contends that these arbitrary choices are, in fact, a sign of influence of valuation from others, rather than personal commitments.⁶¹

Nietzsche's resolution to this paradox also concerns itself with premise (3). He believes that an individual is able to choose among the infinitely many options, but only if they have the strength of will to take responsibility for the self-created values. An individual must become aware that their choices are not objectively right, therefore whatever path they choose they are entirely responsible for.⁶² In his resolution, Nietzsche is not making a clear-cut distinction, yet he is not fully abandoning premise (3). There are still infinitely many choices, and for some individuals it will still be impossible to choose. The paradox is only resolved for the individual with the ability to acknowledge and go beyond the contradiction intrinsic in decision making.⁶³ Thus, the paradox is not universally resolved using Nietzsche's line of reasoning; those who do not possess the ability to take responsibility will continue to be free and unfree.

Continuing with Nietzsche's perspective, let us turn lastly to Camus. In the *Myth of Sisyphus* Camus writes "The world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and wild longing for clarity whose call

⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that one cannot be free if they cannot make choices, yet someone can be unfree and make choices. For example, a prison inmate can choose if they want to play basketball in the courtyard or which book they would like to read before lights out. This issue would be an interesting discussion to continue further.

⁶¹ L. Nathan Oaklander, *Existentialist Philosophy*, 79-80.

⁶² L. Nathan Oaklander, *Existentialist Philosophy*, 84.

⁶³ L. Nathan Oaklander, *Existentialist Philosophy*, 84.

echoes in the human heart”.⁶⁴ This passage is reminiscent of our earlier discussion; one of the reasons paradoxes occur readily in philosophical matters is the philosopher’s attempt to theoretically clarify fact-coordinated concepts. In this quote Camus is claiming that the attempt to clarify in general is paradoxical because there is no clarity to be found at all. This leads us to the *Absurd Paradox*:

- 1) Life is devoid of meaning
- 2) It is human nature to seek out meaning
- 3) (2) contradicts (1)

For Camus, premise (1) is a fact of life, thus his resolution concerns itself with premise (2). For Camus this paradox is not theoretical, it simply represents how things really are, thus he rejects premise (2), not as false, but as a behavior that must be acknowledged and changed. An individual must come to terms with the meaninglessness, in doing so one reaches an absurd freedom, a freedom where one is no longer a slave to their values. Camus states “The lucidity that constitutes his torture at the same time crowns his victory... one does not discover the absurd without being tempted to write a manual of happiness”.⁶⁵

Another route to consistency would be to assume premise (2) as a fact of life, while premise (1) is a mere supposition. In abandoning premise (1), a distinction can be made between objective and subjective meaning. This resolution is very similar to Nietzsche’s line of reasoning. While life is devoid of objective meaning, those who are willing and able to confront their freedom will be able to live genuinely, knowing that the only meaning that exists is their own subjective values.

The *Absurd Paradox* and Nietzsche’s *Paradox of Choice* illustrate how life itself is paradoxical, especially if we are to take the position that it is devoid of meaning and objective values. *Kierkegaard’s God Paradox* demonstrates the paradoxical nature of religion, while the *Self-Deception Paradox* shows how paradoxes arise from our own cognitive states. Is this labyrinth of paradox and inconsistency, that constitutes nearly every facet of our lives, analogous to the fate of Sisyphus, who was condemned to push a boulder uphill

⁶⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York, NY: Vintage Int, 1955), 21.

⁶⁵ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 121-122.

just to watch it roll back down?⁶⁶ Or is this continual struggle with inconsistency the fuel that keeps the fire of philosophy burning? The human condition is entrenched with inconsistency, philosophy attempts to resolve this. Yet, paradoxically, the discipline does not afford us definitive answers and ultimate truths. It is as if at every turn we are confronted with inconsistency. It is difficult not to feel as if one is drowning in the infinite number of paradoxical situations that surround us. But these paradoxes and paradoxical situations are the means of philosophical innovation. They generate new ideas and produce new questions. Just as one must come to terms with the absence of objective values in order to be free, so too must we accept that the discipline of philosophy does not engender final truths. With this acceptance, we become free to empower paradoxes to open new doors of thought. In the words of Camus “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy”.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Roy Sorenson, *A Brief History of the Paradox: Philosophy and the Labyrinth of the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 44.

⁶⁷ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 123.

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Atlantic

Malwina Takez

A letter would be longer and wiser
Than these words written on a napkin
Than a flight over Greenland
And Atlantic
I'm pretending that I don't care
Listening to Mahler 6 and 7
Simon and Garfunkel
And the sounds of the engine
"Half of the time we're gone
But we don't know..."
Interrupted
Like a feeling
That's always not-here
And sometimes not-at-all

A letter would be longer and wiser
But not longer than my longing

Overwhelmed and Undermined

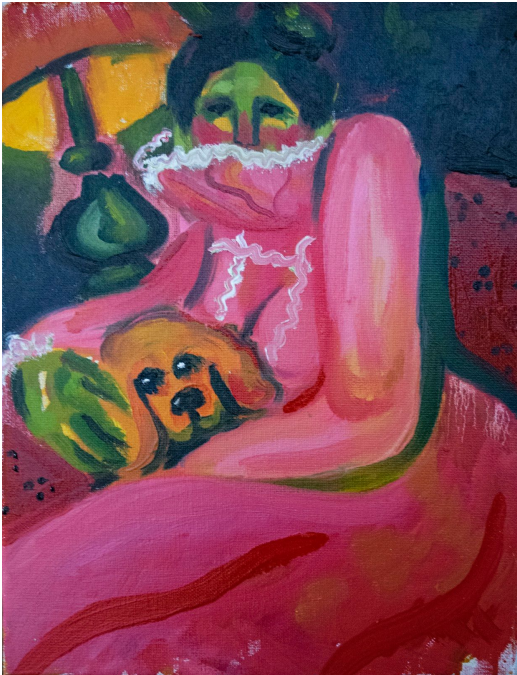
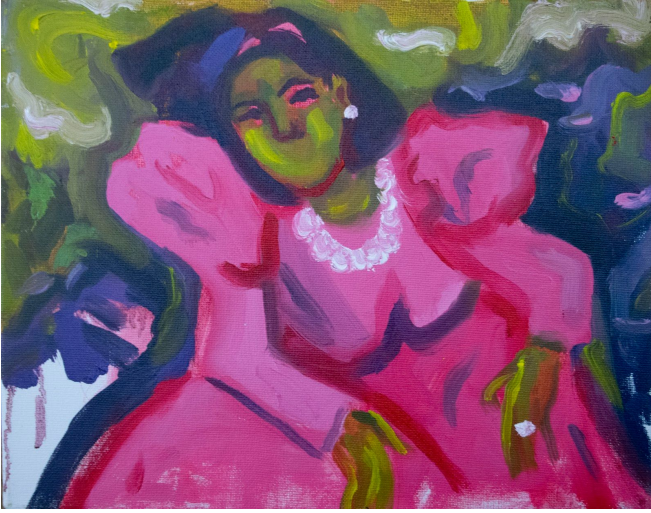
Shane Cooney

Sitting at the laundromat, I am struck by boredom. I arrived here at 8:58pm, greeted by a less-than enthusiastic employee who let out an audible sigh as I entered the building. Under her breath, she cursed me to damnation for slithering into her store before the cut-off time for the last load: 9:00pm. If it were not for me, she would have been able to go home early—as everyone else in the laundromat had loads that were almost finished. I empathize with her, because I have been in her position many times in the past jobs I have worked. I understood my position as the antagonist in her mind’s narrative and tried to compensate for my perceived wrong-doing by greeting her with a heartfelt smile and warm salutation. She faked a smile back at me, but the cold look in her eyes revealed her true feelings. I proceeded to load my laundry and then sat down at a table facing the interior of the store. Now, here I am, observing the mundane everyday lives of the strangers before me. There are two people sitting adjacent to me, lost in the artificial world of their smartphones. Zombie-like, they glare at their screens with intensity. Their illuminated faces, necks and backs bent at an angle that must cause them pain. What are they thinking? Surely, they are not thinking about anything. If they truly wanted to think they would put down their phones and turn their mind inwards and explore the world of their thoughts. Occasionally, one of the zombies would look upwards to check on the status of their laundry, then morbidly turn back to their phones. Their actions speak to me as if time is their greatest enemy. Being alone with their minds and the nakedness of the world is too much for them, so they must find a way of passing time without realizing what is truly going on; as if the world is not enough, they must retreat into a world of greater interest. Suddenly, one of them looks up from their phone and meets my eyes. I smile, subsequently diverting my gaze. She reverts back to staring into her phone. I scan the room until I find the only person in the room who is not afraid of facing the reality before them; the very employee who had cursed my existence. She is folding someone else’s laundry. Her eyes are surrounded by large, dark circles. She wore the face of a chain-smoker; riddled with wrinkles and aged beyond her years. Her only solace is the fact that at some point, her night will end. She lives for this future and

clings to it desperately. Although, by positioning herself in relation to time she must also realize that this cycle is bound to repeat. Tomorrow and the next day, she must wake up and go back to work at the laundromat. Upon realizing her fate, she must become filled with an overwhelming sense of dread. How does she overcome it? How does she wake up every day and knowingly go about her life? This very thought perplexes me and fills me with dread. I could never live such an existence. If somehow the world bestowed upon me a similar fate, and I were to one day wake up as a full-time employee at a laundromat, I would surely and willingly take my own life. As I am thinking this, she finishes folding the laundry and returns it to a seemingly ungrateful college student. Then she intently walks outside and lights up her last cigarette. As she inhales the first drag, I can see a wave of relief flood over her entire body. Her tense demeanor begins to fade as she stares into the darkness of the night. Maybe it is these simple pleasures that she lives for. Maybe, these brief moments of relief are sufficient for her to continue her existence. In fact, maybe she lives the most authentic life anyone can live. Every morning she wakes up with a cup of coffee and a cigarette and is perfectly content with her fate; she does not wish for anything greater. Perhaps, I actually envy her.

A Familiar Stranger 4 & 5

Jackie Dudley



The Ethical Individual in Kierkegaard and Unamuno

Hannah Kunzman

Abstract

This paper examines the roles of individual action and authenticity in Søren Kierkegaard's "The Present Age" and Unamuno's *Mist: A Tragicomic Novel* to argue that Unamuno's assertion of ambiguity undermines Kierkegaard's ethical universe. Unamuno's character Augusto embodies Kierkegaard's critiques of society, but it ultimately remains unclear whether or not Augusto was ever able to escape the cycle of reflection. Augusto's agency in his own death is uncertain, and thus Unamuno questions the existence of God and the individual agency necessary for Kierkegaard's ethics. As a result, while Kierkegaard argues for faith as a foundation for ethical existence, Unamuno leaves the task of determining how one ought to live to the reader.

Both Søren Kierkegaard in "The Present Age" and Miguel de Unamuno in *Mist* (originally *Niebla*) address the concepts of individual action and authenticity. However, while Kierkegaard constructs universals and lays a foundation for ethical action, Unamuno offers only uncertainty. This paper will demonstrate how Unamuno and Kierkegaard present the individual as suffering from tedium and meaninglessness, but ultimately offer different conclusions to this issue of existence. §1 will explicate Kierkegaard's critiques and observations of society in "The Present Age," as well as his theory of how individuals escape the cycle of reflection. §2 will demonstrate that Augusto is a representation of Kierkegaard's critiques of society and then question whether or not his singular moment of passion was an assertion of his individuality. Finally, §3 will argue that Unamuno ultimately rejects Kierkegaard's ethics, and instead he urges the reader to decide for herself how to proceed in a foundationless world. Unamuno undermines the ethical universe of Kierkegaard by questioning the existence of God and individual agency. Unamuno's ultimate project is therefore not to convince the reader that she is an actor in a religiously ethical universe; instead, she must decide for herself how to proceed in an ambiguous world in which she cannot even be certain of her own existence.

1: Kierkegaard's social critiques

In "The Present Age," Kierkegaard argues that society suffers from the "seductive uncertainty of reflection" that ultimately results in a loss of meaningful concepts.⁶⁸ He asserts that individuals are prone to excess deliberation and a lack of passion. They are so caught up in their deliberations that action is impossible; they cannot bring themselves to take a stance on issues or ideas, instead preferring to endlessly reflect. Although individuals occasionally experience sudden enthusiasm, these are quickly followed by a return to apathy. Kierkegaard argues that this lack of passion leads to the development of "representational ideas." Rather than tearing down or replacing systems of meaning, individuals in a passionless age engage in dialectic practice without any move towards synthesis. They thus reduce the values and "inward reality" of concepts until they contain only tepid reflections. In other words, representational ideas preserve the *structures* of important concepts but rob them of their substance. These concepts lose any meaning they once had—they are nothing more than an illusory barrier against the nothingness that society so greatly fears.

For Kierkegaard, it is possible for individuals to break free both of their own excess deliberation and the meaningless concepts of society. Individuals become aware by first breaking "loose from the bonds of [their] own reflection[s]" in a passionate decision (Kierkegaard 48). However, even after freeing themselves from their own reflections, individuals find themselves in the "vast prison" of the reflections of others—they cannot escape the confines of society. The individual "can only escape this second imprisonment through the inwardness of religion."⁶⁹ For Kierkegaard, then, it is impossible to escape the uncertainty of society without the help of God. He asserts that the individual finds religion and escapes reflection by "leaping into the depths," or enthusiastically embracing action and decision in pursuit of faith.⁷⁰ This moment of passion is the essential antidote to the nothingness of society.

⁶⁸ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Present Age, and Of the Difference Between a Genius and an Apostle*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 34.

⁶⁹ Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, 48.

⁷⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, 58.

2: *Augusto as a representation of Kierkegaard's individual*

Augusto is a representation of Kierkegaard's critiques of society. He is deeply plagued by his lack of passion and boredom: "It seems to be the case that I have been boring myself to death without knowing it...there is such a thing as an unconscious tedium...Tedium is the foundation of life."⁷¹ In order to provide some distraction to his endless tedium, Augusto decides to believe he is madly in love with Eugenia. However, he does not love Eugenia as herself, but as the concept he has constructed of her. Like Kierkegaard describes, relationships—including Augusto's—lose meaning when everyday life is considered to be less important than representational ideas such as love. Augusto asks if there is anything more "to being in love than thinking it is so."⁷² His empty concept of love demonstrates how his lack of passion has robbed ideas of their meaning, even in his effort to escape his tedium. Moreover, his penchant for monologues is just another way in which he fills the silence with meaningless words and excess deliberation. Augusto's lack of passion results in an ultimate loss of value and meaning, and this manifests in his reflections. In a conversation with Victor, Augusto demonstrates his belief that there is no true meaning to existence, and thus no guidance for *how* to live:

"Then what difference does it make whether you get your distraction in one way or another? Why may not one play badly? And what does it mean to play well or to play badly? Why shouldn't we move these pieces in some other way than we do?"⁷³

Augusto cannot make a passionate decision without guiding values. His life is thus one of tedium, meaningless, and emptiness, just as Kierkegaard writes about in "The Present Age."

Augusto's only moment of true, sustained passion is when he learns he is nothing more than a character in Unamuno's *nivola*. He allows himself to feel and thus truly experience his own existence rather than only reflecting on it in his mind. As a result of this moment of enthusiasm, he decides to take his life into his own hands by killing

⁷¹ Miguel de Unamuno, *Mist: A Tragicomic Novel*, trans. Warner Fite (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), 49.

⁷² Unamuno, *Mist*, 98.

⁷³ Unamuno, *Mist*, 40.

himself (Unamuno 288, 291). For Augusto, this is the ultimate form of becoming an individual and refusing to be a mere creation of Unamuno's imagination. However, the novel ends with tragedy: it is unclear if Augusto killed himself, or if Unamuno killed him. In other words, there can be no certainty about whether or not Augusto finally took a passionate action that truly belonged to him as an individual. The doctor in the novel, after examining Augusto, suggests that it was suicide, "and nothing but suicide. That is what he wanted, and he had his own way!"⁷⁴ However, the character Unamuno also suggests that Augusto's "suicide" was really the work of his author: "And I [Unamuno] even repented of having killed him. I came to believe that he had been right, and that I ought to have let him have his own way and commit suicide."⁷⁵ It is therefore left ambiguous whether or not Augusto ever escaped his prison of reflection through *action* to become an individual in the Kierkegaardian sense.

3: *Unamuno's rejection of Kierkegaard's ethics*

The ambiguity of Augusto's death undermines Kierkegaard's ethics and rejects his concept of the universal and the exception. Kierkegaard's philosophy is built on the existence of concepts of good and evil. For Kierkegaard, universals exist as forms of ethical demands or norms, and—under extraordinary circumstances—an individual can be an exception to these universals. The exception moves beyond the universal and thus provides a way to analyze more deeply the limits or expectations of the universal. Faith often provides the basis for these exceptions, particularly when God's moral imperatives are in conflict with ethical expectations.

Unlike Kierkegaard's God, the character of Unamuno as Augusto's creator or "God" provides no such universals for his creations. Unamuno shrouds the "nivolistic" world in the titular *niebla*, leaving only shadowy concepts rather than clear ethical imperatives. Augusto's monologue demonstrates the ultimate uncertainty in *Niebla*: "We are traveling through a wild and tangled forest, Orfeo, in which there are no trails. We make the trails ourselves with our feet as we go along at random...What necessity is there that God should be, or the

⁷⁴ Unamuno, *Mist*, 318.

⁷⁵ Unamuno, *Mist*, 319.

world, or anything whatever?”⁷⁶ The “wild and tangled forest” of life provides no clear path, and the existence of a God to define ethical demands is left uncertain.

Perhaps more importantly, Unamuno suggests that the individual cannot even be sure that she owns her own actions. It is for this reason that Unamuno undermines the entirety of Kierkegaard’s ethical universe: if individuals have no more control than characters in a novel, there cannot be a notion of agency that provides a basis for moral action. There is no certainty as to whether or not Augusto, in a sustained experience of passion, finally became an individual. There is not even clarity as to the character Unamuno’s agency. Augusto asks Unamuno if it is possible “that it is you and not I who are the fictitious entity, the one that does not really exist, who is neither living nor dead?”⁷⁷ Moreover, the reader is also forced to doubt her own existence. Augusto declares to Victor: “I want to make the reader of his *nivola* doubtful of his own solid reality, if only for a passing moment, and take his turn in believing that he is only a ‘novelistic’ personage like ourselves.”⁷⁸ He argues that this is for the salvation of the reader, because the most “liberating effect” of art is to make the individual doubt her own existence. Perhaps this liberation could be enough to create a moment of passion for the reader, but the question of action and agency remains.

In this way, Unamuno rejects Kierkegaard’s idea that an individual can become authentic through faith in God, and thus undermines his conception of the universal/the exception. For Unamuno, the distinction between the creator and the created does not exist, and this ambiguity extends to the world of the reader. We cannot be sure that our actions are our own, and so we cannot understand what it means to be an ethical agent in the Kierkegaardian sense. Unamuno’s ethical ambiguity undermines the concept of agency necessary to sustain Kierkegaard’s idea of the exception. Neither Augusto, the character Unamuno, nor the reader can be certain that his

⁷⁶ Unamuno, *Mist*, 71.

⁷⁷ Unamuno, *Mist*, 295.

⁷⁸ Unamuno, *Mist*, 288.

actions are his own. In the face of this uncertainty, Unamuno offers no guidance as to how the individual should act.

Kierkegaard's philosophy relies on individual action necessitated by the existence of a God. The individual breaks out of the cycle of inward reflection only through the inwardness of religion, and religion supersedes universal ethics to provide the basis for action. In contrast, Unamuno leaves uncertain whether or not the individual can have truly authentic action (Augusto's suicide), and even undermines the experience of consciousness itself. *Niebla* urges readers to determine how they themselves will live their lives in an ambiguous and misty world; however, the tragic twist is that we cannot be sure if our decisions to choose one way or another are our own. How do we break free from the insidious cycle of reflection? How do we make ethical decisions? What does it mean to truly be conscious? Kierkegaard prescribes faith as a solution and an antidote, but Unamuno provides no such synthesis: that is the burden of the reader.

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Lionheart

Yuchen Zhou

I don't know what to say
As if it was yesterday
As if I was wise
But nothing changes, nothing gets better
I can still hear you laughing
And I can still see you sitting on the seats by the window
You have no idea what I will do
So that I can have you longer

A little piece of the sky is missing
I see it from here
a gap that will never close
It has the shape of you
I wish we can have everything we used to have
and never lose them again
But nobody will, in a thousand years,
be like us again.

I see,
light is shining through the gray clouds,
What does it mean?
I don't know yet

I hope,
you have been to the place
where is nice and beautiful
where you can think about me
because I always think about you

*I am dreaming about you all night
What a beautiful dream!
Tell me, do I have
a spot in your lionheart
I dream of a Kingdom for you
where you are the king
You know, you always have a
spot in my lionheart.*

And on this note
is still your handwriting
and on the table lies
your opened book
Outside is your footprint
your feet used to step on the sandy path
and on your sweater
your smell still exists

And on the old record player,
your vinyl is spinning
I can clearly hear your voice
and feel like you are still here
I can see your gestures
I almost think that you are listening to it with me
The door is still open
because she hopes for your visit.

I still feel like
you will be back soon
All you need to know is
how much I miss you
And with every breath
and also with every step
you seem to walk and live
with me

What remains is your love
years full of love
the glow in everyone's eyes,
seems to tell me about you
Millions of stars at night,
but only one is shimmering
in the distance and faded
but I will remember it forever

And I think life is more than
name, picture, and date.
there is wish, time
and all the experience with you
there are people who love you
your favorite movies, your favorite food
your move, your facial expressions
your honesty and your smile

*I am dreaming about you all night
What a beautiful dream!
Tell me, do I have
a spot in your lionheart
I dream of a Kingdom for you
where you are the king
You know, you always have a
spot in my lionheart.*

Finally, there is something
that I can promise you:
that I will never forget you
I have never forgotten you
I laugh with you for a while
sit with you by the window
My lionheart, I will share it
so that I can have you longer

Visions of Art in Existentialist Philosophy: Weil, Camus, and Sartre

Hannah Kunzman

Abstract

This paper analyzes the role of art in three different existentialist works: *The Need for Roots* by Simone Weil, *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus, and *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre. These three different visions of the role of art—art as a model for harmony, art as a confrontation with the absurd, and art as an escape from existence—help to elucidate some of the key concerns of each of these thinkers. For Weil, the beauty of art demonstrates a sense of harmony that we cannot understand, but that can perhaps orient us towards goodness in our own ethical lives. For Camus, art provides a way for the individual to embrace the absurdity of the world rather than hiding or attempting to solve the irrationality. For Sartre, art can either provide the illusion of a meaningful existence, or it can escape it. The narrator of *Nausea* explores both of these options, and ultimately confronts the heaviness of his own existence by choosing to write a fantastical novel. The paper concludes by suggesting that each of these conceptions of art and its role in the world clarifies the philosophical emphases of each of these thinkers: Weil emphasizes the needs of the soul and the creation of an ethical world; Camus, the need to confront the world's absurdity; and Sartre, the project of giving meaning to our otherwise empty existences.

Existentialism takes seriously the lived experience of the individual—indeed, this embodied perspective defines who we are. Rather than developing abstract ethical theories or worldviews from the perspective of the singular subject, existentialists emphasize the freedom all individuals possess. The question of how to proceed in an irrational, often incoherent world can terrify the individual, who may choose either to embrace or to hide from this freedom. In this paper, I will examine the role of art⁷⁹ as it relates to themes of ethicality, absurdity, and existence in existentialist thought. I will analyze works

⁷⁹ In my usage of the term “art,” I include visual art, music, and novels. I will not delve into the distinctions between the three in this paper

from three important existentialist philosophers:⁸⁰ *The Need for Roots* by Simone Weil, *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus, and *Nausea* by Sartre. It is important to note that this paper does not seek to provide a comprehensive view of the role of art in existentialist philosophy, nor even in the work of these thinkers. Rather, it is an exploration of the various ways in which existentialists have imagined the role of art in our existences and the absurd world. §1 will analyze Weil's concept of art as a model for harmony and her argument that the contemplation of beauty can continually orient us towards goodness. §2 will present art in *The Myth of Sisyphus* as a confrontation with the absurd, and assert that for Camus, the value of art is not intrinsic, but rather lies in the individual's interaction with it. Finally, §3 will argue that Roquetin's experiences in *Nausea* represent Sartre's idea that music can escape the heaviness of existence. However, Sartre suggests that some art can also undermine the existentialist concept of meaninglessness. These three different models of art demonstrate the different ways in which art can intersect with existentialist philosophy, and elucidates some of the differences in each thinkers' conceptions of the world and individual existence.

1: Art as a Model for Harmony

In *The Need for Roots*, Simone Weil argues that the beauty of works of art can present a model of the unrealized good and harmony to which humanity can aspire. Weil's ethical theory stems from a person's obligations towards others. These obligations are more fundamental than rights—which are “subordinate and relative” to obligations—and are binding only on human beings rather than collectivities.⁸¹ The only time in which human beings can escape these binding obligations is when two obligations conflict. Weil argues that “the imperfections of a social order can be measured by the number of situations of this kind it harbours within itself.”⁸² Unfortunately, she notes, humans have no method for minimizing these dilemmas of incompatible obligations. Indeed, she asserts that “we cannot even be sure that the idea of an

⁸⁰ Not all of these figures accepted the title of “existentialist,” or even of “philosopher,” but all are commonly considered today to be a part of this philosophical movement

⁸¹ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, trans. Arthur Wills (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), 3-4.

⁸² Weil, *The Need for Roots*, 5.

order in which all obligations would be compatible with one another isn't itself a fiction."⁸³

Weil suggests that we can perhaps sense this concept of true harmony through the contemplation of beauty, including beautiful works of art. These works of art demonstrate "*ensembles* in which independent factors concur, in a manner impossible to understand, so as to form a unique thing of beauty."⁸⁴ Weil argues that this beauty demonstrates the presence of some force similar to the wisdom we desire in developing an ethical society. As such, while humans cannot understand the organizations nor the elements that produce this harmony, they can understand what it ultimately *is* by focusing their attention on that which is beautiful in the world. Moreover, she asserts that:

“The contemplation of veritable works of art, and much more still that of the beauty of the world, and again much more that of the unrealized good to which we aspire, can sustain us in our efforts to think continually about that human order which should be the subject uppermost in our minds.”⁸⁵

For Weil, viewing works of art not only helps us sense the presence of harmony or wisdom, but also *continually orients us towards reaching towards that ideal*. This orientation towards goodness helps us to resist the “great instigators of violence”⁸⁶ and their claims that blind forces drive our world. Instead, Weil argues that we can understand that these forces are limited, and that beauty—although we cannot fully understand it—can bring the world into a “united whole.”⁸⁷ Weil’s belief in the existence of true harmony echoes both Platonic and Christian thought. However, she remains rooted in the reality we experience, and does not travel to purely abstract plains of thought. Her insistence on the obligations we all have to one another reminds us that her vision of harmony is tied to the vision of an ethical society for *all*, not the disembodied subject without social class or situation. For Weil, art demonstrates the existence of true harmony and reminds us to continue striving for its realization in our world, *for* our world.

⁸³ Weil, *The Need for Roots*, 10-11.

⁸⁴ Weil, *The Need for Roots*, 11.

⁸⁵ Weil, *The Need for Roots*, 11.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

2: Art as a Confrontation with the Absurd

Albert Camus presents an analysis of art and artistic expression in *The Myth of Sisyphus* that portrays art as an individualized reflection of the absurd world. Camus suggests that art represents an attempt to understand or explain one's experiences in the world: "If the world were clear, art would not exist."⁸⁸ However, for Camus, art is not a way to find meaning in this ambiguous world. Instead, art is non-transcendental, and does not reach a universal meaning. Rather than extrapolating from particular experiences to a unified understanding of reality, art portrays only a singular perspective on existence. In other words, the artist's task is not to explain, but to describe.

For Camus, the artist should not attempt to give answers or make lasting testaments in her art. Instead, she must understand that absurd art does not seek to create meaning where there is none; it only presents the ambiguity, illusion, and tormented logic already filling the absurd world. Indeed, art should not even provide a reply to the absurdity.⁸⁹ Moreover, she must also realize that it will eventually fade into nothingness, as all humans and their experiences do. Her works may contradict each other, or correct past mistakes, but ultimately her art will "manifest its utter futility."⁹⁰ Nevertheless, art can play an important role in her attempts to process her own existence: "Perhaps we shall be able to overtake that elusive feeling of absurdity in the different but closely related worlds of intelligence, of the art of living, or of art itself."⁹¹ Camus requires the same of the artist as he does for all individuals facing the absurdity of existence—"revolt, freedom, and diversity."⁹²

While Weil argues that art is meaningful for the elusive sense of beauty it contains, Camus asserts that neither art nor the process of creation holds any *intrinsic* meaning. He asserts that "none of all this

⁸⁸ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 98.

⁸⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 112.

⁹⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 117.

⁹¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 12.

⁹² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 117.

has any real meaning,”⁹³ and that in art, “the concrete signifies nothing more than itself...creating or not creating changes nothing.”⁹⁴ In other words, not only does art hold no innate meaning, but it also carries no “value” in the sense of moving us towards any greater ethical good, or helping us understand reality beyond our own existences. This does not mean it has no place in the absurd world, but rather that it is not valuable in and of itself—the individual’s interactions with the creation of art or the art itself are more important.

As a result, art becomes the way in which we confront the absurdity of existence. Camus asserts that the purpose of human will is to maintain awareness of our experience; however, he notes that this is difficult to do. He argues that struggles of creating art builds the discipline necessary to face the reality of existence: “But perhaps the great work of art has less importance in itself than in the ordeal it demands of a man and the opportunity it provides him of overcoming his phantoms and approaching a little closer to his naked reality.”⁹⁵ For Camus, then, the product of art is less meaningful than its process of creation. Creating art moves the artist towards confronting the absurdity of her own existence without hiding behind false meaning or universals.

3: Art as an Escape from Existence

Sartre’s *Nausea* is concerned with the heaviness of existence and suggests that music is an essence that can escape it. For Sartre, music does not exist in the same sense that humans do. The narrator of the novel, Roquentin, describes music as being “beyond”—if he were to lift the record player needle, or even snap the record in half, he would still not reach the music. The music, Roquentin suggests, is always beyond something, even the instruments or voices that comprise it. There is nothing superfluous about music that ties it to existants, and it is in this model that Roquentin finds realizes that this lack of superfluidity is what he desires for his own existence:

“It [the music] does not exist because it has nothing superfluous: it is all the rest which in relation to it is

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 97-98.

⁹⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 115.

superfluous. It is. And I, too, wanted to *be*...at the bottom of all these attempts which seemed without bonds, I find the same desire again: to drive existence out of me, to rid the passing moment of their fat...to give back at last the sharp, precise sound of a saxophone note.”⁹⁶

For Roquetin, music escapes the heaviness of existence that is the root cause of his “nausea” throughout the novel. Although humans are tied to our bodies—and thus we cannot escape our existence—Roquetin also suggests that the creation of music could perhaps be a way to justify one’s existence. As he listens to the music, he imagines the creators of existence, and muses on how they are like “dead people” to him, or “the heroes of a novel.”⁹⁷ Even though the creators may have imagined themselves buried under the weight of their own existence, Roquetin argues that they have ultimately “washed themselves of the sin of existing.”⁹⁸ As Roquetin turns back to the issue of his own existence, he decides that he will justify his own existence by writing a novel; this novel will not be something that reflects the history of the world, but rather something fantastical, akin to the music he hears in the café.

Roquetin’s decision to write a novel seemingly stands in contrast to some of his earlier statements in *Nausea*. At one point, Roquetin muses to himself: “To think there are idiots who get consolation from the fine arts.”⁹⁹ However, this statement becomes clearer when he visits the salon Bordurin-Renaudas, which contains portraits of important figures in Bouville’s history. There is a key distinction between the music in the café, or the novel Roquetin wants to write, and these portraits: the portraits seek to preserve achievements, and thus provide a false consolation that the subjects’ lives had meaning. Those who view the art in the gallery are soothed by the implicit message that there exists meaning and continuity. However, for the existentialist narrator, these portraits are about existence, and existence is pointless; this art is unsettling rather than comforting. As he leaves the gallery, he ironically remarks: “Farewell, beautiful lilies, elegant in your painted little sanctuaries, good-bye,

⁹⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander (New York: New Directions, 1952), 175.

⁹⁷ Sartre, *Nausea*, 177.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Sartre, *Nausea*, 174.

lovely lilies, our pride and reason for existing, good-bye you bastards!”¹⁰⁰ These portraits, like painted lilies, hold a false sense of eternity. Although they portray themselves to be lasting testimonials to human achievements, Bouville’s “pride and reason for existing,” they are nothing more than empty brush strokes on canvas.

Weil, Camus, and Sartre present differing, yet related, visions of the role of art in existentialist philosophy. Each of these ideas helps to elucidate some of the key distinctions in each thinkers’ philosophy, and also demonstrates some of their deepest concerns. Weil’s religious inclinations—through unorthodox and nonsectarian—drives the concept of true harmony or a united whole in which all ethical obligations can be fulfilled. Thus, for Weil, art is a way of continually orienting the individual towards the pursuit of goodness—even if we cannot be sure that it truly exists. Her philosophy emphasizes the needs of the individual soul that allow us to project outwards into an ethical existence. In contrast, Camus’ vision of art does not move outwards towards a harmony within the world, but is rather a way for the individual to confront the absurd world.

Camus argues that the creation or contemplation of absurd art drives the individual to continually face and recognize the absurdity in the world, rather than attempting to provide false solutions or illusions against it. For Camus, then, the emphasis is on our task to embrace the absurd and live a life full of embodied experience. Finally, Sartre creates a distinction between art that affirms a falsely meaningful existence and art that escapes existence. The gallery in Bouville, with the portraits of historical individuals, assigned meaning where there was none; Roquetin sneers at the individuals who found comfort in these illusions. However, at the end of the novel, Roquetin realizes that there are some art forms that can provide a way out of the nausea-inducing existence. Music, which exists outside of any existent, escapes existence, and the creation of something without material referents—music, a fantastical novel—can perhaps justify one’s own existence. Thus, in *Nausea*, Sartre is primarily concerned with existence, and how one can escape or justify it; art provides a way to do so.

¹⁰⁰ Sartre, *Nausea*, 94.

Although these emphases—the needs of the individual soul and the ethical society, the absurdity of the world, and the heaviness of existence—seem sometimes disparate or divergent, they are all deeply concerned with how the individual should proceed in the face of ambiguity. Art, when it defies prescriptions or mandates, reflects this lack of clarity. It is in this uncertainty that Weil, Camus, and Sartre each embrace their deepest concerns, and encourage others to do the same.

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In the Still of the Night

Quint Hubbard

In the still of the night, lowly creatures stir. The branches of trees sway, leaves fall to the ground. A drunken man stupors wayward, a raccoon rummages through trash. The fog rolls in thicker; a light breeze, crisp morning air. All these sounds I hear, sights I see, the air I feel—all too real for me to bear. Simple, quiet, desolate. My mind alone continues to whirl. The future, the past, and all else there is to be worried about. The real, the unreal, the potentially real and the all-too-real—all too much to bear. Every bad joke, awkward silence, drunken night and scraped knee, I am at once guilty for. This guilt consumes me. Every pitiful ant to meet its end under the weight of my thumb. And an ant I shall be to the universe! Lowly ant, crawl wayward into the night and may you too meet your end when the time is right. “When the time is right”—as if I did not squash ants merely on a whim. “When the time is right”—as if such a whimsical death will not also befall me. Lowly ant, crawl wayward into the night—may the branches of trees sway, raccoons rummage through trash, and the drunkards stumble home—and may you also find your way, through your guilt and your worried mind, and when it comes time for your whimsical end, may you look up at the thumb which condemns you and laugh.

