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“A freedom which is interested only in denying freedom must be denied. And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: 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. I am oppressed if I am thrown into prison, but not if I am kept from throwing my neighbor into prison.”

— Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*



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## From the Editors

As the sun of vaccination finally breaks the long night of the COVID-19 pandemic, our purpose as a publication has become a subject of much closer scrutiny than Eli and I could have expected coming into the world of The Reed two years ago. How does one engage with the world in a way that honors the legacy of the objective aspirations of philosophical inquiry intact? More importantly, how do we make sure that said preservation does not come at the cost of individual voices? How do we draw the line between creative license and overseeing an editorial process that would not result in churning out pieces that spoke in pure accordance with each other at the cost of meaningful debate? How do we facilitate meaningful debate without creating space for mindless contrarianism? These are only a few of the many topics discussed in the very difficult process of birthing the 23rd Edition of this most sacred of Existential publications.

After many coffee-fueled late-night arguments on and about these very questions, we had our realization. To engage truly, in the philosophical sense, with the world requires a kind of stepping out of it. To say what is true in an age of a pandemic furthered mired by the disheartening urgency of social reform, we chose to speak to the concepts that underpin inclusion and exclusion: love, hope, belonging, freedom and all aligned notions.

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We thank you for your time and trust that this is only the beginning of our philosophical journey together.

Sivuse Bantubonkhe Mbingo, *Editor-in-Chief*  
& Elijah Graf, *Vice Editor*

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# Kierkegaard's Catholicism

By Dario Trimarchi

## Abstract

This paper will aim to examine the Catholic interpretation of the thought of the Lutheran philosopher Søren Kierkegaard proposed by Cornelio Fabro, an Italian Catholic philosopher. Its main aims will be to clarify Fabro's argument and understand whether his interpretation can be assessed positively. Firstly, it will describe Fabro's context, which is essential in order to understand his attempt to make Kierkegaard acceptable to the Catholic Church. Secondly, it will provide an overview of Fabro's interpretation of Kierkegaard and of his relationship with Catholicism, particularly through reference to the concept of the "Imitation of Christ" and Mariology. Thirdly, it will try to find evidence for his main claims in Kierkegaard's own works, particularly the Journals and Papers. Finally, it will interpret Fabro's argument as an attempt to identify Catholic sensibilities in Kierkegaard's thought and it will endorse his interpretation overall, though with minor disagreements on more specific issues, such as Kierkegaard's opinions on celibacy and on the possibility of a counter-reformation. This interpretation of Fabro, who is widely unknown in the English-speaking world, will provide a new insight and perspective on the analysis of Kierkegaard's theology which could challenge the dominant Protestant interpretation through an in-depth analysis of his works.

# **An Analysis of Fabro's Catholic Interpretation of Kierkegaard**

## **Introduction**

The aim of this paper will be to examine the Catholic interpretation of the thought of the Lutheran philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) proposed by Cornelio Fabro (1911-1995), an Italian Catholic philosopher.

Fabro's interpretation challenges the dominant Protestant understanding of Kierkegaard's philosophy while also providing innovative arguments within the Catholic literature on the topic (represented by authors such as Haecker and Przywara) (Furnal 2015). Therefore, the importance of this research is given by the fact that it widens our understanding of Kierkegaard's theology, providing the interpretation of an author who is widely unknown in the English-speaking world (Furnal 2015) and who has presented a perspective on the topic which is antithetical to the dominant one.

This paper will try to achieve two main goals. First, to clarify Fabro's argument by interpreting it as an attempt to make Kierkegaard acceptable to the Catholic world (rather than as an attempt to make a Catholic out of him). It will describe how he identifies in Kierkegaard a disappointed Lutheran who is using Catholicism as a corrective for Protestantism, without fully embracing it. Second, to understand whether Fabro's Catholic interpretation of Kierkegaard can be assessed positively. A balanced approach, which analyses both strengths and weaknesses, is necessary to ensure that Fabro's interpretation can be used correctly to provide a good insight into the relationship between Kierkegaard and Catholicism.

I will begin by describing Fabro's context, which is essential in order to understand his argument as an attempt to introduce Kierkegaard in the cultural environment of the twentieth century Catholic Church. Secondly, I will provide an overview of Fabro's interpretation of Kierkegaard and his relationship with Catholicism. I will particularly look at the issues of the "Imitation of Christ" and

Mariology, two highly relevant concepts in Catholic theology that Kierkegaard seems to be praising. Thirdly, I will try to find evidence for Fabro's main claims in Kierkegaard's work, particularly the Journals and Papers. Finally, I will show some minor inaccuracies in Fabro's interpretation of Kierkegaard's use of Catholicism as a corrective for Protestantism, and I will exemplify this with the issue of "celibacy". Notwithstanding this, I will argue that his interpretation of Kierkegaard as a disappointed Lutheran with Catholic sensibilities is correct overall.

### **Fabro's Context**

Cornelio Fabro was an Italian Catholic priest, academic and philosopher, known for his works on Thomism. However, his name was often related to the works of Kierkegaard, which he translated and reinterpreted.

Although well known in Italy, Fabro's interpretation of Kierkegaard was, and still is, largely unknown in the English-speaking world <sup>1</sup>. Moreover, his argument is not always clear. In his interpretation, there is certainly an attempt to identify Catholic sensibilities in Kierkegaard, although it is unclear to what extent this interpretation depicts Kierkegaard as a Catholic or as a pseudo-Catholic. Part of the confusion is given by the fact that in many of his works, Fabro lets Kierkegaard speak for himself through direct quotations from the Journals and Papers. That is not to say that Fabro does not provide us with his own comments, but it means that he often relies on direct evidence from Kierkegaard without the mediation of his own view.

Nevertheless, I believe that one thing can be clarified immediately: Fabro is not trying to make a Catholic out of Kierkegaard. Although he makes reference to German philosophers like Haecker and Przywara, who have tried to find in the Danish philosopher the possibility of a conversion to Catholicism <sup>2</sup>, he distanced himself from them, providing a slightly different argument

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<sup>1</sup> Furnal 2015: 182

<sup>2</sup> 1956: 68

and clarifying explicitly that it is absurd to depict Kierkegaard as a Catholic<sup>3</sup>.

The question remains: what is the message that Fabro is trying to convey? I believe that the best way to understand it is by looking at the context in which Fabro lived. Joshua Furnal has followed this path by focusing on the situation of the Catholic Church and using it as the key to understanding Fabro's interest in Kierkegaard<sup>4</sup>. Fabro writes in the context of the Thomistic revival in the Catholic cultural environment, which started after Pope Leo XII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris*<sup>5</sup> and which continued with Pope Pius X's condemnation of Modernism<sup>6</sup>. The Catholic Church looked back at the Middle Ages in theology, being suspicious of the new changes in continental philosophy. This caused the reaction of the Ressourcement, which supported the idea of being open to Modernism<sup>7</sup>. As Furnal noted, Fabro became close to this movement and Kierkegaard's philosophy<sup>8</sup>.

At this point, as Furnal explains, Fabro, who was a Thomist, found in Kierkegaard several similarities with Thomas Aquinas<sup>9</sup>. This began with a reinterpretation of Kierkegaard's relationship with the role of reason<sup>10</sup>. On this last point, Fabro challenged those philosophers who interpreted Kierkegaard as an irrationalist thinker. Instead, he argued that Kierkegaard depicted reason as separate from faith but in a positive relationship with it (similarly to Aquinas)<sup>11</sup>. Reason helps in recognising its own limits in front of the paradoxes of religion, and it collaborates with faith by avoiding speculations on what is believed<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> 1948: 1033-1034

<sup>4</sup> 2015

<sup>5</sup> 1879

<sup>6</sup> 1907

<sup>7</sup> Furnal 2015: 185-186

<sup>8</sup> 2015: 190

<sup>9</sup> 2015: 191-192

<sup>10</sup> Furnal 2015: 192

<sup>11</sup> 1956: 69-70

<sup>12</sup> 1956: 69-70

This information helps us in understanding what message Fabro is conveying. He is not trying to interpret Kierkegaard as a Catholic, but he is instead trying to make Kierkegaard acceptable to the Catholic Church<sup>13</sup>. In order to do so, he has tried to identify in Kierkegaard some Catholic sensibilities. Some of them are listed by Furnal, such as Kierkegaard's Mariology or his Ecclesiology<sup>14</sup>. However, Fabro also talks about Kierkegaard's views on Imitation, from which his views on the saints, celibacy and the monastery are derived, and which bring the Danish philosopher closer to the Catholic Church without making him a Catholic. This concept of Imitation will be explored more in depth in the next section.

Nevertheless, Fabro's attempt to make Kierkegaard acceptable to the Catholic cultural environment does not imply that he fabricates facts and statements about his philosophy. On the contrary, in the following sections I will show how Fabro depicts Kierkegaard as a disappointed Protestant with some Catholic sensibilities which he uses to correct the degeneration of Protestantism. I will also highlight how Fabro's claims are based upon an overall accurate reading of Kierkegaard's own works.

### **Fabro's interpretation: Kierkegaard, Protestantism and Catholicism**

Having clarified that Fabro is not re-interpreting Kierkegaard as a potential Catholic, it is now necessary to analyse his positive interpretation of the Danish philosopher. Fabro's idea of Kierkegaard is that of a Protestant, but a "disappointed" one because of the status of Christianity in Protestantism and in Denmark in particular.

Fabro identified in Kierkegaard several criticisms against Protestantism, among which we can list the influence of Hegelianism<sup>15</sup>, the excessive secularisation<sup>16</sup>, the theological role of the Virgin

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<sup>13</sup> Furnal 2015: 199

<sup>14</sup> 2015: 198-210

<sup>15</sup> 1959: 852-857

<sup>16</sup> 1957: 127

Mary<sup>17</sup> and the abandonment of the concept of the *Imitatio Christi* (“Imitation of Christ”)<sup>18</sup>. Although all these issues are fascinating and worth analysing, I will explore only the last two for the sake of conciseness. That is because Imitation is an issue which has rarely been explored and, along with Mariology, is the point on which Kierkegaard appears to be closest to Catholicism.

To understand what the idea of “Imitation” is, it is worth starting from the role it plays in Fabro’s interpretation of Kierkegaard. According to the Italian thinker, Kierkegaard accuses later Protestantism of having abandoned the idea of Christ as a “prototype”, i.e., an example to follow and imitate. This has contributed to an extent to the victory of worldliness and, overall, has led Protestantism to focus solely on ‘grace’ as a path to salvation, and to ignore ‘good works’<sup>19</sup>.

In Fabro’s view, Kierkegaard’s criticisms are not solely directed at the condition of later Protestantism. Effectively, the Danish philosopher also ascribes some responsibilities to Luther’s actions and preaching<sup>20</sup>. Kierkegaard is particularly harsh in those passages cited by Fabro in which Luther is described as an anti-apostle who has defended and created a more ‘human’ and ‘worldly’ version of Christianity<sup>21</sup>, and who is responsible for the excessive attention of later Protestantism to the idea of Christ as a gift and the rejection of Christ as a prototype. This finds its origins in the fact that Luther himself focused too much on the first and ignored the latter<sup>22</sup>.

However, Fabro admits that Kierkegaard still agrees with Luther, justifying most of his errors<sup>23</sup>. Here Fabro’s argument appears in line with that of Kim and Rasmussen. In their interpretation, Kierkegaard is acknowledging that Luther has overstressed the idea of Christ as a gift, but Luther is also contextualised as responding to

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<sup>17</sup> 1948

<sup>18</sup> 1973

<sup>19</sup> 1973: 260-261

<sup>20</sup> 1984

<sup>21</sup> 1984: 9-10

<sup>22</sup> 1984: 9

<sup>23</sup> 1984: 10

the traditional importance of the concept of Christ as a prototype in Catholicism and the Middle Ages<sup>24</sup>. In this context, Luther focused more on the idea of Christ as a gift, and less as a model to imitate, as a form of counterbalance.

In Fabro's interpretation, Catholicism has in Kierkegaard the role of a corrective for these degenerate aspects of Protestantism, as it has kept in its tradition the importance of Christ as a model to imitate<sup>25</sup>. In other words, for Kierkegaard, by looking at how Catholicism positively understands the concept of Imitation and by comparing it with the Protestant rejection of it, we can identify where Protestantism has committed some mistakes and we can manage to solve them.

The relevance of the Imitation of Christ in Kierkegaard is depicted by Fabro as inherently connected to the importance of the communication of truth. The two models that Kierkegaard uses to exemplify this concept, Socrates (for the natural truth) and Christ (for the supernatural truth), lived without writing and communicated the truth directly through their actions<sup>26</sup>. Hence, what has to be done, or at least ought to be tried by men, is to live and be in the truth by striving to be Christ-like, while also being conscious of their inability to be Christ.

From this conception of Imitation, Kierkegaard derives his Catholic corrections to Protestantism. An example is when he praises Catholicism for worshipping the saints and martyrs, who followed the path of the Imitation of Christ<sup>27</sup>, something which Protestants rejected. There is also the case of the monasteries. Fabro identifies in Kierkegaard several critiques against the monastic life of the Middle Ages, as a misunderstanding of how the Imitation of Christ should be properly performed. However, he also recognises in him a sentiment of regret for the Protestant abolition of the monastery, which still represented an admirable attempt to imitate Christ<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Kim and Rasmussen 2016

<sup>25</sup> 1957; 1973

<sup>26</sup> 1957: 131-133

<sup>27</sup> 1957: 127

<sup>28</sup> Fabro 1973: 259-260



Celibacy is also an interesting case in Fabro's interpretation of Kierkegaard. The Protestant pastor who lives with his wife and children and whose role in society is nothing more than that of a normal person with a job and a family is, in Kierkegaard's view, the symbol of the rejection of the *Imitatio* in favour of worldliness. The pastor's life is one of contradiction between the New Testament and his own actions<sup>29</sup>. From here comes, according to Fabro, Kierkegaard's praise of forced celibacy in the Catholic clergy, and his critique of Protestantism for the way in which it is suspicious of celibacy and labels it as wrong. Moreover, Catholicism has also the merit of venerating the "virgin", rather than the common woman as Protestantism does<sup>30</sup>.

This last point is connected to Fabro's overview of another Catholic sensibility in Kierkegaard: his Mariology. In contrast with Karl Barth as well as with most of the Protestant intellectuals, Kierkegaard praises on several occasions the Virgin Mary<sup>31</sup>. She becomes prominent in his philosophy and is even compared to Abraham as a person who accepted the radical choice imposed by religious life<sup>32</sup>.

Her acceptance to be the virgin mother of God and, more generally, her acceptance of the paradox, the scandal and the suffering that will derive from it, make her as great as Abraham and even more, as no angel came to save her child from suffering<sup>33</sup>.

Nevertheless, it is important to be reminded that Fabro is not depicting Kierkegaard as a Roman Catholic<sup>34</sup>. Although Fabro has shown us that Kierkegaard possessed several Catholic sensibilities, he accepts that the Danish philosopher remains incompatible with Catholicism in many ways. He is ultimately loyal to the Lutheran interpretation of Grace and Faith, and he admires and praises Luther and the Reformation as right and necessary<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Fabro 1974

<sup>30</sup> Fabro 1974

<sup>31</sup> Fabro 1948: 1026-1028

<sup>32</sup> Fabro 1948: 1028-1029

<sup>33</sup> Fabro 1948: 1029

<sup>34</sup> 1948: 1033-1034

<sup>35</sup> Fabro 1984: 6-7

Hence, Fabro interprets Kierkegaard's relationship with Catholicism in terms of a dialectic, in which Kierkegaard does not embrace but uses Catholicism, through his own "Catholic sensibilities", in order to correct the degeneration of Protestantism.

## **Kierkegaard's Thought**

After having clarified what Fabro's view is, I will now show whether we can find evidence for it in Kierkegaard's works. It seems evident that the issue of Imitation is a central one in Fabro's analysis. Nevertheless, it is not immune to criticisms.

It is true that there are several passages in which Kierkegaard praises the concept of the Imitation of Christ, complaining that it has been left out in Protestantism<sup>36</sup> and by Luther, as this quote seems to confirm: 'It is "imitation" (to suffer for the doctrine and what belongs to it) which must be emphasized again; in this way the task relates itself dialectically to the point where Luther eased up'<sup>37</sup>.

However, Daphne Hampson identified in Kierkegaard a coherence with a Lutheran "Nachfolge" rather than the Catholic idea of the Imitation of Christ<sup>38</sup>. The difference between the two is quite subtle and has been widely debated. In order to simplify this issue, we could say that a person who accepts the Catholic "Imitatio" does not limit himself to follow as a disciple the words and preaching of Christ, but strives to become Christ-like instead, i.e., to model his actions on those of Jesus. This is well exemplified by the attention to the saints in Catholicism, as they are seen as "holy individuals" like Christ<sup>39</sup>.

On the contrary, the concept of "Nachfolge" (which might be translated as "discipleship") in a Lutheran sense does not imply the idea that one should strive to be Christ-like, but it tries to convey the message that one should accept through faith the preachings of Christ and to follow them as a disciple of his thought. As

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<sup>36</sup> X3 A 666 n.d., 1850; X3A 750 n.d., 1851

<sup>37</sup> X4A 349 n.d., 1851

<sup>38</sup> 2006: 266-267

<sup>39</sup> Hampson 2006

Lutheranism tries to give more importance to salvation through “grace” and acceptance from God (irrespective of merits) than

Catholicism does, it also tends to focus less on the idea that one should act and be like Christ <sup>40</sup>.

Hampson’s interpretation could be confirmed by the fact that “imitation” and “imitate me” are respectively translated from the Danish “Efterfølgelsen” and “Følge mig efter”<sup>41</sup>, which conveys an idea closer to that of “following” (and hence discipleship) rather than to that of “imitating”.

However, Fabro translated Kierkegaard from Danish into Italian, and his choices are not lacking some good reasons to support them. Notwithstanding the semantic inaccuracy of the translation, the context in which these expressions are used seems to convey a clear reference to the Catholic *Imitatio Christi*. For example, the following quote appears to convey an idea of imitation: ‘What he says, therefore, is essentially this: Imitate me [følge mig efter]; hate yourself; forsake all things; crucify the flesh; take up the cross; hate father and mother, etc.’<sup>42</sup>.

This seems to be a case of imitation, given that the actions of the disciple are modelled on those of Christ himself. Moreover, even more compelling are those quotes in which he explicitly refers to Catholicism: ‘There is more significance in Catholicism simply because “imitation” (“Efterfølgelsen”) has not been relinquished completely’<sup>43</sup>.

In this last quote, it seems impossible that Kierkegaard might be referring to a Lutheran “Nachfolge”, as he is clearly specifying that the concept to which he is referring to is present in Catholicism. Moreover, in the following quote he clearly refers to “Efterfølgelsen” as something that existed and was established in Christianity before

Luther’s reformation and against which Luther reacted. Hence, if it existed before the Lutheran reformation, how can it be a “Lutheran Nachfolge”?

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<sup>40</sup> Hampson 2006

<sup>41</sup> 2006: 266

<sup>42</sup> XI1A 199 n.d., 1854

<sup>43</sup> X4A 354 n.d., 1851

‘Luther's situation was quite different in his time. Then "imitation" was in full motion and off course. Now, however, imitation has been completely abolished.’<sup>44</sup>

In other words, Fabro's interpretation seems to be coherent with Kierkegaard's works. Compelling evidence that suggests the existence of Catholic sensibilities in Kierkegaard is also given by those passages about the Virgin Mary and the Annunciation. In his Journals and Papers, he depicts her as a woman worthy of honour<sup>45</sup>, who must be praised for her “Yes” which represented the acceptance of the miracle and of the paradox of being the virgin mother of God<sup>46</sup>, against all the prejudices she was going to face<sup>47</sup>. Fabro is right in citing Fear and Trembling in his analysis. In it, Kierkegaard compares the Virgin Mary with Abraham, the Knight of Faith, by focusing on the suffering which she accepted in her life by her leap of faith<sup>48</sup>.

Nevertheless, in other cases Fabro's interpretation appears to be somewhat biased, for example when he talks about Celibacy. As I outlined earlier, Fabro stresses Kierkegaard's critique of the way in which Celibacy is treated in Protestantism and of the way in which the pastor regards marriage as something which must be done in order to be a good Christian. Although these criticisms are part of Kierkegaard's thought, and are confirmed by several quotes in which he also praises celibacy,<sup>49</sup> it is also true that his views are far from an endorsement of the Catholic idea of celibacy.

On the contrary, Kierkegaard often criticizes Catholicism and the Middle ages on this point, clarifying that it was wrong to think that ‘it was a sacrilege for a priest to marry’<sup>50</sup> or ‘to regard [...] the unmarried state, etc. as something which in and for itself could please God’<sup>51</sup>. Kierkegaard might have been a champion of celibacy as Fabro describes him, though only as a personal choice. Therefore,

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<sup>44</sup> X4A 349 n.d., 1851

<sup>45</sup> XI1A 40 n.d., 1854

<sup>46</sup> X4A 454 n.d., 1852

<sup>47</sup> VIII1A 338 n.d., 1847; X4A 520 n.d., 1852

<sup>48</sup> 1843

<sup>49</sup> VIII1A 369 n.d., 1847)

<sup>50</sup> X1A 440 n.d., 1849

<sup>51</sup> X2A 181 n.d., 1849

that does not make him an opponent of the idea of marriage for priests. What he is opposing is instead the Protestant degeneration which criticizes and ridicules celibacy<sup>52</sup>. Fabro does not explicitly deny the criticisms against the Catholic celibacy, but he simply ignores them, providing an unfair depiction of Kierkegaard's view.

However, notwithstanding this last point, I believe that Fabro is right in finding some Catholic sensibilities in Kierkegaard, as has been established above.

## **The Catholic Corrective in Kierkegaard**

On the relationship between the Danish philosopher and Catholicism, Fabro's interpretation appears to be right. The same can be said of his interpretation of Kierkegaard's opinion regarding Protestantism as 'altogether indefensible' and 'a mitigation of Christianity'<sup>53</sup>. From these criticisms and disappointment, the Catholic corrective which Fabro identified arises. A clear example is provided in the entry on Catholicism-Protestantism from the Journals and Papers.

Here, Kierkegaard depicts both Catholicism and Protestantism as necessary to each other, making Protestantism 'not qualified to stand alone'<sup>54</sup>. This is shown in the differences between the two in judging their clergy. While Catholicism's corruption would take the form of "surface sanctity", in which the Catholic will admit to not be in a position to judge the clergy spiritually but will recognize its worldliness, Protestantism's corruption would take the form of "spiritless secularism", in which the Protestant would see in the worldliness of the pastor nothing more than religiousness<sup>55</sup>. Therefore, through comparison with Catholicism, the Protestant could be able to recognize the worldliness of the pastor.

This is just a general overview of Kierkegaard's use of Catholicism as a corrective, but there are several cases in which the

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<sup>52</sup> X3A 419 n.d., 1850

<sup>53</sup> XI2A 162 n.d., 1854

<sup>54</sup> XI2A 305 n.d., 1853-54

<sup>55</sup> XI2A162 n.d., 1854

correctives are related to more specific issues, such as for monasteries or celibacy.

I believe that it is when discussing these latter specific points that Fabro's interpretation loses its accuracy. I think that Fabro is interpreting Kierkegaard as somebody who is using those Catholic correctives to "counter-reform" certain specific aspects of the Reformation (such as celibacy or the monasteries), while remaining a Lutheran overall. It is necessary to clarify that this is not something that Fabro claims explicitly. Nevertheless, by looking at how he frames certain debates, this view tends to emerge. A clear example of this is the issue discussed above: celibacy.

We have already seen how Fabro omits the parts in which Kierkegaard criticizes the compulsory nature of celibacy for priests in Catholicism. In the same article, Fabro claims the following: 'He (Kierkegaard) praises [...] Catholicism, which forces celibacy upon its priests as a guarantee of the authenticity of their mission and the transcendence and freedom of Christianity'<sup>56</sup>. He later states that this is the reason why Kierkegaard called for the return of the Religious Orders<sup>57</sup> and wrote: 'back to the monastery from which Luther broke out'<sup>58</sup>.

Firstly, the main sentence quoted is ambiguous, particularly in its original Italian version. It could either mean that Kierkegaard praised Catholicism because it has kept the institution of obligatory celibacy (which, as we have seen earlier, would not be coherent with Kierkegaard's own views); or it could simply mean that he praises Catholicism, and that Catholicism happens to enforce this rule for the reasons he has given. I leave it to the reader to decide which interpretation sounds more plausible. However, it is worth noticing that this is one of the few cases in which Fabro makes a claim about Kierkegaard's view without directly citing or referencing his original texts, suggesting that he might be aware that Kierkegaard has never

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<sup>56</sup> 1974

<sup>57</sup> 1974

<sup>58</sup> XI 1A 134 n.d, 1854

written anything in support of compulsory celibacy for the clergy and that the ambiguity of the sentence could be intentional <sup>59</sup>.

Secondly, notwithstanding this ambiguity, one thing seems clear from Fabro's following claims. According to him, Kierkegaard believes that Protestantism has got celibacy completely wrong and that it is necessary to reform it and to go back to the Catholic model <sup>60</sup>. Although Fabro does not explicitly say it, this is what seems to be suggested by the last claims cited from the article. Whether Fabro truly believed this or did it simply to make Kierkegaard more acceptable to the Catholic Church is difficult to say. In my opinion, the first option is unlikely considering Fabro's in-depth knowledge of Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, which clearly show the Danish philosopher does not want to go back to the Catholic model of Celibacy<sup>61</sup>.

Kierkegaard accepts that celibacy should be a choice and accepts this aspect of the Reformation. He simply disagrees with how Protestants have interpreted this change, i.e. as a statement of the fact that celibacy is wrong <sup>62</sup>. That is what Kierkegaard is saying. He does not want to counter-reform; he simply wants people to understand the meaning of the Reformation correctly. His unwillingness to go back to Catholicism on specific points through a "new Reformation" is explicitly stated:

'No, the evil in our age is the frivolous, profane conceit that we are fit to reform the Church; the evil in our age simply wants to take the concept of reformation in vain. [...] My idea is: the true task in our age is not to reform but to get clear about our present situation, where we are' <sup>63</sup>.

Hence, the Catholic corrective must not be interpreted as a Reformation of the Reformation, as a way of bringing back several Catholic features to Protestantism. It should instead be understood as a model of comparison, something which should lead

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<sup>59</sup> 1974

<sup>60</sup> 1974

<sup>61</sup> X1A 440 n.d., 1849

<sup>62</sup> X3A 419 n.d., 1850

<sup>63</sup> X4A 345 n.d., 1851

Kierkegaard's contemporaries to think critically and to compare how Protestantism is and how it should have been.

The difference between using Catholicism as a corrective or as a way to counter-reform is quite subtle but is fundamental, which is why it is worth clarifying it. Going back to the example of celibacy, Fabro seems to be claiming that Kierkegaard wants to counter-reform the Reformation on this point<sup>64</sup>. What Kierkegaard is claiming instead, is that the Reformation was right, but that the Protestants misunderstood it by thinking that celibacy is to be ridiculed<sup>65</sup>. Therefore, Kierkegaard's solution is to compare Protestantism with Catholicism. By doing this, it is possible to see that Catholicism got the idea of making celibacy compulsory to priests wrong<sup>66</sup>. However, it is right in its praising and encouraging chastity<sup>67</sup>. Therefore, Protestants should take this as a "corrective" for how the concept of celibacy has been understood after the Reformation. In other words: he wants to keep the Protestant freedom of choice on the matter, but he also wants to change how Protestants see celibacy.

One thing is to reform certain aspects of Protestantism and to go back to Catholicism on specific points while remaining Lutheran overall. A different one is to say that, by comparing Catholicism to Protestantism, it is possible to learn something valuable and to correct some of the interpretations which contemporary Protestants have given of the Reformation. The first one seems to be Fabro's interpretation; the latter seems to be what Kierkegaard is arguing.

It is on these points that I believe that Fabro's interpretation of Kierkegaard involves some inaccuracies. Yet, as shown earlier, he is right in finding Catholic sensibilities in Kierkegaard, in defining him as a disappointed Lutheran and recognizing in his theology an attempt to improve Protestantism by using Catholicism as a corrective, without being a Catholic overall. Moreover, on other points (like Imitation) Fabro clearly specifies that Kierkegaard does

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<sup>64</sup> 1974

<sup>65</sup> X3A 419 n.d., 1850

<sup>66</sup> X1A 440 n.d., 1849

<sup>67</sup> VIII1A 369 n.d., 1847



not want to counter-reform, but only to correct <sup>68</sup>, meaning that issues like that of celibacy are only minor inaccuracies which do not excessively undermine the overall validity of his claims.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has tried to provide an account of Cornelio Fabro's interpretation of Kierkegaard. It has tried to understand his argument better, interpreting it as a depiction of Kierkegaard not as a "pseudo-Catholic" (as other Catholic interpreters have described him) but as a disappointed Protestant with Catholic sensibilities. The paper has also endorsed this overall interpretation, but it has disagreed with Fabro on his depicting those Catholic sensibilities in Kierkegaard as a way of going back to Catholicism on specific issues, while remaining a Lutheran overall.

The importance of this research is not simply exemplified by the fact that it has provided an account of an author widely unknown in the English-speaking world, but also that it has presented an in-depth analysis of an interpretation of Kierkegaard which is alternative to the dominant Protestant understanding of his theology, this being well represented by Hampson's rejection of the presence of an idea of "Imitation" in Kierkegaard <sup>69</sup>. Therefore, a balanced assessment of Fabro's argument which recognizes and highlights both its strengths and (minor) weaknesses, can provide researchers with a new understanding of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Catholicism.

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<sup>68</sup> 1957; 1973

<sup>69</sup> 2006

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## Extinction

By Isabel Wolf

with the moon only barred from the streetlights  
by the first dead leaves which glide above the road  
you could stand in the lecture hall's half-light, watch  
the flashing of hundreds of eyes  
as they meet, as they part ways in seconds  
each glance another synapse  
in the season's only thought

i thought, when the west coast lit up,  
that i could smell smoke a thousand miles out  
or the first time a friend broke against me, the fear  
like fumes from the tears on her face  
turned gaseous in seconds— we burn here too  
hold ourselves still until smoke fills the halls  
and stumble outside with our shells on, coughing,  
swarming, loosed on the rain

under the steel clouds, i'll fly home safe  
and wait for the sirens which never come  
body bracing on the month's first wednesday  
ten times, then never again

# **Overwhelmed and Undermined: The Use of Psychoactive Substances and the Problem of Meaninglessness**

By Shane Cooney

## **Abstract**

Drug use and addiction have been dealt with extensively as social phenomena, with the latter also being studied by psychologists and other medical professionals. Neither, however, has been thoroughly examined as an existential phenomenon. The scale of this crisis is symptomatic of a much deeper problem, viz., the problem of meaninglessness. What consequences follow from the realization that life has no inherent or absolute meaning; that life is, as Albert Camus describes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, absurd? In this essay, I argue that drug use and misuse can be seen as problematic responses to the absurd. Exploring Camus' notion of absurdity and drawing on my experiences with addiction, I situate drug use within the context of the absurd, highlighting how the use of psychoactive substances is, either consciously or unconsciously, an attempt to escape the absurdity of existence. The aim of my project is to analyze drug use vis-à-vis meaning, so that we may gain insight into why some people begin and continue to use drugs, which, as I suggest, is the starting point for understanding addiction.

## **Introduction**

"I do drugs that I don't even like just so I can feel different."

When I heard my friend utter these words as he sat on the cheap futon in my living room, I understood him completely. Outwardly, his statement might appear to be a pronouncement of hedonistic tendencies, a pursuit of the euphoric pleasure that psychoactive substances can afford. But, below the surface, I believe that this statement is ultimately an expression of a person's desperate attempt to address the felt meaninglessness of life. His statement is not about using drugs to feel good; it is about not feeling bad, an effort to feel normal in an abnormal world. A struggling heroin addict, when he got off heroin, he substituted his drug of choice with various others—I did, too. He had difficulty dealing with life without using drugs—I felt the same way. He needed to have something to help him through the boredom, the suffering, the unbearable weight of the world on his shoulders—I shared that need. Like him, I would take drugs to escape, to evade the overwhelming meaninglessness of life.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over 70,200 people died from a drug overdose in the United States in 2017. On average, this means that roughly 192 people died every day from a drug overdose. As the addiction epidemic continues to worsen, and rates of drug overdose deaths continue to rise, finding the reasons that drive a person to use drugs in the first place is increasingly important. While medicine and psychology offer a wealth of invaluable information regarding the physiological and psychological factors of addiction, philosophy is particularly well-equipped to analyze the existential factors that might influence a person to use or misuse drugs.

## **Meaninglessness and the Absurd**

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus frames the problem of meaninglessness in relation to what he terms the “absurd.” While his central concern is the absurd, Camus begins his work by a discussion of suicide, asserting, “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.” All other philosophical problems are of secondary importance; metaphysical questions of being or the

construction of complex moral systems pale in comparison to the question of whether life is worth living. When it is shown that life is meaningless, suicide can follow—that voluntary act is indicative of a person's response and their surrender to the utter meaninglessness of life.

Suicide is ultimately the corollary of a person's judgment that life, because of its lack of meaning, is not worth living. Camus writes, "In a sense ... killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it." The overwhelming and incomprehensible character of life can be enough to bring a person to their knees, and some go further. There is a profound dislocation between the subject and the world, and this feeling of being alienated in one's existence can certainly lead a person to take their own life or try to escape in other ways. Camus states that "this divorce between man and his life ... is properly the feeling of absurdity." When a person realizes that there is no inherent meaning in life, they are left with little recourse for consolation. In an apathetic world, faced with the seemingly insurmountable task of coping with the profound tragedy of our lives, we face the world in opposition.

The absurd defines our confrontation with our inhuman world. However, it should be noted that the absurd is not simply the feeling that a person suffers upon realizing life has no objective meaning. Undoubtedly, there is a pronounced emotive component to absurdity, but reducing it entirely to a feeling mischaracterizes its true nature. The absurd is an actual datum of experience. It exists neither in us nor in the world but is born from the antagonistic relationship between us and the world in which we find ourselves. It amounts to a contradiction, a conflict between two terms diametrically opposed to one another. This conflict springs from what we want from—and, indeed, demand—of the world and what the world actually has to offer. The absurd is an outgrowth of human expectation—the expectation of an absolute meaning in life and its inevitable absence. The dramatic devastation that follows from the unrelenting silence of the world inevitably leads to a profound existential crisis, and it is this crisis that ushers in the absurd

realization. That realization brings with it a recognition of human insignificance and a lucid consciousness of the human condition, which, in turn, will determine the absurd individual's conduct. Becoming conscious of the absurd, then, either leads to suicide or some other form of escape, or it intensifies the passion for life despite its lack of absolute meaning.

If a person chooses to stay despite the absence of meaning, a new question emerges: how to live in this absurd universe. Ultimately, living in the face of absurdity "is a matter of persisting." It requires one to constantly revel in that profoundly unsettling disharmony between the oneself and the world. To live within the tension that keeps the absurd alive is an act of revolt; the moment when one rejects all hope and reconciliation is the beginning of truly living. Because of this, Camus maintains that "one of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt." While the absurd individual accepts their condition to an extent, it is never complete or lethargic acceptance; it is accepting the fact without acquiescing to it, acceptance coupled with revolt. One must revolt and not become apathetic or acquiescent or hopeful; revolting against the absurd is what gives our lives legitimate value. Indeed, subjective meaning, happiness, and even an existential joy might be created in that struggle.

In the same way that the absurd prevents the possibility for absolute meaning, it also precludes eternal or absolute freedom. But Camus believes that there is still room for freedom of thought and action, insofar as one does not attempt to escape, insofar as one continues to revolt. Upon the absurd realization, we recognize that we were never truly free. When we realize that we have no future, no promise of tomorrow, no definite purpose, then we can achieve a certain degree of inner freedom. In this absurd world, there is no freedom as such, nor anything like God-given freedom, i.e., eternal freedom. Ours is an inner freedom, a temporal freedom. Without the rosy pink hues of eternity painting our horizon, with only the certainty of death, we affirm our mortality and thereby liberate ourselves from all false hope that prevents us from living authentically; at once we find ourselves living without appeal, living



life with fervid intensity. Our freedom must always remain on the human scale. All meaningful freedom must, perforce, be constrained. Its limits are what substantiate its meaning. This inner freedom is the only type of freedom available to us, and we are tasked with making the most of it while we can.

This newfound independence is limited only by time, that is, by our mortality. Camus declares that “if I admit that my freedom has no meaning except in relation to its limited fate, then I must say that what counts is not the best living but the most living.” Quantity and quality are not mutually exclusive in the absurd universe, however. By maximizing the opportunities in life, one creates the necessary space for potential subjective meanings to be actualized. The absurd individual exhausts as many of life’s possibilities as they can; with a new vitality, they passionately pursue the ends that they determine for themselves. Achieving the most living requires “being faced with the world as often as possible.” By constantly confronting the absurd, by always standing face to face with it, the absurd individual maintains the tension between the two contradictory terms.

Camus ends his essay by invoking the story of Sisyphus—the epitome of an absurd hero. Sisyphus defied the gods, and for his crimes, they condemned him to push a rock up a mountain for eternity. After the rock tumbles down the mountain again, Sisyphus must descend, and it is here, according to Camus, where we should focus our attention. As Sisyphus trudges down the mountain to begin again his “futile and hopeless labor,” with his muscles still burning and bones aching from the ascent, he becomes acutely aware of his reality. Becoming painfully conscious of one’s condition is liberating, and it is this consciousness that allows Sisyphus to become “superior to his fate.” Paradoxically, Sisyphus’ lucid consciousness is what gives this myth its tragic character. “Where would his torture be,” Camus asks, “if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him?” The myth of Sisyphus is a metaphor for our own condition. His punishment is painfully familiar to us. Our pursuit of absolute meaning in an indifferent world, a world devoid of absolutes and universals, is analogous to Sisyphus’ struggle. Ours, too, is an absurd fate insofar as

we are conscious. It is at the precise moment when we know that our own tragedy begins.

Coming to terms with his reality marks the beginning of Sisyphus' revolt, freedom, and passion. Even in the underworld on that demoralizing mountain, these absurd consequences define his life—they are his absurd virtues. Trapped in his absurd fate, Sisyphus, like all those who have realized, accepted, and revolted against the absurdity of life, has “the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it.” Sisyphus refuses to surrender. He recognizes the complete futility of his activity and nonetheless continues pushing his rock up the mountain. In his struggle, he takes the ultimate responsibility for his life. With fervent passion, Sisyphus revolts in defiance of his hopeless condition. Despite that unending frustration and eternal torment, Camus proclaims, “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.” Although happiness is never guaranteed, it always remains an open possibility for us. A life defined by the absurd struggle—a life which is rendered meaningful by our revolt, freedom, and passion—can be a happy life. But a more meaningful life is not necessarily a more enjoyable life. If nothing else, our lives become bearable, and that can be enough to last a lifetime. Henceforth, we must embody that Nietzschean formula for human greatness: *amor fati*. With our heads held high, we must love our absurd fate in spite of everything.

### **Drug Use: An Absurd Consequence**

To see to what extent Camus' understanding of the absurd can inform our present understanding of the phenomena of drug use and addiction, I will discuss the influence his work had on me and my own struggles with addiction. By providing an experiential account as existential support for my claims and exploring the resources available in Camus, I hope to show where his conception of absurdity and its relation to meaning is appropriate to the problem of drug use.

There are many ways of eluding the meaninglessness of life, allowing a person to, at least temporarily, circumvent the sinking existential dread induced by the absurd. That peculiar drive to escape from the overwhelming and undermining nature of life is a pronounced characteristic of the human condition.

We are not wanting for doors to run through; escapism comes in myriad varieties. Some lose themselves in novels or exercise, other people shop online or work incessantly, some gamble, and yet others play video games or watch television. Another way to escape is through the use of psychoactive substances, which can lead to lifelong struggles with addiction. Drug use and misuse can be understood as a form of surrender, a surrender of oneself to the substances—a bowing out, however temporary, of life. Similar to suicide, drug use is “acceptance at its extreme.” It is accepting, whether implicitly or explicitly, the absurd as a bare fact of the human condition, but it encourages resignation rather than revolt, binds rather than frees, and begets despondency rather than passion.

In many respects, addiction presents as an existential condition, with existential causes and consequences. Addiction, when it is a result of recreational drug use with existential motivations, can thus be seen as another extreme consequence drawn from the absurd. That being said, addiction is a highly complex problem, and, for that reason, my analysis focuses primarily on drug use and the reasons behind a person’s use thereof. To talk about my addiction in any meaningful way, I must first begin with an analysis of drug use, since recreational drug use precedes drug addiction. While the risk of forming an addiction is always present, nobody uses drugs with the intent or the expectation of becoming addicted. Addiction comes after protracted use—though sometimes that period can be comparatively short. Some people use drugs once or twice and then never use them again. Others become dependent relatively quickly. Certainly, some people can remain recreational drug users for their entire lives, but their use is still emblematic of the issue at hand, viz., the desire to escape an absurd reality.

I always had an acute sensitivity to the absurdity of existence, but was never able to put my experiences into words. I was suffering

from an unarticulated alienation, which reflected a reservoir of dissatisfaction and disenchantment with my life specifically and the world more generally. In the beginning, my drug use was an attempt to address the intolerable boredom that I felt. Indeed, boredom seems to be one of the many driving factors which influence a person's initial use of drugs. Understandably, one of the marked characteristics of absurdity is boredom—that lack of excitement comes from the sheer monotony of our daily lives, which is a symptom of felt meaninglessness. A life devoid of meaning can undoubtedly be stultifying. I felt like I had no greater purpose to which I could apply myself and no real direction in life. So, I got high to pass the time. And for a while, the drugs helped me overcome that boredom. Eventually, however, my use was directed toward all of my feelings and not just boredom.

My drug use became an explicit response to the flux of my emotions. Drugs became my crutch. In times of pain, hardship, and sorrow, drugs were there to assuage those negative affections. And when things were going well for me, when I had cause to celebrate, drugs were there to aid in the celebrations. But as time went on, I used drugs almost exclusively as a way to self-medicate. There was an existential void that I needed to fill, sorrows that I needed to nurse, and a pain that I needed to numb, and once I had tasted the sweet nectar of escape that drugs had to offer, I continued to go back. My response, on the surface, might have seemed to be a reaction to whatever it was that negatively affected me at the time, but, on a much deeper level, I think that I subconsciously became aware of the fact that the “uselessness of suffering” was an integral part of life, an unavoidable and irreconcilable fact, one which I nevertheless endeavored to numb out. Suffering, too, is part and parcel to the absurd. On my account, suffering is both caused by and a cause of drug use, which can eventuate in addiction. When a person feels like they cannot cope with the suffering, that is, when the suffering is felt to have no meaning, it can be almost impossible to bear. Drugs, in this sense, can help. But that help is short-lived, and more often than not, drug use only serves to multiply suffering.

I think people who use drugs and those who are struggling with addiction have a certain sensitivity to the felt need for meaning in life. The people struggling with addiction whom I have encountered have been hyper-reflective, which proves to be one of the more torturous aspects of their condition. As Camus notes, “Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined.” This hyper-reflectivity and sensitivity to meaninglessness allow the person struggling with addiction to have a special relationship with the absurd, as well as an added difficulty—they have tasted the sweet nectar of escape.

When a person is battling addiction, their existential reality is profoundly altered, and they orient themselves in the world in markedly different ways; they are placed in a position of constant presence with the absurd, though they may not realize it. But it is this very presence that also gives them a privileged position once they begin the process of recovery, a process that can enable the full development of the absurd realization. As a result, the person in recovery is especially well-equipped to struggle against the absurdity of existence through their revolt, freedom, and passion. But revolt, freedom, and passion can only be achieved through lucid consciousness, and drugs necessarily negate such consciousness. Thus, beginning recovery is the necessary first step toward the absurd realization for the person struggling with addiction, a step on an undoubtedly difficult but worthwhile path of living authentically despite the absurd.

Using drugs was my desperate attempt to satiate that human appetite for meaning. But drugs did not solve the problem of meaninglessness for me; they only afforded me a temporary escape. Life has a way of catching up with you, though. You can only escape for so long before you have to come back and face the reality that you have been trying so fiercely to outwit. Eventually, I made the difficult decision to begin recovery. If a person has a good reason to stop using drugs, if they see recovery as a worthwhile endeavor, then many times they can begin recovery. The problem is being able to find a good enough reason to stop, which is specific to the individual and their circumstances. In my experience, the possibility of a more

meaningful life is a good reason to stop. If their drug use stems from a desire to escape the felt meaninglessness of life, then they might be able to create or discover meaning in their recovery. Recovery, then, can be seen as a process of existential reorientation. Like the absurd individual, once a person chooses recovery, they have chosen life over death. By finding the why to live, the new question regards how. Specifically, for the person in recovery, the question now is how to live in the face of absurdity without using drugs as a means to escape, to “live without appeal.” The person in recovery thus finds themselves on that same mountain where Sisyphus toils.

My addiction is my rock, one which I have to perpetually push up a mountain only for it to roll back down again. But it is and always will be my thing. Although this task is exhausting and, to an extent, futile, the process of pushing this rock up the mountain constitutes my recovery—a rich source of subjective meaning for me. Like Sisyphus, we all have our rocks, which are unique to our lives and existential orientation. We all cope with boredom and with suffering, varying both in kind and degree. Some people deal with these absurd consequences in healthier ways than others, but the struggle nevertheless remains the same. We are doomed to failure only insofar as we stop struggling against the absurd condition.

Relapse, however, should not be considered a failure. If Sisyphus stumbles on the mountain as he trudges toward the heights, we do not fault him for that. His task is challenging, both physically and emotionally. By losing his footing, he learns more about where to place his feet the next time he pushes his rock up the mountain. Addiction is similar in this respect. A relapse is analogous to losing one’s footing. The important thing for the person in recovery is to learn from their various stumbles, which are not always relapses, to get back on their feet, and continue pushing their rock up the mountain. Recovery is a Herculean task, and stumbles are inevitable. But when taken as opportunities for learning, these stumbles can be turned into something positive, something instrumental which will support the person in recovery in their continued struggle.

Upon reading Camus, I had an intuition that his notion of the absurd could be of use to other people struggling with addiction. There is, I think, a therapeutic and liberating aspect to understanding. Learning about the absurd helped me to reflect on and redescribe my experiences with a new vocabulary and, consequently, understand my struggles with addiction in new ways. I believe that understanding the absurd will afford others with a needed articulation for a previously unarticulated feeling. It was that articulation that made me recognize, for the first time, the exact nature of what I was struggling with, and this new understanding became invaluable for my recovery. A common saying from *Narcotics Anonymous* states: “Live one day at a time.” I think Camus would agree with this imperative. We all have to push our rocks up the mountain one day at a time. Every single day, we must choose life—a life that is defined by and rendered subjectively meaningful by our revolt, freedom, and passion.

## **Conclusion**

The addiction epidemic is an existential epidemic. It has drastically altered the existential reality of millions of people, even those who are not directly struggling with addiction. As such, we need to begin paying attention to the existential needs of others and the existential motivations behind their actions. Many people today who use drugs are responding to a widespread existential phenomenon, viz., the absurd character of human existence. I argue that, in a large number of cases, if not most, the response to meaninglessness is a major motivation in drug use and misuse that has too often been ignored in mainstream analyses. Addiction is a perennial problem, and if we hope to address it meaningfully and effectively, we must look at every factor that might contribute to the development of an addiction, which undoubtedly includes existential factors. The present analysis offers, I hope, a new way of thinking about the problem, which might engender imaginative approaches to our attempts at mitigation.

This analysis does not apply to all cases of drug use or addiction, but I maintain that this is one of the most promising starting points for understanding these phenomena. It has a broad explanatory capacity, and I think it is consonant with the experiences of a wide range of individuals who have struggled against many of the same things as I have. But not everyone who is struggling with addiction will see their lives in the terms that I have laid out here. However, just because they do not see their lives in this way now does not mean they cannot come to understand their lives similarly in the future. The absurd realization takes time to come into fruition; lucid consciousness is not a fact of life but an achievement. Putting into words what one is struggling with is difficult when the situation is still imbued with ambiguity. Sometimes, having the exact nature of the problem articulated by another can facilitate one's self-understanding, and self-understanding is critical for creating the conditions for one's success in recovery.

Today, we face a problem with which millions are currently struggling and a crisis that claims tens of thousands of lives every year. Ultimately, it is on us to address this problem, and our efforts cannot be half-hearted. We must take it upon ourselves to lend a hand to those who need it most. Addiction, like the absurd, is pervasive and will always be a reality that we must constantly confront. Living authentically in the face of absurdity necessitates our individual and collective revolt, freedom, and passion. And, thus, I reiterate the principal point: we only fail if we give up in our absurd struggle.

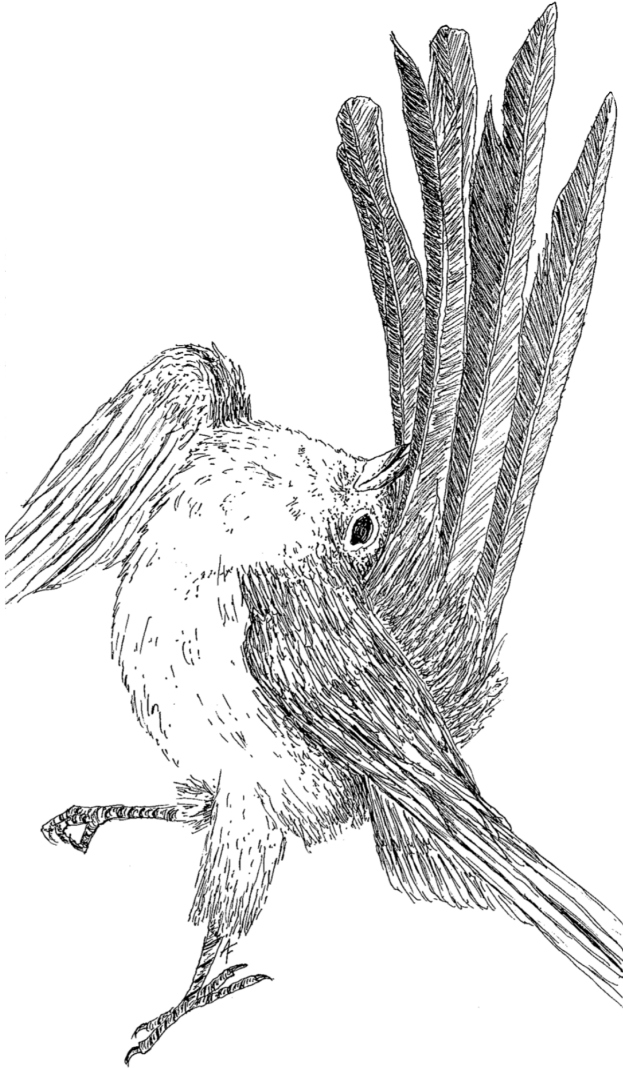


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# Where Freedom Lies

By Ana Freeberg



## **The Night Song**

By Bangrui Chen

Deeper the lovely night goes by  
The stars slow down their golden feet,  
When wind of mounts heave a sigh,  
Softly travels pass the street.

Why cannot you prepare for rest –  
The heart penetrated by moonlight?  
A fellow sufferer of falling leaves,  
Hovering, nowhere to go in sight.

# **The Prospects for Authentic Dasein or, How to get out of the Deathworld**

By Ethan Klaris

## **Abstract**

Heidegger says that, in order to live authentically, we must honestly confront our own death. But he also acknowledges that confronting death head-on undermines the meaning of life. Taking Heidegger's conception of Being-in-the-world as its point of departure, this paper asks whether an honest relationship with our own death risks destroying our ability to function actively and productively within our environment. Is it possible to live authentically in a meaningless world, or, without meaning, do we lose that which most essentially makes us human? Though Heidegger claims to provide an answer to this question, a close reading of Being and Time reveals that the text's premises may not, in fact, lead to the conclusion that Heidegger imagines. Fleshing out this internal contradiction and analyzing the conclusions that follow is the project of this essay.

## **Introduction**

'Dasein' is Martin Heidegger's word for human existence, for the kind of Being that we have. Dasein "is essentially constituted by Being-in-the-world," it is "in every case its 'there.'" This means that the world is an existentiale of human existence; Dasein is inseparable from its world ontologically and cannot be understood as standing apart as an isolated subject. Likewise, "'world' is not a way of

characterizing those entities which Dasein essentially is not; it is rather a characteristic of Dasein itself.” Thus, according to Heidegger, there is no Dasein without world and no world without Dasein. In philosophy’s phenomenological tradition, Heidegger sets himself apart from those who came before in his robust commitment to the worldliness of human existence. He dispenses completely with dualist notions like Descartes’s extended consciousness, Husserl’s transcendental ego, and Brentano’s inner perception. Only Dasein and the world remain: a unified totality without boundary, division or distinction.

When Dasein dies, so does its world. Death is nothing less than the end of Being-in-the-world. Heidegger thinks this idea should be uncontroversial; in virtually no conception of death and its aftermath do we simply go on existing in our world in the same way as before. To say we do would be to eliminate any substantial delimitation between life and death and thus to destroy the concept of death by collapsing it into life. “Life,” Heidegger says, “must be understood as a kind of Being to which there belongs a Being-in-the-world”<sup>70</sup>. Thus, insofar as we can say that death is something other than life, it must also be something other than Being-in-the-world. And since Dasein is Being-in-the-world, death is therefore something other than Dasein.

The project of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* is to describe the Being of Dasein via an analytic of human existence as such. In its most basic form, Heidegger’s account can be summarized thus: Dasein is Being-in-the-world, and Dasein is Being-towards-death. These two features capture the irreducible elements of what it is to be human; that is, the indubitable presence of the world to me now, and the unquestionable certainty of its eventual destruction. It turns out, though, that Being-in-the-world and Being-towards-death do not reside comfortably together in the soul of Dasein. Indeed, Being-towards-death threatens to unravel Being-in-the-world from its ontological roots because the more authentic Dasein is towards death, the greater the danger for its Being-in-the-world. This means that the more honestly a person comes to understand her own

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existence as a thing that will one day die, the less she can function in the world as a normal, productive person.

This paper seeks to explicate the relationship between Being-in-the-world and Being-towards-death—between Dasein and the “nothing.” Parts One and Two discuss Being-in-the-world and Being-towards-death, respectively, in order to lay the expository groundwork for the analysis to follow. Part Three explores the effect of Being-towards-death—especially authentic

Being-towards-death—on everyday Being-in-the-world. Finally, Part Four considers how the dynamic examined in Part Three affects Heidegger’s account as a whole. It asks whether authentic Being-towards-death is in fact possible in beings such as us, and, if so, what that means for the possibilities of human existence.

## **Being-in-the-world**

Being-in-the-world is Dasein’s way of encountering the world, the way the world shows up to Dasein. Most primordially, the world discloses itself through entities—the hammers, chairs, plants, and houses of everyday life. Dasein encounters entities, not through “bare perceptual cognition,” but rather through “that kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use.” As opposed to the mere sight that we might associate with perceptual cognition, the faculty through which we encounter entities is ‘circumspection.’ Circumspection is Dasein’s special kind of looking that discloses entities as equipment to be used in a certain way, rather than simply objects to stare at.

In particular, what circumspection reveals to Dasein is an entity’s ‘assignment.’ A piece of equipment, say, a hammer, is assigned to the work to be done with it—hammering. Hammering is an ‘involvement’ that Dasein has with the hammer, an involvement which is, in turn, assigned to a higher-order involvement, say, fastening two planks of wood together. Fastening the wood is, in its turn, assigned to an even higher-order involvement like building a house. This chain of assignment continues upward and into the future to an ultimate ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ like “providing shelter to

Dasein,” which is, in all cases, “a possibility of Dasein’s Being.” Thus, a hammer, far from being merely a wooden-shafted, iron-headed artifact, is linked through its assignment to the very being of Dasein itself.

As with all things in Heidegger’s ontology, the assignments of entities and involvements do not arise independently of Dasein. True, in every moment Dasein is ‘thrown’ into its situation with the world’s assignments and involvements already intact; however, Dasein also creates the assignment structure of its world by constantly assigning itself to an ultimate for-the-sake-of which. This ultimate for-the-sake-of-which serves as the organizing principle for Dasein’s world, imbuing entities and involvements with the significance that allows Dasein to comport itself toward them sensibly and productively. I want to become a lawyer, that is my ultimate for-the-sake-of-which. As a result, I will understand the world, not as some neutral observer, but as a thing that is pursuing law. This means that I encounter my computer not merely as a metal, rectangular machine, but as a device for writing papers, an involvement which will allow me to pass my classes, to graduate college, to get into law school, to pass the bar exam, and eventually to become a lawyer.

Everything in my world has meaning to me only insofar as it fits in with my larger project of pursuing law. Of course, my real for-the-sake-of-which is more complex and holistic than merely being a lawyer. It captures a projection of myself as whole into the future and includes every imaginable aspect of what my life will be. As such, much more than computers and textbooks are disclosed to me in the world. Indeed, what I see is a world of things, all of which, in one way or another, point to some aspect of my future possibility for being, my ultimate for-the-sake-of-which. My ultimate for-the-sake-of-which is thus the foundational grounding for the significance structure of my world—my ability to encounter entities as meaningful at all.

The extent to which Dasein understands its for-the-sake-of-which is the extent to which Dasein understands the world. The more authentically I confront the fact that the

significance of involvements and entities derives from a future possibility of my being, the better able I am to navigate and execute my projects. Think of it this way: if Dasein is authentic in its understanding and recognizes the relationship of all things and involvements to its ultimate telos, Dasein will be better at directing its efforts towards those shorter-term ends that most effectively speed it toward its projected end. Authentic understanding is therefore characterized by Dasein's recognition that the world flows from its original self-assignment, rather than from some independent metaphysical grounding.

Inauthentic understanding, on the other hand, is Dasein's way of "understanding itself in terms of its world" instead of the authentic reverse. In the inauthentic state, Dasein treats entities and involvements as simply given from out of the world, and takes them seriously as things it 'must' use, or obligations it 'has to' fulfil. Inauthentic Dasein cannot prioritize its projects appropriately, and is blind to the relationship of one involvement to the next. As a result, Dasein is lost in a sea of possibilities, pressing forward into them without direction or clarity. Inauthenticity, then, is the mode of having "not known how to begin," in a world that has "kept itself veiled from the purview of circumspection."

Thus, understanding is tied directly to the fact that "Dasein is constantly 'more' than it factually is." The world makes sense to Dasein only insofar as Dasein has projected itself forward onto a possibility of its being, allowing a significance structure to cascade backwards from that projection and imbue entities and involvements with meaning. This relationship of Dasein's ultimate for-the-sake-of-which to the disclosedness of its environment is what constitutes worldhood, the very being of the Lifeworld.

## **Everyday Being-towards-death**

The problem is that the ultimate possibilities for being to which Dasein assigns itself are not actually Dasein's ultimate possibilities for being. Only death is ultimate; all other possibilities are eventually outstripped by that singular inevitability. Heidegger is



interested in death not as a biological, social, or historical event, but rather as a “phenomenon of life.” He is asking after “the ontological meaning of the dying to the person who dies,” that is, what being-towards-death is like for creatures like us who are aware of our own mortality. If death is to be considered in this way, it must be so as a possibility. Death is never actual to the Dasein that experiences it: “when Dasein dies...it does not have to do so with an Experience of its factual demising.” Insofar as we have any experience of death at all, it is always as a ‘not-yet’ that awaits us down the road. Thus, Being-towards-death maintains the character of a pure possibility and remains “as far as possible from anything actual.” But death is not like the other possibilities characteristic of Being-in-the-world.

The others are possibilities for being, ways for Dasein to exist in the future, as a lawyer, or mother, or acrobat. Death is a possibility for non-being, it is “the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein,” or, “the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all.” Death is also the only possibility of which Dasein is certain. Dasein’s posture toward possibilities for being, as actualizable in the future, is “waiting for that actualization.” Toward death, as pure un-actualizable possibility,

Dasein does not need to take up the stance of waiting—there is nothing to wait for. The certainty of death is a fact of life, it is a part of Being-in-the-world, and it is therefore the only possibility of which Dasein can be absolutely sure. Finally, death is unique because it is the last possibility, the possibility that is “not to be outstripped,” the “‘not-yet’ which all others lie ahead of.” No matter what ultimate potentiality for being Dasein assigns itself, the certain possibility for nonbeing always comes later. As such, death can be summarized as the certainty that nonbeing awaits Dasein at the end.

Most of the time, however, Dasein conceals these aspects of death from itself. In our everyday lives, “death is ‘known’ as a mishap which is constantly occurring,” it is a “well-known event occurring within-the world.” Death is no real threat. We think, “One of these days, one will die too, in the end; but right now it has nothing to do with us.” It is an event of public occurrence, involving funerals,

eulogies, obituaries, and burials. It is always happening to others, not to us, and is often seen as “a social inconvenience, if not even a downright tactlessness, against which the public is to be guarded.” Thinking about death too much is considered cowardly and insecure, perhaps a bit like navel-gazing. And to the extent that we do think about death, our social conventions cause us to fall into a state of fear in which, rather than confronting our existential Being-towards-death, we instead worry about whether it will hurt, whether the loved ones we leave behind will be alright, whether we will go to heaven or hell. Thus, Dasein does not, “proximally and for the most part, have any explicit or even any theoretical knowledge that it has been delivered over to its death and that this death thus belongs to Being-in-the-world.”

Nonetheless, the possibility of death is always already a feature of the situation into which Dasein is thrown. Death reveals itself to Dasein pre-theoretically through the mood of anxiety. Anxiety arises “when Dasein has been brought before itself in an ontologically essential manner” and has been made to recognize, however indirectly, its Being-towards-death. In everyday life, Dasein flees from anxiety, to “turn thither towards entities within-the-world by absorbing itself in them.” This way, Dasein does not have to think about what is really upsetting it—the certainty of its own destruction—and can instead retreat into a state of fear in which its troubles are externalized onto features of the world. Dasein gets itself so absorbed in the world, so caught up in the hustle and bustle, so fixated on the little crises and stressors of life that it does not have the time to consider its own inevitable death. In this fleeing, Dasein covers up the source of its anxiety and is left in a state in which it “does not know what that in the face of which it is anxious is.” When our anxiety has subsided and we have successfully buried our heads in the sand of the world, we are accustomed to say of our previous consternation, “it was really nothing.” These various ways in which Dasein conceals and turns away from death and anxiety constitute inauthentic Being-towards-death.

## **Authentic Being-towards-death and the Deathworld**

Dasein can achieve authenticity by recognizing that the threat disclosed by anxiety does not reside in the world. Rather, “Being-in-the-world itself is that in the face of which anxiety is anxious,” or more accurately, it is the possibility of no-longer-being-in-the-world—the destruction of the world—that Dasein is anxious about. In anxiety, worldhood itself is at stake; Dasein is anxious because it is confronted by the certainty that, in death, it and its world are going to end. Occupied in this way, not by entities and involvements within the world, but by the worldhood of the world itself, authentic Dasein ceases to recognize the assignments and meanings of worldly concern.

In authenticity, Dasein sees death for what it is: certain, final, and devoid of being. If it honestly confronts this reality, Dasein has no choice but to replace all of its ultimate possibilities for being with the only possibility that is truly ultimate—death. Authentic Being-towards-death thus strips Dasein of its ultimate for-the-sake-of-which, which, as we recall, is the ordering principle of the world, the thing from which all significance flows. Entities and involvements only have assignment insofar as they point to the ultimate state of being to which Dasein has primordially assigned itself. My computer can only show up to me through circumspection as a machine for typing because my future possibility for being involves being a lawyer. This hammer is only a tool for hammering because I project myself onto a final state of being sheltered in a house. But authentic Being-towards-death reveals to Dasein that its primordial act of assignment is also an act of self-deception. We do not end up as the future selves upon which we project ourselves, we end up dead.

After all our projects are done and our projected states of being are achieved, it is not a further, final state of being-fulfilled that awaits us; it is a state of not being at all. Insofar as we are working towards something, we are lying to ourselves. We are working towards nothing, our paths end in a void. Our involvements thus become ridiculous, for they are acts of being in service of

nonbeing. Entities become nonsensical, for the work they point to has lost its significance. The world is not the Lifeworld anymore, it is the Deathworld.

The narrator in Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Wall* comes to this realization as he sits on death row. Looking back on his life he says, "I took everything as seriously as if I were immortal...I had spent my time counterfeiting eternity." Now in his prison cell awaiting execution, he has been made to confront his death authentically, he has "lost the illusion of being eternal" and the world accordingly begins to unravel. He describes objects as having "a funny look," as appearing, "more obliterated, less dense than usual." It was enough, he says, "to look at the bench, the lamp, the pile of coal dust, to feel that I was going to die." This response fits well with Heidegger's account. He tells us that "in anxiety one feels uncanny," there is an impression of "not-being-at-home" in the world any longer in which "everyday familiarity collapses" and "the world has the character of completely lacking significance." For Sartre's narrator, as for all other authentic Dasein, the world is not a Lifeworld of activity and involvement, it is a Deathworld of emptiness and confusion.

Allowing the world to be disclosed to us as such is a matter of permitting ourselves "the courage for anxiety in the face of death." We must turn toward our anxiety and confront it head-on, rather than fleeing from it into worldly fears and absorptions. We must have the fortitude to remain in a state where "entities within-the-world are not 'relevant' at all" and we are thus "essentially incapable of having an involvement." This mode of being has the effect of sundering the significance structure of our world, unraveling the network of assignments to an ultimate for-the-sake-of-which that constitutes the meaning of the Lifeworld. But it also causes our available possibilities for being to be ranged before us as lightweight, inconsequential options to choose from.

We have lost the illusion of being eternal, so we no longer need to take seriously any particular for-the-sake-of-which as the ultimate object of pursuit. All roads lead to death, so picking one over another is a matter of little more than personal fancy and practical feasibility. Authenticity thus allows us to view the array of

live options and choose between them at will. In authentic anticipation of death, one is liberated from one's lostness in those possibilities which may accidentally thrust themselves upon one; and one is liberated in such a way that for the first time one can authentically understand and choose among the factual possibilities lying ahead of that possibility which is not to be outstripped.

Authenticity frees Dasein from its illusions and discloses its situation more clearly than ever. What we can be is determined by what and where we are now—our current “there.” Therefore, the extent to which we can clearly view our available options for the future, is also the extent to which our present situation is disclosed. Thus, authentic Being-towards-death “is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is practically possible at the time.” In this way, anxiety is a state of both confusion and freedom. Nothing is given and no one can “guarantee to Dasein that all the possibilities of its Being will be secure, genuine, and full.” This is destabilizing, but it also allows Dasein to seize hold of itself for the first time, to take control of its life and decide for itself how the world will show up phenomenally. This amounts to a reconstitution of the Lifeworld in the image of authentic Dasein.

## **Heideggerian nihilism and the prospects for authentic Dasein**

What we have shown thus far is as follows: (1) Dasein is Being-in-the-world; (2) authentic Being-towards-death destroys the Lifeworld and leaves Dasein in the nonsensical, chaotic Deathworld; and (3) from out of the Deathworld, Dasein can reconstitute the Lifeworld by authentically seizing hold of its possibilities for being and choosing among them in a way that honestly reflects itself and its situation.

Saying that authentic Being-towards-death destroys the Lifeworld is tantamount to saying that authentic Being-towards-death disrupts Being-in-the-world. Being-in-the world is, as we have seen, a fundamental existentiale of the Being of Dasein. A disruption to Being-in-the-world is therefore tantamount to a disruption to the existence of Dasein qua Dasein. Thus, insofar

as it exists authentically in the Deathworld of anxiety, authentic Dasein cannot be Being-in-the-world and therefore cannot be Dasein. Who is it then that, from out of the Deathworld, seizes hold of its possibilities for being and reconstitutes the Lifeworld?

The most charitable reading of Heidegger requires that we do not posit a new sort of being that comes into existence with the advent of the Deathworld. If authenticity is to be a mode of being for Dasein, Dasein must persist through the change from inauthentic absorption in the world to anxious Being-towards-death. One way to ensure Dasein's survival could be to resist this paper's account of authentic Being-towards-death as the destruction of Being-in-the-world. In order to do this, one would have to show that worldhood—the significance structure created by Dasein's assignment of itself to an ultimate for-the-sake-of-which—is not sundered by the replacement of that ultimate for-the-sake-of-which with the authentic possibility of death.

Though the resources may exist in Being and Time to make such an argument, a better approach considers that Heidegger might have overstated the connection between Dasein and its world. Take, for example, a student of Heidegger who in reading the literature on the analytic of Dasein comes to authentically confront her own death. She falls into the Deathworld and sits for a week in her dorm room unable to function. Her alarm clock goes off in the morning, but it does no more to get her out of bed than the sounds of cars honking and birds chirping outside. The alarm has lost its assignment as a thing for waking her up, so she simply lets it ring. She has no motivation to go to class, for her career as a budding philosopher has lost its promise; she feels no need to brush her teeth or bathe, for her physical health is no longer a concern; she neither turns on the television nor picks up a book, for the occupations and concerns expressed therein appear pointless and incomprehensible to her.

Lying there unable to move in her dorm room, the student has lost her 'facticity': she no longer "has Being-in-the-world in such a way that [she] can understand [herself] as bound up in [her] 'destiny' with the being of those entities which [she] encounters in

[her] own world.” Her world has, in other words, lost its worldhood. Nonetheless, charity demands that we still posit her as Dasein. She can continue to be Dasein only if we sever the essential link between Dasein and its world. Only if Dasein is defined primordially by something other than facticity and worldhood can the student still be considered identically one and the same thing upon entering the Deathworld. If we do not redefine Dasein in this way, the student ceases to be Dasein the moment she wakes up in a state of full-fledged authenticity. Lying in her dorm room, the student is not Being-in-the-world.

There is nothing from out of the world that could motivate her to do anything at all. Even the sensations of thirst and hunger are no longer assigned to involvements like drinking water and eating food, they are merely empty phenomena to be stared at like the behavior of some inscrutable bacteria in a laboratory. Thus, if we follow Heidegger to the letter and “understand Being-in-the-world as the essential structure of Dasein,” we condemn her to death<sup>71</sup>. Utterly unmotivated, she remains there wasting away until her heart finally stops beating and her body perishes. Her Dasein has already been dead for days. Were this to happen, we would have to conclude that authentic Being-towards-death is incompatible with Dasein. Far from a state of enlightenment or honest understanding, it would be an immediate death sentence.

But we can save the student from her passive philosopher’s death; all we need to do is posit that she is free. Heidegger’s account of freedom deals primarily with our liberation from the expectations and demands of our social circumstances, what he calls the ‘they.’ The ‘they,’ are “those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself--those among whom one is too.” Dasein’s ‘they’ is a cross-section of its family, hometown, school, friends, workplace, nation, class, and religion. Any norms-giving collection of Others to which Dasein assigns itself contributes to its ‘they.’ The ‘they’ is the source of Dasein’s ultimate possibilities for being: the only options that show up to Dasein as available are those that have been laid out by its ‘they.’ If I am a philosophy major at Dartmouth College, I see a

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variety of professional and personal possibilities laid out for me by my 'they.' Because my 'they' is what it is, none of these possibilities likely include ever being the king of Saudi Arabia. In my everyday inauthentic Being-in-the-world, the 'they' not only lays out my possibilities for me, but also chooses on my behalf which ones I will press forward into. Heidegger says we become free in authentic Being-towards-death because we recognize that in death we will be "wrenched away from the 'they.'"

Confronting this reality authentically means that "in anticipation [of death] any Dasein can have wrenched itself away from the 'they' already." Though it is impossible to invent an entirely new array of live possibilities, it is possible to seize hold of the possibilities laid out by them and decide freely among them. In other words, though I can never take seriously the possibility of one day being king of Saudi Arabia, authentic Being-towards-death might allow me to resist my mother's pressure to join the family dental practice, and instead pursue my passion of becoming a research zoologist.

This sense of freedom, however, is insufficient for rescuing the student of Heidegger from wasting away in her dorm room. The recognition that she is free to choose among an array of available possibilities laid out for her by the 'they' does not motivate her to appropriate one as her own. She is under-motivated not just because she sees no reason to choose one of the equally meaningless options over the others, but more primarily because she sees no reason to choose any of the options at all. Heidegger's account of freedom does not give our student the tools to make the first necessary step for saving herself: what Nietzsche describes as "Saying yes to life, even in its strangest and hardest problems." Only by choosing to remain Dasein instead of simply relinquishing her being can she authentically appropriate a new for-the-sake-of-which and reconstitute the Lifeworld.

Only in a radical act of self-affirmation can she distinguish herself from the Deathworld and adopt a new authentic mode of Being-in-the-world. Poetically, this kind of affirmative act is the antithesis of the negative 'fleeing' that characterizes our everyday



reaction to anxiety. The antecedents of authenticity thus stand in appropriate opposition to the antecedents of inauthenticity.

## **Conclusion**

This kind of independence from and superiority to one's finitude and world requires a sense of freedom more robust than Heidegger's philosophy provides. To save herself, the student must experience herself as transcendent of her thrown situation, defined by more than simply the circumstances of her facticity and world. There must be something within her that is able to look at her circumstances and, in that act of looking, recognize that it is not essentially defined by those circumstances. Being-in-the-world thus cannot ultimately constitute her fundamental being—Dasein must exist beyond the bounds of its world.

The source of necessary transcendence may lie in consciousness. Later philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre have criticized Heidegger for failing to discuss explicitly the topic of consciousness. Heidegger, as we have seen, describes self-understanding as occurring via Dasein's projection of the self onto future possibilities for being. But according to Sartre, this misses a crucial first step. "Understanding has meaning only if it is consciousness of understanding," Sartre writes, "My possibility can exist as my possibility only if it is my consciousness which escapes itself toward my possibility." Sartre's conception of consciousness allows him to attribute to humans a kind of freedom more robust than Heidegger's. Sartrean freedom derives from exactly the kind of transcendence that Deathworld Dasein lacks in Heidegger's account, a transcendence that allows humans to be more than simply their world. Sartrean and post-Sartrean ideas of consciousness may indeed rescue Deathworld Dasein from its authentic downfall; however, an account of this solution is beyond the scope of this paper. Pairing Heidegger with conscious freedom is a project for another day.

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# Eight Fragments of Christophe's Love Letters

By Bangrui Chen

## Letter 1

Dear Zoé,

Besides those sweet sorrows, I also taste my frailty these days... Finding myself sinking into the ocean of love, I once tried to get out of it but failed. Although working for philosophy as a career, I do not feel like I am an authentic thinker. Thinking is not my instinct, but feeling is. And that is enough. I make mistakes once I think, but feeling itself is sufficient to understand the world. Also, I have pretended so hard to be a pure gnostic person or John Keats' Eremite for years, but now I simply content myself with the joy and sadness of secularism. After all, I might lack the characteristic of *spoudaíos*. For the first time in my life, I am consciously aware that I belong to the group of *plēthūs* actually.

Then what about *Φιλοσοφία*– philo-sophia? I have to answer like this, only when my soul is not occupied by love, fervour, recollection, appetite and spirit (in Plato's sense), I could spend some time on reasoning or meditation. That means, I may put the philosophical thinking aside, but I cannot relinquish the control of some essential things that I live on. They are the indispensable blooming of existence within any section of the road towards a good spiritual life. Although the world in front of me might not open itself in the way I prefer, still I can feel, I can hope, I can recall. Once again, I content myself with this – having a fresh and lively heart is much more important than obtaining those solid truths.

Yours,  
Christophe

## Letter 2

Dear Zoé,

Do you know that someone is willing to suffer from the great agony if this could bring him a tiny bit – even the tiniest bit – of happiness and hope? Because I firmly believe that, if I do not love, if I do not pursue, if I do not complete myself within this process, if no one responds to me, I will degenerate to a mortal thing, like materials. But I am not reconciled to it. I have to keep my soul sincerely. I hope, I feel, I recall. Also, even though I face the ruin of my hope, the end of my feeling, and the pain of my memory, I could still say “Nevertheless!” despite everything. Only then I would be convinced that I have understood the true meaning of love, I have responded to the call of my destiny, and I have grasped the reality with full responsibility. You consider yourself as a modern person, whereas my thoughts might be closer to the ancients. However, love is the core of the sacred foundation for all human spirits. This is the truth, no matter what the time is.

Yours,  
Christophe

## Letter 3

Dear Zoé,

Yesterday you asked me, what did I need from you. I cannot answer, because I cannot request anything from you. But even though, even though for now there is not any hope in sight, you are still my dear Zoé, my beloved – to love hopelessly, I guess this might be the best way to approach another person.

What can I hold you with? I have no idea about this question. However, what I can confirm is this: everyone has his/her way to complete himself/herself to greatness, and those who can reach out and embrace the most impossible thing are the greatest among the others (you must remember this as we have read Kierkegaard together these days). For this thing, my obstinate soul will not console myself by saying that, if there is no hope, just disregard it; if I cannot keep this, find another. Because my Vita Nuova is provided by you completely. And I have made up my mind for the future: it is you, or nobody.

While immersing the self in another person, he will certainly sacrifice something, but it is a sublime sacrifice. May we ask, which person suffers more: the one who keeps watching and waiting, or the one who has never done so? Now I have proved that the wait itself is enough to fill a man's heart, and the former is happy.

Yours,  
Christophe

#### **Letter 4**

Dear Zoé,

Ich und Du. The existence of thou does not belong to any sort of experience but a primary, authentic relation, this is what Martin Buber teaches us. However, when love arrives, I am afraid that even "relation" is not proper enough to describe you. The word makes me feel a sense of distance and finiteness: only when reason is present, only when you and I belong to two independent beings, the relation will appear. But you are not reasonable and thinkable to me, you throw me into ecstasy; you are not a particular being out of me, you are infinity.

When I stare at the sun, the sky, mountains and rivers alone, you are there. When I walk through a sea of faces on a street, passing those strangers nearby, you are there as well. The world is that world and it never changes. But it looks different than before. You are

omnipresent, and my whole universe changes because of you. In other words, from now on I only see the world through you, through your presence, as I can never walk alone by myself anymore.

Yours,  
Christophe

## **Letter 5**

Dear Zoé,

These picturesque questions continue to pop up in my dreams these days so I simply write them down to you...

For those past events of happiness, if one day  
They fade from my memory,  
Where will they go? Will they die?

With the eternal motion in the infinite universe  
How do wandering stars prepare for the encounter?  
How do they recognize each other?

If two souls have never met before,  
And will not meet again later,  
What is the encounter for after all?

What would they say to each other,  
When two ships in the vast sea  
Slowly, move and brush pass?

Yours,  
Christophe

## **Letter 6**

Dear Zoé,

Pour tout homme, il vient une époque où l'homme languit...  
In all other cases, I am arrogant and unyielding. You can tell this from others' comments about me, no matter if they like me or hate me. I am so cynical that I will not be moved by the world. I am a towering pine tree capped by clouds. But when I come to you, I will tremble, I will stutter, I have the impulsion to kneel down to the ground...

In this sense, I seem to fall into the psychological state of a believer. Oh yes, from the moment I fell in love with you, I discovered a new religion, a religion within this secular world. Of course, this does not indicate that you are equivalent to gods. Gods are unreachable, they are beyond my senses in another world, far away in the distance, like the blue sky. When I, one of the schwaches Gefäß, cry and call desperately, there is no response. But you are the reality, you are my tangible, inevitable reality – to me, you are more dependable than gods.

Yours,  
Christophe

## Letter 7

Dear Zoé,

No matter how busy I am every day, there are only twenty-three hours for my soul; the one left is occupied by you, by my activity of missing, recalling and dreaming caused by you. What a mysterious feeling! You are an external object as well as an internal experience; my mental activity is an active construction as well as the existent mode of me which is being determined.

But are you here after all? Within my mind, is it just one of your substitute, or a copy of you? No! In the vast prison of space and time, I am not characterizing some appearances of you from the other side; I am rather a resident living on the realness of you. Since you are not existing in my soul like a perceptual image, it is my soul

that needs to exist in the state of experiencing you. I am now locating myself with you, authentic you. Then I feel a spiritual comfort. Even though there are thousands of miles between us, still a surge of excitement strikes me because I am so close to you – much closer than your classmates and roommates, those in contact with you so often but do not prize these encounters. I drop my head with my eyes closed, and put my hands on my chest: facing such a kind of grace, I have to carefully prepare myself to receive it, like a ritual.

Yours,  
Christophe

## Letter 8

Dear Zoé,

Most people crave stabilization and a permanent residence in love, but my love seems unable to provide me with these. To me, like Walter Benjamin, love is an activity of roving or wandering. This might be a misfortune, or it might be a good fortune, to a higher degree.

These days, those sweet memories keep lingering in my dreams. How I wish to kill the time! I also wish your big eyes to be as blue as the bright sky. No clouds. No tears. They gaze at me forever and never turn around. And every day is a festival when I wake up... I believe nothing is more beautiful than this picture. However, this is just a fairy tale. I do not have crayons. I do not have paper. I have nothing.

After all, I know that every soul is lonely and can only walk by itself. Both of us have our independent lives. Besides, leaning too close to each other all the time will unavoidably be a fetter to us as well. What I would like to tell you is the following analogy.

Station is a place with a profound meaning. People bid farewell to each other here, and have their reunion at the same spot. So the starting place and the destination coincide perfectly, making each combination of departure and arrival circular. I hope we can be



each other's station. For each encounter, sincere smiles will break through our faces, combined with a surge of heartfelt melancholy too... Being each other's starting points and destination – all true loves should be like this. This is the selection and confirmation between two solitary individuals time and time again; this is the most soulful call and response in the world; this is the sense of belonging after experiencing the whole repertoire of the universe and still returning to the other.

Yes, I have confirmed this for countless times: love is never a static status of possession. Love is an eternal process of actions and creation, and is the willpower to complete the world of yourself for your partner. Oh, how many people try to merge into a single with their partners and find the completed rest of their souls. But that is all I want... Remember what Robert Frost wrote? "Some will say all sorts of things, but some mean what they say". And you will always be my second "promised land".

Yours,  
Christophe.

## Muddy Stone Well

By Aidan Sivers-Boyce

you asymmetrical thing, you  
I love you!  
you muddy stone well  
with the green grass, off the path  
you mademoisell  
what water will the well give me today?  
what impurities will bless my mouth today?

I spit  
hawpewt.  
...  
am I a well?  
well, no, I think. no one would want me to drink  
well... no, no, no  
I chortle like a piglet. what a silly goose I am

I raise the bucket from your whole  
I take a drink. I take in the sun  
what fun it is to laugh and drink  
well water in.  
the night, I think, but its day, today  
now, I mean. I thought of the song  
from ago. and soon, too. thats why I was wrong

take the sleigh away and it fits any time well

better even. its a feeling, not some words  
a sleight feeling can change your hole world.  
winter was feeling cold this year.  
it got under my skin and left amark.  
i shudder at the the thought, like chilly wind.  
turbulence. why turbulence?

how strange is it that i am cold now  
on this sunny day next to you  
it must be something in the water  
i laugh, off the path, in the golden-green grass  
i scratch my ass, on the crack  
and i don't have a mule, i think  
I Laugh

I get it now, I sigh  
the bucket water taste metal on my lips  
I lean in like a dancer  
as I drop the bucket I borrowed  
you watch, ready to answer when I ask tomorrow  
and as the bucket falls I let you hold me there  
like a leaf holds the air aware

I must admire your stones full of imperfectity  
it is your cracks and curves that define you  
I admire you, for your presentful nothingness  
I come to you day after day to say  
you taut me, you taught me  
the most beautiful things are never

# **Add Sartrean Evaluation of the Black Man as a Being-for-Others in Black Skin, White Masks**

By Lily Lockhart

## **Introduction**

Jean-Paul Sartre's "The Look" within *Being and Nothingness* explores how an individual grapples with the existence of others. Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* exemplifies this struggle through its exploration of the dichotomy between the Black person's existence as a facticity and as a relation to the white man. With the assistance of Luna Dolezal's "Reconsidering the Look in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*" and Anjali Prabhu's "Narration in Frantz Fanon's *Peau noire masques blancs*: Some Reconsiderations," I will investigate the existence of the Black person in colonial society using Sartre's conception of the Look. Ultimately, I will conclude that the Black man is trapped as a being-for-others because the white Other imposes negative assumptions that the Black man internalizes and incorporates into a disordered self-image.

Sartre's text delineates that, whereas the individual considers themselves a subject, or a being-for-itself, on their own terms, the Look as employed by another person forces the individual to realize they exist as an object and a being-for-others. Within the experience of the Other's gaze, the individual must reconcile that their perception of themselves as the subject conflicts with the Other's perception of them as an object.

The fact that the Black man is born without recognition of the white gaze – but rather learns it through interactions with the white man – imposes a weight on him that remains for a lifetime. According to Fanon, this weight operates as three central negative assumptions about himself that the Black man internalizes after exposure to the white gaze: inferiority, criminality, and impurity. It is a Sartrean analysis of *Black Skin, White Masks* that proves the Black man cannot surpass his objectification as long as the colonial structure embedded in the Look exists, and he is trapped as a being-for-others by racist colonial structures and internalized negative assumptions after encounters with the white Other.

### **Sartre on the Look**

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre sets out to explain that the Look originates from an intersecting perception of the world by myself and another. Sartre describes the effect of the Other's presence as follows: "The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralization which I am simultaneously affecting." The presence of the Other initiates the experience of the Look and shifts my worldview because we both view ourselves as the subject of our world where everything and everyone else is an object. I attempt to exist as a being-for-itself at the center of my world, but the Other appears and forces me to acknowledge myself as outside this context.

Sartre defines the Look as the objectification of myself by the Other, realized only by my own objectification of others. Sartre examines how I recognize the existence of the Look through myself:

"The proof of my condition as man, as an object for all other living men...I realize concretely on the occasion of the upsurge of an object into my universe if this object indicates to me that I am probably an object at present functioning as a differentiated this for a consciousness. The proof is the ensemble of the phenomenon which we call the look."

Sartre says I become an object for “all” others, and in doing so, highlights the universality of the Look; this phenomenon occurs for everyone and every human functions as both the individual and the Other. When someone enters my universe, I regard them as an object. Yet, the person I encounter views me the same way: as an object. My view of others as objects proves to me that I too exist as an object for other people. The Other turns my being-for-itself into being-for-others through their gaze such that I lose my subjectivity to objecthood. In this way, the Look is an interpersonal act that allows me to recognize myself as a being-for-others because of my dual function as the object and as the one who objectifies.

However, Sartre clarifies that the Look does not necessitate the presence of the Other. He explains the Look and comments on the feeling of being perceived, stating: “The fact of being-looked-at cannot therefore depend on the object which manifests the look.” The being-looked-at that constitutes the Look does not hinge on the physical Other whom I encounter (and who instigates the Look) actually looking at me. The Look is independent of the physical presence or gaze of the Other. The feeling of being looked at is itself the realization that I am a being-for-others such that the feeling becomes internalized and the Look becomes an ever-present phenomenon.

The Other’s facticity, or the fact of the Other’s existence, within my world where I exist as the subject, is enough to generate the Look. According to Sartre, “It is the Other’s facticity; that is, the contingent connection between the Other and an object-being in my world” that generates the Look. Although the Other may be physically absent, the Look still exists. This, plus my relationship with the Other as an object suggests that absence of the Other is simply an alternate form in which the Other is present. Due to the omnipresence of the Look, I am persistently reduced from a stable and composed subject to an alienated object. While I may attempt to circumvent the Look, my efforts are in vain because of the inevitability of this infinite phenomenon. The physical absence of the Other is enough to instill the Look as both immanent and

inescapable and disrupt my perception of myself as subject, effectively altering my self-image.

Although the omnipresence of the Look appears destructive to the self, Sartre indicates that it serves as the way I grow in self-knowledge: “the Other teaches me who I am.” In other words, it is through the Other that I gain a body image and a perception of myself outside of my body and mind. My actions become significant and judged when considered in the context of existing as a being-for-others because the Other passes judgment on them. The Other’s opinion conveys the weight of my actions which further develops my conception of self.

### **Fanon on the Colonial Black Man’s Condition**

The dynamic between white and Black men within a colonial structure dictates that the Black man realizes himself when he meets the white gaze. The Black man is faced with degrading remarks from the white man including, “‘Dirty nigger!’ or simply ‘Look! A Negro!’” The white gaze is centered on the Black man in colonial society, as the white man’s look is when he belittles him. The white man’s view of him suggests that he is anomalous and contaminated; from this, the Black man realizes his existence in the eyes of others. He exists not merely as a man, but as a Black man. After encounters with the white gaze, the Black man realizes two decisive aspects of his life: he is raced and, worse, his race is viewed negatively in society.

Fanon uses Sartrean terminology to delineate that the Black man is a being-for-others when he interacts with the white man. He clarifies, “As long as the black man remains on his home territory ... he will not have to experience his being for others.” The Black man’s home territory refers to any place with racial homogeneity where only Black men are present and he does not experience being-for-others. Thus, his existence as a being-for-others stems from the white gaze – the Other – who recognizes him as raced. Through encounters with the white Other, the Black man learns that he exists as a being-for-others which prompts his recognition of himself as a racial being.

The learned understanding of himself as raced negatively informs the Black man's conception of self. Fanon describes the effect when the white gaze is within the Black man's grasp: "And then we were given the occasion to confront the white gaze. An unusual weight descended on us." Blackness is riddled with the stereotypes and preconceived notions that the white gaze maintains for the Black man. His hypervisibility in colonial society makes the Black man a constant subject of the white gaze and its associated stereotypes, amplifying the weight of these stereotypes. As a result, the Black man is hypersensitive to being perceived as a racial being-for-others and makes assumptions about how he is perceived based on the negative connotation of blackness. The Black man's sense of self is informed and discerned by the white man's view of him as Black, not a man, with all the negative stereotypes associated with blackness.

The stereotypes that the Black man internalizes from the white gaze manifest as three key feelings, the first of which is inferiority. Judgement from the white gaze triggers the Black man's sense of inferiority because he is made to feel less than the white man: "I start suffering from not being a white man insofar as the white man discriminates against me; turns me into a colonized subject; robs me of any value or originality." To be Black means to be deficient, less than white, and less than human, so blackness is ultimately the mark of the Black man's lowliness. He wears the mark of his discrimination on his body. Thus, the constant judgement he meets from the white gaze condemns him to an inescapable feeling of being lesser than. The Black man's sense of inferiority stems from the implied deficiency of his being when he encounters the white gaze and leads to a diminished sense of self.

The white gaze and its preconceived notions of blackness make the Black man feel criminal regardless of whether or not he committed a crime. Within colonial society, "Sin is black as virtue is white. All those white men, fingering their guns, can't be wrong. I am guilty. I don't know what of, but I know I'm a wretch." The fact of being Black is associated with sin and criminality. The white understanding of the Black man as a criminal becomes so ingrained that the Black man, too, is convinced of his guilt of a nonexistent



crime. However, according to the white gaze, the Black man's crime is his existence, thus he is always sinning or acting criminally.

The traditional superiority of whiteness and inferiority of blackness establishes blackness as an affliction that requires curing and gives the Black man a sense of bodily impurity. Fanon reflects on anti-Black efforts in science, explaining, "For some years now, certain laboratories have been researching for a 'denegrification serum'...[they] have begun research on how the wretched black man could whiten himself and thus rid himself of the burden of this bodily curse." The Black man exists as an absence – specifically as an absence of whiteness – based on his skin color. Denegrification research seeks to cure blackness as an illness, yet these efforts are less about the betterment of the Black man and more about the maintenance of white purity to prevent Black filth from being transmitted to the white man. The legitimate scientific research to alter the Black man proves to him exactly how disgusting the white man finds him and reveals his absolute impurity.

Prompted by the feelings of inferiority, criminality, and impurity that he learned from the white gaze, the Black man resolves to obscure himself from the white man. Woven between a series of commentaries on Black men by various white men, the Black man asks himself, "Where should I hide?" When the Black man views himself as a being-for-others, he understands the white man's avoidance of him to indicate his impurity, inferiority, and fearfulness. He accepts the distance that the white man desires from him and asks where he should hide. The Black man feels guilty for the white man's avoidance of him and seeks to avoid society altogether as a result of his internalized criminality. The negative stereotypes that the Black man learns from recognizing himself as a being-for-others ultimately lead to his displacement from society.

Colonial power structures prevent the Black man from confronting the white Other for the compromising self-image imposed on him by the white gaze. Fanon asserts that the Black man is "Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me." The Black man is subjected to the white man who functions both as the Other and as a

superior being, or master, within colonial culture. His status as lesser than the white man establishes the Black man as oppressed and prevents him from challenging the white Other. Worse, the white man's unscrupulous denigration of the Black man ensures that the Black man remains inferior and cannot confront him. The white Other's gaze solidifies the Black man's inferiority via colonial power structures and discrimination, preventing him from facing the Other and keeping him trapped by his existence as a being-for-others.

The Black man laments that he is trapped to existing as being-for-others because of the relentless white gaze which objectifies his blackness. The Black man pleads for recognition as a man and explains, "I am not only here-now, locked in thinghood. I desire somewhere else and something else." Blackness is a quality that objectifies, alienates, and diminishes the Black man due to the white Other's notions. Although he desires to be more than an object, he can only become free through the abolition of racial assumptions in colonial culture. Yet, the white race will never surrender their superiority and, ergo, the assumptions and view of race that grant them their power. So, the Black man is miserably trapped by the conception of race that establishes a dominant white Other who objectifies him and forces his existence as a being-for-others.

## **Dolezal and a New Interpretation of the Look**

Dolezal initially distinguishes my existence as a being-for-itself from my existence as a being-for-others by highlighting the transcendent nature of being-for-itself: "Being-for-itself intends towards the future, and in this manner, transcends the world. As such, the in-itself is often characterized as facticity, whereas the for-itself is seen as transcendence (of this facticity)." While being-in-itself constitutes the passive, unchanging existence of the body, being-for-itself extends beyond this fact and constitutes my active consciousness. Because I exist within my body, my consciousness cannot regard my body as an object; therefore, being-for-itself exists in the realm of subjectivity and transcends the

facticity of objecthood. It is solely through being-for-itself that I live oriented towards transcendence and ultimate freedom.

In contrast, my existence as a being-for-others reveals the intersubjectivity of existence. Dolezal comments that only “through my own experience I have one kind of knowledge of myself and my body which is different from the knowledge given to me through the perception of others.” My internal perception of myself is not the same as the Other’s perception of me and the latter comprises my objectification and existence as a being-for-others. In this way, my body is used and known by the Other such that I perceive myself how the Other perceives me – as an object – as opposed to how I would perceive myself – as a subject. The Look of the Other exposes my existence as a being-for-others and forces me to confront my objecthood and the way that the Other perceives me.

The Look generates an intimate knowledge of myself as seen, objectified, and judged by the Other which I internalize. The ability to know myself as a result of existing as a being-for-others dictates, “instead of being lived through, one’s actions or appearance become laden with value, conditioned by the judgmental attitude inherent in the other’s Look.” I am no longer confined to merely acting, but I can see and consider my actions because of the existence of the Other. The Look allows me to perceive myself from the eyes of the Other and implies that I acknowledge the inherently negative judgments that the Other passes on me. Because the Other negatively judges me, I gain knowledge of my actions and adopt these judgments into my consciousness which function to shape my conception of self.

The Look does not necessitate a physical Other and, instead, learned social norms can embody the Look to the individual: “the criteria for his shame arises not from the eyes who look at him (for ultimately there is no one there), but rather from previous encounters and learned and internalized social rules and mores. Ultimately, it comes from the standards of an internalized other.” Socialization teaches me societal standards and establishes acceptable and unacceptable actions such that my internalized notion of social correctness, then, becomes the Other within me. Yet, these expectations vary depending on the society I exist in, for social

expectations are biased by societal power structures and determined by those with power. This variance indicates that the Other is prejudiced against some groups and introduces a negative perception of the self from the internalized Look.

## **Prabhu on the Black Man's Objecthood**

Prabhu discusses the Black man's condition in Sartrean terms and determines that the Black man exists in a state of perpetual objectification by the white Other. She considers the implications of Black objectification as follows: "for Fanon it is impossible even to pose the question of political oppression unless it employs the idiom of existential impossibility arising from the black man's experience of de-subjectification." The Black man's struggle to exist arises from his inability to exist as a subject. The white gaze's eternal focus on the Black man indicates that he exists only as a being-for-others and therefore cannot experience the direction towards transcendence that is characteristic of being-for-itself. Altogether, the Black man's ceaseless objectification by the white Other brings his personhood into question and confines him to existence as a being-for-others.

The Black man identifies historically imposed stereotypes in the white Other which inform his knowledge of his body and, correspondingly, of himself. Prabhu underscores Fanon's understanding that "the Black man's body is given to him through the harsh gaze of the white man through a cultural lens informed by stereotypes inherited from colonialism." The Black man's enslavement throughout the world triggered the enduring negative considerations of him as subhuman and contemptible. Although he is now free, the Black man is under colonial rule where the legacy of slavery remains and the white man's biases persist, maintaining the Black man's conviction that he is inferior to the white man. The Black man learns his inhumanity and inferiority from the prevailing stereotypes from the time of slavery that he recognizes in the white Other's gaze.

The Black man meets enduring white supremacy in his present situation of colonialism which informs his sense of self: "The

alienated black man with the inferiority complex is not one who was created from one day to the next... [White domination] systematically cut off all connections he could make with his joyful self. Thus it is agency at the primordial level of being in touch with oneself that is amputated." White domination methodically separates the Black man from joy to instill in him a firm sense of the white man's superiority and, therefore, his inferiority. Society crushes the Black man's soul which effectively distances him from his agency and his most basic ability to understand himself. So, his inability to construct his own conception of self implies that his self-image is instead composed of what he learns about himself from the white man. Thus, the prevailing racist culture dominates the Black man's self-perception and is responsible for the development of his negative perception of self.

The Black man's self-image is based on the white Other's perception of him due to the unavoidable nature of racial stereotypes. She considers that "[the black man's] ethical slip is facilitated by the relationship between blacks and whites in colonial culture, whereby his negative image of himself as a nigger is validated all around him." The perpetuation of negative assumptions of blackness causes the Black man to mistakenly skim over his individuality in favor of stereotypes. He upholds the white man's demoralizing lies about him in his self-image because of the prevalence of negative stereotypes in society. Since blackness marks the Black man's exclusion from society, stereotypes based on blackness are hyper-visible and lead the Black man to inform his self-image via the white man and the assumptions he reinforces.

### **The Constraint of the Black Man as a Being-for-Others in Colonial Society**

The Look of the white Other prompts the Black man to recognize himself in the context of the white man. In this way, the Black man learns the negative assumptions associated with his blackness. This phenomenon arises because, as Dolezal recounts, "self-knowledge depends largely on objectifying responses from other

people who make us objects of their judgments.” Objectification reveals that the Other judges me and I recognize these judgments when I realize that I am a being-for-others. By considering myself from the Other’s point of view, I understand myself as seen and judged by others. Particularly, the Black man recognizes extensive negative stereotypes of himself when viewing himself from the Other’s perspective—a practice that implies further problems because it is not a reciprocal act.

The Black man is especially constrained by the gaze of the white Other because of the white man’s supremacy in colonial society. According to Fanon, “The white gaze, the only valid one, is already dissecting me. I am fixed.” The white man constitutes the pinnacle of society and, as such, his beliefs dictate societal norms and impose three key negative assumptions on the Black man: criminality, inferiority, and impurity. The white Other scrutinizes the Black man through his Look and reflects these negative stereotypes to the Black man whenever the two encounter each other. Thus, the Black man becomes trapped in objecthood through the stereotypes that the white gaze introduces him to in colonial society.

The Black man’s denigration at the hands of the white Other prompts his inability to progress towards transcendence. Prabhu hones the Black man’s fixedness as follows: “the culturally charged look (now buttressed by attitudes and gestures) ‘fixes’ him within a limited sphere of personhood that cannot match his own enthusiasm, his own understanding of the vastness of his soul as a being-in-the-world.” The white Other forces the Black man into a stereotype and traps him with disparagements via the Look. While the Black man knows his immensity and desires to exist as a being-for-itself, he remains constrained because of the magnitude and prevalence of the stereotypes that he sees in the white Other. Negative assumptions that the white man associates with blackness function to limit the Black man to existing solely as a being-for-others.

Societal power structures empower the white man and trap the Black man as a being-for-others such that he cannot exist as a being-for-itself. In the context of colonialism, personal agency “[has]

to do first with the very basic step of asserting a subjectivity through existence ... this has to occur at the level of the individual in his recognition of his self-as-body. Such an assertion of the individual is proved impossible at each turn as the black man is fixed [in stereotypes].” An individual must affirm their existence as a subject and a being-for-itself in order to have true freedom or agency. However, the Black man is unable to assert his agency because he is confined by the stereotypes he encounters when the white Other looks at him. His fixedness in the white Other’s judgment effectively establishes him as a being-for-others at all times such that he can never be free under the colonial structure.

The Black man’s fixedness in existence as a being-for-others corresponds to his lack of freedom and, further, his inability to act towards transcendence. His condition can be understood as follows: “Because transcendence presupposes immanence, the impossibility of the black man’s existence within colonial culture renders absurd any aspirations to transcendence.” The Black man is relegated to objecthood and cannot exist as a subject in colonial society because he realizes the power structures and stereotypes of blackness that are imposed on him when he experiences the white gaze. Plus, he internalizes the harmful tropes of criminality, impurity, and inferiority that he sees in himself upon judgement by the white Other. Already limited by his objectification, the Black man’s negative self-image prevents him from understanding himself as a being-for-itself. So, colonial culture traps the Black man in the facticity of objecthood and eliminates any possibility of progression towards transcendence.

## **Conclusion**

Sartre’s “The Look” exposes how the Other’s gaze allows for intimate self-knowledge by viewing myself the way the Other does, as an object. The Other’s gaze consists of their judgments, societal expectations, and stereotypes that, upon encountering the Other, I adopt into my consciousness and use to compose my self-image. I perceive myself as subject and struggle eternally with the Other who

perceives me as an object; this struggle for existence proves particularly relevant for Fanon's study of the Black man and his relationship with white society. The Black man learns his objecthood and the negative stereotypes of inferiority, criminality, and impurity from the white Other, all of which function to keep him eternally trapped as a being-for-others. With no ability to surpass objectification, the Black man flounders, never becoming the being-for-itself oriented towards transcendence he wishes to be. The Black man continues painfully in his existence as a being-for-others until racist colonial power structures shift and he may finally attain freedom.



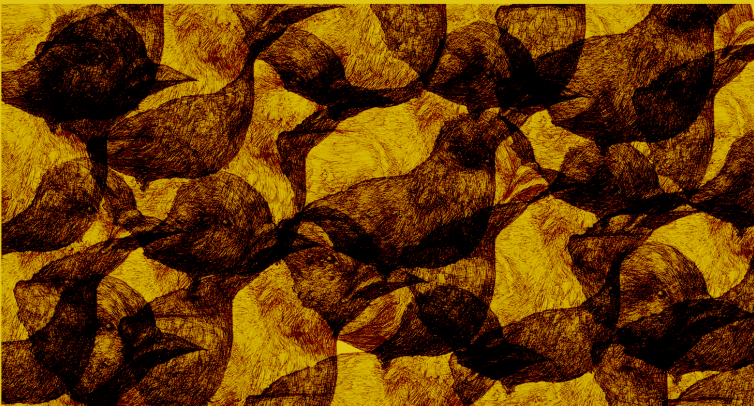
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# Industrial

By Kes Maro

YOU ARE GOING TO SING FOR US?



# **Reading Nausea Through Either/ Or: An Aesthetic and Ethical Perspective**

By Zachary Altman

The great difficulty of *Nausea* by Jean-Paul Sartre, as noted by his contemporary Albert Camus, is that the philosophy can often become lost in the complex, beautiful, rich, and descriptive accounts of *Nausea* that Sartre provides throughout the text. In light of this critique, which I find to hold some truth, I will remedy Camus' frustrations by bringing *Nausea* into conversation with some harder, more systematic philosophy of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. This comparison sheds light on issues that are perhaps too hard to see when reading the text in isolation. The areas of comparison are 1) Roquentin's character, specifically how he relates to the world of phenomena and others, as well as his use of language; 2) the dynamic between Roquentin and the Self-Taught Man as analogous to that of author A and author B in *Either/Or*; and finally 3) through this reading of the text from the Kierkegaardian framework, I will argue that the conclusion of *Nausea* is in fact positive, despite the ending's ambiguity.

The main area of comparison will be between the two main characters, Roquentin and the Self-Taught Man, and their Kierkegaardian analogues, the aesthete, author A, and Judge Wilhelm, author B. I do not argue that these are perfectly analogous figures, merely that a comparative analysis will prove useful in better understanding Sartre's characters and the dynamic between them. Underpinning this discussion, particularly that between Roquentin and the aesthete, is the theme of language and writing, and how

these characters relate to the world of life, phenomena, and objects; this dynamic expresses itself in their struggle against the inadequacy of words to describe their experience. For this discussion I will also be employing the work of Hegel as he is a common interlocutor for both Sartre and Kierkegaard.

Before we can do the work of comparing the aesthete, author A to Roquentin, a thorough understanding of the aesthetic stage is necessary. The word, “aesthetic” has several connotations, the typical, as referring to art, beauty, and faculties of judgment, and the etymological. The etymological sense of the word comes from *aisthesis* meaning sense-perception—Kierkegaard begins from this sense as it relates to immediacy and the immediate:

It is common to equate immediate experience with direct experience, experience as it is simply given and simply had before the onset of reflection. Sensation and feeling are immediate as opposed to thought; first impressions are immediate as opposed to second guesses; life as it is before it doubles back on itself in the “mediation” of self-consciousness is “immediate existence.

The immediate, or the world of direct, sense experience, unmediated and unreflected by thought, is the domain of the aesthete. The aesthete is formulated thus: “The aesthetic in a man is that by which he immediately is what he is.” The aesthete’s project, however, is not so simple. The immediate cannot be had so easily. The instant it is held it becomes thought and reflection; the aesthete cannot be immediately the immediate. So rather than attempt to pursue this failing project—although as author B will argue the entire aesthetic project is a failure—the aesthete turns to art, hence the double meaning of the word:

A finds immediacy immediately presented, the content of immediacy interfusing and interfused by immediate form. In this exquisite alchemy art (reflection) is nature (the immediate)...The internal nexus joining “aesthetic” in its etymological sense to “aesthetic” in its traditional connotation is hereby exposed: art is the transfiguration of nature by self-consciousness.

Through art the aesthete gains access to the immediate. This conception of art, reminiscent of Kant’s notion of aesthetic ideas,

allows the aesthete to have his immediacy without the tainting power of reflection. Art, in this aesthetics (traditional meaning), serves as a conduit and medium for immediacy.

We are then brought to one of the aesthete's signature modes of existing in the world, through possibility. Through art, since it is able to possess an infinite number of possible interpretations, the aesthete maintains his pursuit of the immediate, without the traps of a concrete and definitive result. The aesthete's aesthetics (theory of art) goes on to influence his engagement with the world. The way in which the aesthete exists in the world becomes the way in which art is infinitely interpretable. The aesthete, therefore, embraces possibility and renounces choice:

The poet, who represents man's attempt to live his immediacy, is like immediacy itself eternally presupposed but never present. He is the flickering shadowgraph of human possibilities, the everlasting equivocator who wears an infinite number of masks but never appears in propria persona. He has no proper person, for he is himself only the possibility of manhood, imaginatively entertained and intellectually contemplated, but not yet consolidated in an actual personality.

This is author A's method. Since to engage directly with immediacy leads to reflection, and therefore not immediacy, he chooses instead to live as if he were himself immediate. He will not allow himself to be determined, so he does not choose, lives no serious public life, and has no self. In his quest for immediacy, he becomes detached from the world, "His pact is with the aesthetic, and that involves, as the case of A has already shown, detachment and arbitrariness in relation to actual persons and events." Now, with these points in mind we can turn to Roquentin as a possible incarnation of the aesthetic method.

Finding the words used to describe Roquentin is an extremely difficult task. To a large degree, like the aesthete, he has no definitive self. We can track his movements clearly, cite the folks he speaks with, the places he goes to, and his general activities, but what about his character? Certainly he is sick, but sickness is not part of one's chosen essence. Roquentin exists very much like the aesthete,

detached. Roquentin's accounts are that of a voyeur, he watches, contemplates, and judges, but rarely do we see him engage with others, save the ordering of a meal or requesting a song on the phonograph. He makes his stance quite clear, "I don't want to do anything: to do something is to create existence—and there's quite enough existence as it is." Now, to be clear, the analogy to the aesthete is not perfect and we will discuss its shortcomings later. Nevertheless, the affinity is there and useful.

In addition to Roquentin's general detachment and reliance on possibility are his generally aesthetic inclinations toward life and actions. During his conversations with Anny, Roquentin's concerns are largely of an aesthetic nature: "I could never find the words she expected, the words which went with her dress, with the weather, with the last words we had spoken the night before." His default reaction toward seeing a long lost lover has nothing to do with any sentimental or moral duty toward her and their relationship. Rather, his concern is to find the right words, to be a good dialectician, and for his participation in the event to be of a good aesthetic quality. This theme continues with their discussion of 'perfect moments' where Anny states clearly that it is a moral duty, while Roquentin again defaults to an aesthetic position: "In fact, it was a sort of work of art." To which she replies: "You've already said that" she says with irritation. "No: it was . . . a duty. You had to transform privileged situations into perfect moments. It was a moral question." Roquentin fails, as author A does in the eyes of author B, to see that life is more than what is aesthetically pleasing.

In addition to prizing the aesthetic over the ethical, Roquentin's valuing of not only situations, but people takes on an aesthetic quality. In his obsession over the song *Some of These Days*, Roquentin creates a fantasy of the life of the creators of the song—albeit whose identities he gets wrong; "They are a little like dead people for me, a little like the heroes of a novel; they have washed themselves of the sin of existing." Unlike actual people, who are perhaps sinful and ugly because of their real existence in the world, characters are not. Characters, like those of the story of the song, have a clarity and an aesthetically attractive quality to

Roquentin. It is this quality that he wants to emulate with his own life when he contemplates writing a novel, not unlike *Nausea*. In the closing passage, Roquentin contemplates writing an autobiographical account of his experiences. He hopes that by writing this text, "a little of its clarity might fall over [his] past." He desires, like the aesthete, to make his life itself art. This theme of writing as a remedy or *pharmakon* continues throughout; "The truth is that I can't put down my pen: I think I'm going to have the *Nausea* and I feel as though I'm delaying it while writing." Roquentin's constant journaling becomes a coping mechanism by which he may process or see his experiences in a mode that makes them real, but in a detached, aesthetic sense away from the actual world of experiences which is often the source of the *Nausea*.

Returning to the aesthetic method of author A, habit takes on a surprising character. Take, for example, psychologist William James' positive conception of habit contrasted to the negative portrayal in both *Nausea* and *Either/Or*. For James, habit is seen as a faculty of delegation by which we assign certain tasks so that we may direct our conscious minds toward more complex, delicate tasks. In *Nausea* and *Either/Or*, however, habit is not looked on so fondly:

Only when I think back over those careful little actions, I cannot understand how I was able to make them: they are so vain. Habit, no doubt, made them for me. They aren't dead, they keep on busying themselves, gently, insidiously weaving their webs, they wash me, dry me, dress me, like nurses.

The image here paints habits as though they were mere caretakers in a hospital or nursing home, necessary, but there is something depressing about having to delegate bodily maintenance to either others, or in this case, unconscious and automatic faculties. Roquentin's disdain for habit is also in accord with author A's fight against habit. In order to maximize pleasures without them becoming stale, author A advocates for a method known as The Rotation Method; "My method does not consist in change of field, but resembles the true rotation method in changing the crop and the mode of cultivation." Rather than simply returning to the same source for enjoyment, which will eventually become stale, author A

advocates for a highly attentive and active process of changing the sources and methods of receiving pleasure. Roquentin, however, notoriously returns to the same song for pleasure and relief from Nausea. In Kierkegaardian terms, this can be seen as an unskillful attempt at the aesthetic life.

I would like now to briefly attend to possible counter arguments toward the affinity between Roquentin and author A, the aesthete. The best argument against this affinity is that Roquentin's aesthetic inclinations are more reflexive than they are intentional. To be an aesthete is a highly intentional and attentive process. Author A is extremely explicit in his method, motivation, and approach toward the aesthetic life. Roquentin, however, does not have this quality. He is sick and due to this sickness, resorts to an aesthetic lifestyle. In this way, we can see Roquentin as modeling a sort of aesthetic coping whereby he uses the tools of the aesthete, without the overarching theory and conscious motivations behind it. His desire for a cure comes out of intense, forceful confrontations with immediacy. In response to these experiences he endeavours to deal with them by the aesthetic means of detachment, possibility, and art. This intentionality, I argue, is not essential given that the rest of the behaviors associated with the aesthete are exhibited by Roquentin. Despite his lack of highly-intentional and theoretically backed approach to the aesthetic life, many useful comparisons can still be drawn.

Following the pages of author A are those of author B, also known as Judge Wilhelm. B's work in these pages is a response to the writings of A. B represents the ethical, the next stage of life. Ethics for B are entangled with choice and public life: "Ethical choice takes the form of vow or public contract; it is decisive because it decides a man's character for the future, it defines him in advance. Only that man has a self whose personality is continuous through time, and this requires that he be willing to put his future in trust by means of his choices." As we can already see, this approach to life is directly antithetical to the aesthetic who has no continuous self, strays away from choice and embraces possibilities, and lives detached from the world and public life: "For the aesthete, a possibility is an



ever-present opportunity for enjoyment; for the ethical man, it is the now-or-never demand for decision.” The ethical person creates himself with every decision and every contractual engagement, “The ethical man. . . whose choice is a choice of himself in all his temporal concretion, unites his past (repentance) and his future (duty) in the instant of resolution.” The ethicist lives in the world. He ties himself to others through contractual arrangements, joins political parties, and makes himself through his choices. These are of course, not the attributes of Roquentin, but are in part those that describe his interlocutor, the Self-Taught Man.

Just as Roquentin can be seen as analogous to author A, so too can his predominant interlocutor, the Self-Taught Man, be seen as analogous to author B, the Judge. And just as we searched in vain for descriptions of Roquentin, when we make the same search for the Self-Taught Man, we find that our job is not nearly as difficult. The Self-Taught Man is, of course, disciplined, as any good autodidact must be to read through an entire library in alphabetical order. Even more grossly, however, he is a humanist. The Self-Taught Man explicitly aligns himself, not only with an ethical stance, but also a political one, something entirely foreign to Roquentin as well as the aesthete.

The dialectic, then, between Roquentin and the Self-Taught Man can be read as a confrontation between the aesthetic and the ethical life. This is everclear during the characters’ discussion of humanism. The Self-Taught Man, after having declared himself a humanist, learns the sad truth about his interlocutor, that he is not a man of ethics and will not even communicate on the same terms, “I don’t want to be integrated, I don’t want my good red blood to go and fatten this lymphatic beast: I will not be a fool enough to call myself “anti-humanist.” I am not a humanist, that’s all there is to it.” Rather than engaging with the ethical dialogue, Roquentin circumvents it and manages to negate ethical qualifications of his stance while still establishing himself as not-humanist, nevertheless in an apolitical and amoral way. Roquentin senses that the gap between himself and the Self-Taught Man is completely unbridgeable and hopeless to try and find a synthesis with, “something has died between us.”

One of the most fascinating dynamics in *Nausea* is the relationship between words and objects or words and phenomena. Roquentin's fight against words to describe objects correctly and fully, his acknowledgment of their inadequacy, and yet his constant return to them is one of the finest portrayals of this struggle:

The word absurdity is coming to life under my pen; a little while ago, in the garden, I couldn't find it, but neither was I looking for it, I didn't need it: I thought without words, on things, with things. Absurdity was not an idea in my head, or the sound of a voice, only this long serpent dead at my feet, this wooden serpent. Serpent or claw or root or vulture's talon, what difference does it make. And without formulating anything clearly, I understood that I had found the key to Existence, the key to my Nauseas, to my own life. In fact, all that I could grasp beyond that returns to this fundamental absurdity. Absurdity: another word; I struggled against words; down there I touched the thing.

Through his sickness, the Nausea, Roquentin continually has experiences of extreme immediacy that often go so far that they may be classified as hallucinations or psychedelic. These experiences in turn allow him to confront things as they are, without reflection, without thought, in their purity before representation—immediately. The oscillation between the inadequacy of words to describe the ineffable experiences that Roquentin has and yet the fact that he is still inclined at the very end of the book to write, just as he does after one of the most intense, hallucinatory moments in the novel, "I could not understand it, even if I could have stayed leaning against the gate for a century; I had learned all I could know about existence. I left, I went back to the hotel and I wrote;" is a dynamic played out in similar fashion by the Kierkegaardian aesthetes, namely author A: "His medium is not words, but himself: he is the living poiesis, the root and branch of which all merely verbal making is but the flower." And despite that, it is written! Even for author A, the ideal aesthete who lives in possibility, remains nameless, and has no definitive self still writes, despite its inadequacy to reach the immediate.

Roquentin's struggle against words to touch the thing has its roots in the work of Hegel—a common interlocutor for both

Kierkegaard and Sartre. Hegel defines the particular thing first as something that is a composite of separate parts or properties:

It is (a) an indifferent, passive universality, the Also of many properties or rather 'matters'...The sensuous universality, or the immediate unity of being and the negative, is thus a property only when the One and the pure universality are developed from it and differentiated from each other, and when the sensuous universality unites them ; it is this relation of the universality to the pure essential moments which at last completes the Thing.

The separate properties that make up the thing belong to universality, the particular thing, however, does not. Moving now to language and descriptions of the particular thing is where Hegel, as well as Roquentin, find the difficulty:

The sensuous This that is meant cannot be reached by language, which belongs to consciousness, i.e. to that which is inherently universal. In the actual attempt to say it, it would therefore crumble away ; those who started to describe it would not be able to complete the description, but would be compelled to leave it to others, who would themselves finally have to admit to speaking about something which is not.

The This that Hegel refers to here is the particular thing—for example Roquentin's root, or absurdity itself. What is the sensuous universality in the thing are the universal properties that make up the thing. These properties are able to be reached by language. The particular thing, however, which is not a universal cannot be reached by language. And, as Hegel points out, when we do attempt to do so, as we often do, we soon realize that we are using language toward an impossible end.

Roquentin finds the level of relating to the root, to absurdity, where words cease to have any use, "The function explained nothing: it allowed you to understand generally that it was a root, but not that one at all. This root, with its colour, shape, its congealed movement, was . . . below all explanation." And yet despite this knowledge, he continues to struggle against the words. He continues to desire to write down his experiences for the sake of clarity. The illusion here that causes him so much suffering and confusion is his fight against

the terms of understanding that may serve well for explanation in terms of function and form, but only serve to create confusion when applied toward the thing itself; Sartre discusses this dynamic explicitly here:

I would say that an object has a meaning (sens) when it is the incarnation of a reality which goes beyond it but which cannot be grasped apart from it and whose infinity does not allow expression in any system of signs; what is involved is always a case of totality: the totality of a person, a milieu, an epoch, the human condition.

When working with the totality of a thing, we cannot resort to systems of signs to convey them, we must forgo this inclination and instead engage directly, immediately, with the thing as it is, without reflection or representation in language or thought.

The final page of the novel leaves the reader with a strange feeling of confusion and dissatisfaction. It seems to fold back on itself and does anything but resolve the issues of the novel clearly. The novel concludes as a kind of farewell for Roquentin to the city of Bouville, following his final day of round-making through the city. These final rounds are the last of those we see in a book whose summary can simply be described as a collection of these walks. He will leave tomorrow and yet it is still hard to distinguish what marks the end of Roquentin's arc in *Nausea* given its circuitous structure. However, by reading the novel's end in the terms of our discussion, we may see that it does in fact display a kind of progression. Roquentin starts again, from the position of the aesthetic. He stays within possibility, "I must leave, I am vacillating. I dare not make a decision." For fear of what choosing might lead to, Roquentin prefers to stay in safety, within possibility; remember from *Either/Or* the advice of author A, "Pleasure disappoints; possibility does not." This remains Roquentin's method of coping, despite knowing that the decision, for all intents and purposes, has already been made. He will leave Bouville tomorrow and has chosen this future, not necessarily the act of a pure aesthete. I argue that in these final pages, Roquentin does in fact make progress away from the aesthetic, toward the ethical; though of course, he does not make it all the way to ethical, but instead stops short at irony. Roquentin does this by

choosing; in choosing a new life for himself, he begins to step away from the aesthetic and closer to the ethical. Roquentin is on the precipice of creating his actuality. By choosing to write and gain clarity of his past he acknowledges his actuality or facticity. Tomorrow he will leave, and he must make himself in this new life, embrace his transcendence and potentiality, rather than run from it by living as the aesthete does in indecision:

In this case choice performs at one and the same time the two dialectical movements: that which is chosen does not exist and comes into existence with the choice; that which is chosen exists, otherwise there would not be a choice. For in case what I chose did not exist absolutely came into existence with the choice, I would not be choosing, I would be creating; but I do not create myself, I choose myself. Therefore, while nature is created out of nothing, while I myself as an immediate personality am created out of nothing, as a free spirit I am born of the principle of contradiction (either/or), or born by the fact that I choose myself.

This passage from *Either/Or* illustrates the extremes of this type of choosing, a version of choice that Roquentin is still far from achieving. Nevertheless, in choosing to write consciously about his own life, and to create a new life in a new place, he is regaining and creating his identity. In this sense, the end of the book might even be read as somewhat hopeful. He does, however, have far to go as his inclinations are still somewhat aesthetic: "And there would be people who would read this book and say: 'Antoine Roquentin wrote it, a red-headed man who hung around caf[e]s,' and they would think about my life as I think about the Nègres's: as something precious and almost legendary." This type of autobiographical writing does, however, have much in common with the ethical life. The ethicist acknowledges his past or actuality, facticity in Sartrean terms, but also his future and possibilities, or transcendence:

However, as long as one is only conscious of oneself, the entire self remains potential. For the self to be actualized, and hence for the process of individuation to be carried further, freedom must be exercised. The self must freely accept the structure of its

being—its actuality (the past), its possibility (the future), and the freedom to realize possibilities (the present).

Roquentin, for large segments of the novel, spends time in pure acknowledgment of his existence without acting. Now, after having gone through his cogito and process of gaining self-consciousness, he chooses and acts in the world. His return to look at the past is necessary if he is to look toward the future, “Naturally, at first it would only be a troublesome, tiring work, it wouldn’t stop me from existing or feeling that I exist. But a time would come when the book would be written, when it would be behind me, and I think that a little of its clarity might fall over my past. Then, perhaps, because of it, I could remember my life without repugnance.” Writing helps him gain a sense of actuality over his past, to grasp it as real and tangible rather than it existing in pure possibility and ambiguity.

Now, as I have said, Roquentin does not become an ethicist; but he cannot be considered a pure aesthete any longer. Fortunately, there is an intermediate stage, irony: “Socrates stood at the border between the aesthetic and the ethical stages; his standpoint was irony.” To be clear, there are many senses of the ironic and the ironist, here specifically we are working with Socratic irony, not the religious irony that Kierkegaard discusses with regard to Abraham and the religious stage. With this type of irony, the ironist stands on the edge of actuality, he is potentiality rather than pure possibility, “this intermediate stage, which is not the new principle and yet is that (potentia non actu [potentially, not actually]), is precisely irony.” And this is where we leave Roquentin, a potentia non actu, he is on the precipice of actuality, the decision has been made, all that is left is for him to live it and become himself in actuality.

By entering into the ironic in the final pages, Roquentin has begun his transition from aesthete to ethicist. The ending of *Nausea* is not as ambiguous as it may initially seem. Roquentin does make progress throughout the novel and the ending marks his final departure from the aesthetic, through the ironic, toward the ethical—a positive movement.

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# **A Patient Pumpkin Sits at the Window and I watch the Snow Fall**

By Iya Abdulkarim

Perhaps I am a leaf?  
That would explain  
my attachment to autumn

I want to carry myself  
as the wind carries me,  
a mere leaf  
strong and unwavering  
silent and somehow still loud

My heart flutters  
as the paper slips from the branch  
I watch the colors  
through the afternoon glare  
And I spin

I strive to please  
to provide the perfect crunch  
or to fall  
perchance  
into a passerby's palm  
or to be preserved  
between  
the pages of a yellowing book



Whimsically whirling  
diving, even;  
fearless in the face of life  
at peace with the fact that I may be  
buried by snow  
—I guess I am not a leaf.

# Self Actualisation

By Thomas Bryant

## 1. Breathe and Scan Your Body

I have water

I have food

I am blessed with safety,

I am Thankful for my relationship.

I have accomplished many things and I am proud.

## 2. Take Stock Also Of Your Emotional State

I am miserable with water

I am miserable with food

I am still miserable with safety;

more miserable with my relationship,

And I am miserable with accomplishment

I have misery. I have company. Misery loves company.

## 3. Take Stock Of The Things Around You

15 men sit behind typewriters

15,000,000 monkeys sit behind typewriters and eventually write  
shakespeare

15 men miserably slouch behind typewriters and sling  
non-shakespearean shit.

**4. How Do You Hope Your Participation In This Exercise Will Affect Your Relationships?**

Promotion to office manager

Marriage to Wendy

Also Sleeping with Paula, unfortunately not simultaneously.

Promotion to home ownership

Marriage to Zoloft

Also taking Lexapro, fortunately not simultaneously.

**5. Allow Thoughts To Enter and Exit Your Head Without Judgement**

Shakespeare died and left his wife his second best bed

15 men sit behind typewriters and live their second best lives

15,000,000 Monkeys sit behind typewriters

The Monkeys have water, and food, and safety but do not comprehend misery and successfully write Shakespeare.

Shakespeare clearly comprehended misery; read the plays.

**6. Concentrate On Your Breath. Notice How Deep Or How Shallow It Is. There Is No Immediate Dangerous Circumstance.**

**7. Now Allow Your Mind To Wander Briefly Before Opening Your Eyes**

15 men sit behind typewriters

15,000,000 monkeys sit behind typewriters and write Shakespeare

1 William Shakespeare writes without typewriter, this is not the common denominator.

Some Subsection of the world wide population follow an ascetic tradition and some subsection of that population verifiably can not write Shakespeare but claim to have achieved enlightenment.

15 men sit behind typewriters and they need to believe that is true.

Each Listed individual scans their body and takes a breath.

## Limbo Diptych

By Natalia Granquist



# And I Feel Okay About That: A Dramatic Monologue

By Thomas Bryant

## Simon

I've been thinking a lot about church, communion really. For those of us in the room who weren't regularly dragged out of bed on Sundays, that's the part where people eat Jesus Christ. Stupid, right? This bread is the manifestation of our God and we're going to chew on it. I had this ex boyfriend, Matt. Matt was this neurotic, boozed up, associate professor of music theory; constantly on the edge of nervous breakdown; but he went to church every Sunday. After communion he always felt the most okay. He felt okay for about 10 minutes before he pulled out some tone deaf-freshmans' transposition assignments to grade during the sermon, but still. And Jesus loved this neurotic freshman chamber choir conductor enough to allow himself to be eaten so Matt could feel okay.

I feel okay. I'm reminiscing about Matt, but I feel okay. We didn't really have the best breakup but I feel okay. We went on this vacation to this ski resort. God, I can't even remember the name, that's how devastating the breakup was. We fell in with some guys who were dedicated cave divers. It's a cool hobby if you like danger and rats. You may remember some details of this story from a news article that you read a few years ago. They took us diving, Matt really needed something shocking to distract him from school and these were the type of people with no respect for the social or legal codes surrounding the ethics of cave diving. Come to think of it, the name

of the resort is probably in that article you read. Matt really would have hated that article; Gay Lovers Trapped In Cave is actually how his parents found out. His parents were very Catholic but the whole incident made them question stuff, like “would my son risk cave diving if we didn’t force him to be president of celibacy society at St. Augustine High for 2 years?” 2 years, seriously. They feel okay about it now, with time, and they were so much better when his sister came out.

The whole vacation makes me think a lot about Jeffery Dahmer. If you want a more gruesome news story, look him up. Worst hour of wikipedia you’ll ever have. He would seduce young men and dismember and eat their body parts. As young men who start to read Men’s Health for the wrong reasons, we begin to worry about him a lot. Will I go to someone’s house and never come back? Or worse, what if the potential to become him is inside me. Gay men don’t grow up with a lot of great role models. Not to say there aren’t a lot of horrible straight men but at least straight men have Mr. Rogers. Also I don’t think their moms’ worry about them becoming Jeffery Dahmer. But we grow up, gain encyclopedic knowledge of one female pop star(Lady Gaga), get married before the supreme court takes that right away, and we feel okay.

Do you think Matt and I would have gotten married? He was so good to me. I mean, we were in that cave and I was so hungry. I was so hungry and he loved me so much and he was so cold. I wrapped my body around his but I didn’t have any heat left to give him. Maybe it would have been more romantic if neither of us made it out. But he wanted me to, and because of him I did. You’ll remember the article you read, the paragraph about how one of them disappeared. I go to church now, to feel okay about that.

# **The Fragile Relation between Anxiety and Authenticity: Heidegger and The Stranger**

By Omar Khali

## **Abstract**

According to Heidegger's ontological-existential analysis of anxiety, this particular affective state can serve as a means for authentic existence. One of the inherent features of anxiety is its ability to render one's world and their immersive Being-in it utterly insignificant. However, something which Heidegger does not contend with is the possibility that this feature can persist after one's encounter with anxiety. I argue that in order for anxiety to function as a facilitator for authentic existence, it must not permanently render one's world insignificant. When anxiety results in this altered relation to the world, what comes along with it is apathy. Therefore, given the complexities in pursuing authenticity, understanding how apathy interferes with this existential objective is something worth investigating.

## **Introduction**

The function of anxiety plays a central role in Martin Heidegger's systematic analysis of what it means to be a being that is concerned about its very Being; and it is this entity that Heidegger is concerned with that he terms "Dasein." Part of Being is to be in-a-world immersed with others and objects that constitute a world significant to Dasein. There is, however, something that can render

this significant world, and Dasein's immersion in it, utterly meaningless. And that something is the affective state of anxiety. Heidegger deems anxiety as that distinct modality of Being that is conducive for Dasein's attainment of authentic existence. Although, this is not to say that anxiety necessarily leads to authenticity, for it can also result in apathy. In the first section of this essay, I elucidate what Being-in-the-world means for Dasein in its everydayness. The second section inquires into what an attunement to anxiety does to Dasein's Being. I dedicate the last section to investigating a possible consequence which can result from Dasein's confrontation with anxiety; namely, the possibility of apathy. I use Albert Camus's *The Stranger* to show what occurs when anxiety's inherent feature of stripping the world of its meaning persists after the affective experience.

### **Being-in-the-World and Inauthenticity**

The way in which anxiety alters Dasein and its Being can only be understood with a grasp of the very entity anxiety affects. The German translation of Dasein can often be interpreted as "being there" or "presence"; however, Heidegger's usage of the term correlates more with the former. I say this because Dasein's particular state of existence (Dasein's Being) takes part in some temporal and spatial context that has its own significance. On the macro-scale, we could say Dasein is immersed in a specific culture that has its own traditions and socio-political structures; conversely on the micro-scale, Dasein is engaged in various activities that are of particular interest to it (e.g. vocation, hobbies, etc). This is what contributes to Dasein Being-in-the-world. To get a better understanding of who Dasein is, it is best that we direct our attention to Dasein in its everydayness.

The ontological structure of Being-with becomes apparent when there is a recognition that Dasein's world is not one that is understood as one that belongs to it and it only; it is understood as a shared world, a world that is shared with "Others." What this means is that when Dasein is confronting the world, it not only meets



equipment and objects, but it also encounters Others as well. Take for example the environment which is closest to a metal-smith. In this environment, involved Others—those who make the equipment, buy the items, supply the metal, etc— are invariably encountered in addition to the equipment. The engagement with Others does not look like a solipsistic subject confronting some foreign world of others. The Others “already are with us in Being-in-the-world” from the start, involved in similar concerned activities.

It is because of the inclusive role Others play in Dasein’s world that prompts Heidegger to assert that, “Being with Others belongs to the Being of Dasein, which is an issue for Dasein in its very Being.” A significant part of what it means to exist as a Dasein does not necessarily entail being present with others (in a physical sense), but instead, to be immersed with Others in a concerned manner. In the midst of Heidegger’s account of the Others, he announces something that seems to stand out from the surrounding claims: “When Dasein is absorbed in the world of its concern”, which involves Being-with-Others, “it is not itself.” Dasein in its everydayness takes the form of a “they-self.” Heidegger does not explicitly delineate the difference between Others and the they, however, the two can be roughly distinguished in the following way: “Others” refers to the general concept of another person or a set of persons that can exist in the world. On the other hand, the they is the entity that is contextual for Dasein, it refers to the sphere of belonging that Dasein resides in. This can be broadly compared to the term “culture.”

In examining cultural traditions, like holding the door for someone, you cannot point to exactly who established them; you can only refer to the they for causing it. Similarly, in examining the they, it is improbable to think of who caused the way the they deem a moral act permissible; in every case “it ‘was’ always the ‘they’ who did it.” Common phrases such as “they think..., society says..., etc” give credence to the assertion that you cannot pinpoint the exact person or group of people that caused particular beliefs or ways of interpreting the world.

The state of primarily 'not being itself' in the immersion of the they is indicative of Dasein's inauthentic orientation in-the-world. This is because the way in which Dasein interprets its Being and what is possible in that Being, is wholly up to what the they prefers. And it is important to note that this inauthentic interpretation occurs in a pre-ontological way, a way that is not explicitly thought about beforehand. The "failure to stand by one's Self" results in Dasein fleeing from itself, which is an essential part of the inauthentic mode of Being. This inauthentic relation to Being, however, is fundamentally disturbed through the most bewildering and peculiar affective state: anxiety (Angst).

### **Anxiety and Authenticity**

Before we explore Dasein's relation to anxiety, it would be helpful if we first delineate the structure of fear; for this preliminary analysis will prove to be beneficial considering anxiety and fear can often be conflated. The chief commonality that fear and anxiety share is that they are both moods. An element that cannot be separated from Dasein and its Being-in-the-world is its attunement to that world; it is through moods that Dasein "finds itself." What this means is that moods manifest "how one is and how one is faring" in their particular involvement in the world, or its thrownness. And no matter what variation of attunement Dasein finds itself in, the mood is never preceded by some cognitive act that places Dasein in that mood. As Heidegger notes, a "mood assails us", which implies that Being-in-the-world is accompanied with being inundated with various moods that cannot be predicted in advance. Even if it appears as if Dasein is in a bland or neutral mood, that does not signify that it lacks a mood. The world continues to be disclosed in a peculiar fashion, even if that attunement seems to lack affectivity. Moods also have the characteristic of implying a "disclosive submission" which allows us to "encounter something that matters." The intensity or the degree of that state-of-mind also discloses the level of concern one has towards their particular thrown situation. For example the potent anger the student feels after receiving a subpar grade on a test reveals

that doing well in school is something that matters to them; for if it did not matter, frustration and disappointment would not follow the sight of a low grade.

That which we fear, the fearsome, will always be “something we encounter within-the-world.” The fearsome could be some entity within the same spatial environment we are concerned with. It can also be something like failing an exam or perhaps stumbling on one’s words while giving a presentation. Whatever is deemed fearful, and thus threatening, has a “detrimental” characteristic to it. The failure of passing the exam is understood as a detriment to the particular, or the ontic, involvement Dasein is concerned with. The important feature to recognize about fear is that what we fear can always be located and identified in the world one is immersed in. Even in cases where one does not know exactly what they fear, there are typically ways to elicit the object of fear. The fear that one has towards that which is fearsome is not derived from the object of fear itself as an isolated occurrence; rather, what underlies this fear is a “fear about that very entity which is afraid—Dasein.” The student afraid of failing her exam is ultimately afraid about herself and her Being—how failing her exam will affect her g.p.a, how her low g.p.a will decrease her chances of getting into an established university, etc.

Anxiety as a state-of-mind can be differentiated from fear, and all other affective states, by its indeterminacy. That which is fearsome is “encountered as an entity within-the-world” and comes from “some definite region”, which makes it determinate. On the other hand, when Dasein is in an anxious state-of-mind, it is incapable of identifying anything particular within the world that is threatening or inducing the anxiety. Anxiety is indeterminate in that, that which it is anxious about is “nowhere”; there is no definite entity that anxiety can be anxious about. However, this “nowhere” does not indicate that anxiety is anxious about nothing; rather, it is the very experience of Being-in-the-world that Dasein is anxious about.

The functions of anxiety are most evident and are best revealed in the everyday-Being of Dasein. When the rare mood of anxiety assails Dasein, all the features that come along with the immersive experience of Being-in-the-world (Being-with,

Being-alongside, etc), are abruptly extinguished from having any significance. Entities within-the-world that were once feared, are made to be not threatening. The ready-to-hand equipment that Dasein has familiarized itself with, renounces its important status. And most pertinent, the everyday world that Dasein is absorbed in, the world of the they, is rendered “utterly insignificant.” This loss of significance of worldly matters is due to anxiety’s function of “turning” Dasein away from its fallenness. Dasein’s “falling into the they and the world of its concern” is precisely the continuous act fleeing from itself, which characterizes an inauthentic comportment in Being.

It is only when Dasein is attuned to anxiety that it is forcefully extracted from its tranquilizing fallenness, and is then brought face to face with the totality of its Being. The uneasy or “uncanny” feeling that is a symptom of anxiety arises in virtue of Dasein being torn away from its reassuring “Being-at-home.” However, this uncanniness sprouts the potential for Dasein to confront its “authentic potentiality-for-Being-its-Self.” When Dasein fully dissolves itself in the they, the possibilities for Being are prescribed by the they. As Heidegger articulates, Dasein’s Being is “taken away” and stands in subjection to the “dictatorship of the they.” When affected by anxiety, however, the possibilities for Being are blossomed beyond the confines of what is prescribed by the they. Anxiety makes manifest in Dasein “its Being-free for the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself.” This is not to say that the already-established possibilities of the they are not to be considered; however, taking those possibilities as the only possibilities for Being, results in an inauthentic comportment towards Being.

Establishing and setting one’s own possibilities does not necessarily mean to dismiss or reject the possibilities promoted by the they. Rather, it means to be aware of the almost infinite possibilities attached to Being, which may or may not be antithetical to what the they currently promotes. This is what Heidegger refers to as “Being-possible”, which only anxiety can disclose. It is the disclosive features involved in the affective state of

anxiety—revealing possibilities in Being, exposing Dasein’s fallenness, etc—that facilitates the potential for authentic existence.

## **The Stranger and Authenticity**

Thus far we have only explored one possible consequence of Dasein’s confrontation with anxiety; namely, Dasein taking hold of its potentialities for Being. There are, however, two additional possible outcomes that need to be addressed and discussed. The second possibility that can occur when Dasein is afflicted with anxiety is a return back to its inauthentic fallen state, which is to say that it escapes the discomfort elicited by its anxiety and desperately immerses itself back into the they. In the transcription of his lecture, “What is Metaphysics?”, Heidegger notes the following: “That in the malaise of anxiety we often try to shatter the vacant stillness with compulsive talk...” What we can draw from this is that Dasein has a propensity towards escaping and fleeing its anxiety. Lastly, the third potential outcome is what I refer to as apathy; and it is precisely this consequence that Heidegger fails to consider. To understand how Dasein’s confrontation with anxiety can lead to apathy, it is best that we outline some of the prominent features of the anxious experience.

As mentioned in the preceding section, anxiety has the characteristic of dissolving meaning from the “totality of involvements”, which is to say that “the world has the character of completely lacking significance.” Part of the potential apathetic consequence of anxiety entails a prolongation of this aforementioned feature. After its confrontation with anxiety, Dasein finds itself attuned to the world in an indifferent manner. Once this is the case, its “ownmost potentiality for Being” becomes a relation which is devoid of substance; for if the world is of little importance for Dasein, it follows that what it does in the world—its orientation towards the world— is concurrently seen as futile. Therefore, authenticity functions accordingly and effectively insofar as Dasein maintains a general concern for the world and its Being-in it. To get a better understanding of apathy as a possible consequence of anxiety, an

existential-ontological analysis of Meursault from Albert Camus's *The Stranger* will prove to be insightful.

Near the beginning of the novel when Meursault is at his mother's funeral, it becomes evident that there is a lack of concern for how others publicly perceive him. While smoking a cigarette in the mortuary where one's mother's coffin is placed is generally regarded as inappropriate, this doesn't apply to Meursault. They, who typically dictate and "present every judgement and decision" for Dasein, fail to influence Meursault's behavior. Throughout the novel, the character never exhibits hesitation in his speech or actions which makes it unfitting to claim that inauthenticity pervades his Being. "Entities within-the-world" have become "of so little importance in themselves" that the death of his mother or killing a man bear no reasons for feeling uneasy.

An essential part of Being-in-the-world is Dasein's care for others, which Heidegger designates as solicitude<sup>72</sup>; a genuine solicitude towards others cannot be located in any of Meursault's actions. When asked whether he is nervous about his forthcoming trial for killing the Arab man, he responds by claiming he is not but rather is more "interested in seeing a trial." One might say that Meursault's "interest" in Marie, the woman that loves Meursault, signifies some degree of solicitude or concern for her. I dissent from this sentiment in that his "concern" for her is in reference to the sensuous pleasures he receives while being with her. Whenever we hear Meursault speak about Marie, it is always in terms of her aesthetic appearance, whether that be her "sparkling eyes" or "firm breasts" or the "salty smell of Marie's hair." Even when Meursault details the walks he went on, he never expresses how these experiences were meaningful to him; for he only describes the immediate physical sensations he felt. The indulgence of sensuous pleasures does not contribute to some larger structure of meaningful existence.

Furthermore, we do not find a significant relation between Meursault and his own future possibilities for Being. As Heidegger notes, Dasein taking issue with its Being in its Being is made plain in

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<sup>72</sup> Fürsorge

its “Being-ahead-of-itself.” In other words, Dasein is constantly projecting itself towards the possibilities it considers a potentiality for its Being, thus illuminating its concern for its very Being. Not once do we see Meursault carefully examine and deliberate the possibilities that are potential for his Being. When being offered a higher-level position at work that resided in Paris, he tells his boss that “it didn't really matter to him” whether he was promoted or not; and since that he is not necessarily dissatisfied with his life, he “couldn't see any reason to change it.” It is within this dialogue that we are able to confirm that Meursault was not simply born with the predisposition towards apathy.

He confesses that when he was a student, he was “filled with ambitions”; however, it was only soon after giving up his studies that he “learned very quickly that none of it really mattered.” And the “it” that does not matter to Meursault is in reference to the orientation towards projected possibilities (i.e. ambitions), but it can also refer to Being-in-the-world as a whole. I conjecture that it was precisely during this part of his life (namely, the time when he had to give up his studies) that he was afflicted with anxiety; I say this in virtue of the fact that it was only shortly after the event of giving up his studies that he realized the world he inhabits lacked significance.

Meursault's Being is void of projecting towards any potentiality-for-Being, which allows us to conclude that, in his Being, he does not take his Being as an issue. “Yesterday and tomorrow” are the only days that have any meaning for him. Recall that in the face of anxiety, “[a]ll things and we ourselves sink into indifference”; and when this feature persists beyond the encounter with this affective state, we can denote this consequence as apathy. It is in virtue of this possible outcome that compels me to be emphatic in maintaining that for anxiety to operate accordingly (which is to say, act as a facilitator for authentic existence), Dasein's world and its Being-in it cannot be rendered permanently insignificant.

## Conclusion

By Heidegger failing to acknowledge the potentially adverse consequence of Dasein's confrontation with anxiety, his ontological-existential analysis of anxiety lacks the necessary comprehensiveness. Meursault's narrative embodied this apathetic outcome which proved to be rather somber and grim. In this essay, I attempted to illustrate and argue that anxiety can result in an undesirable outcome which inhibits the potential for authenticity. One of the ways this essay extends beyond philosophy is its implications for psychotherapy, particularly for existential psychotherapy. If we accept that among the motivations of existential therapists is to encourage the patient to situate themselves in relation to their existential totality of Being, then the anxiety that invariable follows is something which must be managed. Thus, to prevent the patient from confronting the unconstructive consequences of anxiety, whether that be apathy or fleeing from anxiety, it would be beneficial to heed the various ways anxiety can radically transform one's relation to Being-in-the-world.



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# Untitled (collage)

By Flora Douglass



# **Bad Faith and the Look as a Hellish Cycle**

By Julia S. Abbott

## **Introduction**

Early in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre defines bad faith as the act of lying to oneself in order to evade freedom and live an inauthentic life. Later in the same work, he describes the torment that arises from being perceived and objectified by the Other's look. Though these concepts are introduced separately, they are intricately connected. Sartre himself illustrates the unity of bad faith and the look using the characters in his play *No Exit*, notably those of Garcin and Estelle. The purpose of this paper is to further explore the extent to which Sartre's concepts of bad faith and the look function together. I will highlight their appearance within the relationships between the characters of Garcin, Estelle and Inez. Ultimately, I will conclude that bad faith is a vicious and hellish cycle, both instigated and destroyed by the look of the Other.

## **Sartre on Bad Faith**

According to Sartre, bad faith is an attitude characteristic of human existence in which humans subconsciously deny their freedom through self-negation to rid themselves of this responsibility. Bad faith is neither lying nor falsehood as Sartre clearly differentiates bad faith from these two notions. Sartre contrasts bad faith and lying by first defining what it means to lie. According to him, a liar has "cynical consciousness, affirming the truth within himself, denying it in his words, and denying that

negation as such.”<sup>73</sup> To be a liar, one must be intent on withholding or negating the truth. To do this, one must know the truth for oneself and deliberately tell someone else otherwise. Lying must be done outwardly and involve two distinct parties: the deceiver and the deceived. The liar explicitly deceives the Other by saying the opposite of what the liar knows to be true. In a way, a lie is just as clear and straightforward as the truth; it is merely the purposeful concealing of the truth. There is no uncertainty within the act of lying. As long as the lie lives, the liar must stay consistent with it. A lie is a deliberate act involving two parties: one who is fully aware of the truth and one who is not.

Bad faith, on the other hand, involves only one party: oneself. Unlike lying, bad faith is a conflict within oneself because “in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth...the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist.”<sup>74</sup> Bad faith is lying to oneself in the sense that, out of pre-reflective apprehension and an aversion to freedom, one decides without even being aware of it. In other words, one subconsciously decides not to decide. However, to be both the deceiver and the deceived, as one is when one is acting in bad faith, one must know the truth to some extent in order to conceal it. Therefore, bad faith involves self-negation in the sense that one’s consciousness must simultaneously know and suppress the truth. By suppressing the truth, one’s consciousness employs its freedom to relieve itself of the unwanted freedom that would result from acknowledging the truth.

Sartre explains the difference between bad faith and falsehood to prevent a true liar from using bad faith as an excuse for lying: “The true problem of bad faith stems evidently from the fact that bad faith is faith. It cannot be a cynical lie or certainty--if certainty is the intuitive possession of the object.”<sup>75</sup> Here, Sartre expands on the definition of bad faith, clarifying that bad faith is neither a conscious lie nor certainty - it is a belief. He then asserts that by the definition of the word “belief,” one can never completely,

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<sup>73</sup> Sartre, “Bad Faith”, 87

<sup>74</sup> Sartre, “Bad Faith”, 89

<sup>75</sup> Sartre, “Bad Faith”, 112

utterly believe in what one believes. A belief is merely what one attempts to accept as true. Because of this, bad faith is a phenomenon that takes advantage of this “flaw” in consciousness. Bad faith is the result of pre-reflectively willing a belief into existence due to the desire not to believe what one believes.

## **Sartre on the Look**

Sartre reveals that the look of the Other triggers anxiety and distress, often leading people to act differently in the presence of other people than they do when alone.<sup>76</sup> When a person looks at an object, their consciousness perceives it and defines it. Yet, because it is an object and has no consciousness, the viewer knows the object is incapable of doing the same to them. However, when one looks at another person, one is cognizant that the Other is attempting to define them just as they are trying to define the Other. It is the reciprocity of consciousness that creates this initial discomfort of the look.

In the keyhole scenario, out of jealousy, Sartre spies on his lover through the keyhole of a door. The fact he thinks he is alone when he does this allows him to do this “safely” without reflecting on it. However, when he hears footsteps, Sartre instinctively recoils in shame. Sartre explains this reaction by saying, “First of all, I now exist as myself for my unreflective consciousness. It is this irruption of the self which has been most often described: I see myself because somebody sees me.”<sup>77</sup> When someone else comes along, Sartre is now subject to the judgement that always comes from the Other. The presence of the Other forces Sartre to reflect on his actions and the inferences that can be made from them.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Sartre incorporates this notion into his discussion of bad faith when he writes “The meaning of this look is not a fact in the world, and this is what makes me uncomfortable” (Sartre, “Bad Faith”, 105).

<sup>77</sup> Sartre, “The Look”, 349

<sup>78</sup> In his explanation of the keyhole example, Sartre directly reintroduces the concept of bad faith when he says “I escape this provisional definition of myself by means of all my transcendence. There as we have seen is the origin of bad faith” (Sartre, “The Look”, 348-349).

The fact that people are aware of the Other perceiving them and thus defining them in their consciousness causes people to either restrict or expand themselves, resulting, respectively, in shame or pride. Even though it is impossible for anyone to truly know how the Other defines them, people react to the Other's perception: "If there is an Other... then I have an outside, I have a nature. My original fall is the existence of the Other. Shame— like pride— is the apprehension of myself as a nature although that very nature escapes me and is unknowable as such."<sup>79</sup> Ironically, though people are naturally uncomfortable with their own freedom, they seemingly are also uncomfortable with what exists outside their freedom: how the Other perceives them. However, this is better explained by people's discomfort with their freedom and is only worsened knowing the Other uses what they do with their freedom to define them. This may result in an active attempt to be completely objectified by the Other as an attempt to escape freedom. To be completely objectified by the Other means to be viewed in the same way as an object. Objects do not have freedom and therefore cannot be subject to judgement based on what they do with it. This is one way in which Sartre weaves the concept of bad faith into "The Look".

### **Bad Faith and the Look in No Exit**

In his play *No Exit*, Sartre himself unites his concepts of bad faith and the look by depicting the hell that is the look of the Other and the effects the look has on those in bad faith. This play depicts three characters —Garcin, Estelle, and Inez— meeting and conversing with one another in Hell. However, rather than being a fiery landscape complete with torturers, hell is a room with three anchored couches arranged in a way suitable for conversation. At first, the only indication of anything torturous in this hell is the lack of eyelids, and with it, the impossibility of sleep. Confused by the fact that the hell they are in does not match the idea of hell they encountered on Earth, they inevitably attempt to reconcile this by discussing their lives, namely, who they are and why they are in hell.

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<sup>79</sup> Sartre, "The Look", 352

It soon becomes evident that the hell in question is their destiny to be locked in a room together forever. Each character suffers as a result of the look—the presence of and the conversation with the other two. Garcin and Estelle, who are in bad faith, suffer especially, as they find it extremely difficult to admit both to themselves and to the others why they are in hell. Hell is unique for Inez, who is in good faith. She is quick to take responsibility for her actions by telling the others exactly why she is in hell.

Garcin is in bad faith because he conceals his cowardice from himself and the others. He is convinced his being in hell is a “pure fluke”, asking Estelle and Inez “do you think it’s a crime to stand by one’s principles?”<sup>80</sup> He proudly shares with the others how he ran a pacifist paper during wartime, conveniently neglecting to mention that he died running away, rather than standing for his principles. Contrarily, he actively states otherwise, claiming he stood his ground as a pacifist as the firing squad shot him. When the inevitable discussion occurs regarding how each ended up in hell, Garcin is much more willing to admit he treated his wife abysmally than to admit to his running away.

However, initially upon entering hell, he denied knowing any reason why he may have ended up there.

It is not until much later that Garcin finally reveals how he truly faced his death: not by standing up for his principles, but by running away. Ashamed of this, before he died, Garcin convinced himself that if he faced his execution courageously it would negate the cowardice of running away and he would no longer be considered a coward. However, he also failed to do this, revealing how he faced his death: “Miserably. Rottenly. Oh, it was only a physical lapse—that might have happened to anyone; I’m not ashamed of it. Only everything’s been left in suspense forever.” Garcin was in full control of his decisions; he could have decided not to run away, and he could have decided to face his death with valor. He does neither but does not accept that this makes him a coward. He attributes his actions to “a physical lapse.” By saying this, Garcin directs the blame outwardly, yet the truth of the matter is, it was his fault. Additionally, by saying

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<sup>80</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 16

it “might have happened to anyone,” Garcin implies that all of this happened to him when he had complete control over his actions. Furthermore, Garcin claims not to be ashamed of his actions, which is proved false by the fact he spends the entire play lamenting them.

Garcin avows that, as a result of his death, “everything’s been left in suspense forever.”<sup>81</sup> Yet it is quite the opposite. Because Garcin is dead, his character is set in stone by the decisions he made while he was alive; he can no longer do anything to convince the Other, or himself, that he is not a coward. Because he cannot accept this, he lives, or exists in hell, in bad faith, debating for eternity whether or not he is a coward.

Estelle’s bad faith also stems from the fact she doesn’t know why she is in hell. When asked by Inez why she is in hell, Estelle responds, “That’s just it. I haven’t a notion, not the foggiest. In fact, I’m wondering if there hasn’t been some ghastly mistake.”<sup>82</sup> This is difficult to believe, however, as she eventually reveals she had an affair, got pregnant, and drowned her baby. Further, after learning what she had done, the father of her baby killed himself. It is not until Garcin and Inez force her to share her story by attempting to piece it together that Estelle tells them this. However, she puts up a fight first by accusing them of being hateful, bullying her, and throwing a tantrum. It is this resistance to telling her own life story that initially indicates the extent of her bad faith.

Estelle tries to become an object because an object does not have the responsibility of choice-making, a characteristic of human freedom. For the entirety of the play, Estelle strives to be objectified by Garcin. This behavior reflects her behavior on Earth. Estelle aims to become an object by focusing all her attention on her physical appearance and sex appeal. She is extremely disturbed by the fact there are no mirrors in hell — the only way she can see herself is through the eyes of the other two. After almost fainting upon this realization, Estelle says to Inez, “I feel so queer... When I can’t see myself I begin to wonder if I really and truly exist.”<sup>83</sup> Estelle is so

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<sup>81</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 38

<sup>82</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 15

<sup>83</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 19



desperate to see herself that she even tries to see her reflection in the pupil of Inez's eye. Estelle's bad faith extends so far that without her appearance, she hardly believes she exists. Estelle puts her appearance and sexuality on a pedestal to distract herself and others from her character, which is defined by her choices and actions.

The driving force in Estelle's life is the desire to be wanted and objectified. She does not want to be defined by her character, as she refuses to accept the responsibility for her actions and behavior. Inez is the only one of the three in good faith. One in good faith lives an authentic life, both acknowledging and accepting one's freedom. The fact that Inez is in good faith does not make her good; in her case, it means she accepts she is bad and is viewed that way by the Other. Good faith, to the extent which Inez has it, merely indicates self-awareness. She is aware of the choices she made in her life and what they mean. One of the first things she says is, "I'm not polite," later expanding on this when she tells Estelle, "I'm always conscious of myself—in my mind. Painfully conscious."<sup>84</sup> Inez says this directly in response to Estelle after Estelle tells Inez not being able to look at herself in the mirror causes her to question her existence. This is a stark contrast between Estelle's bad faith and Inez's good faith.

Inez takes ownership of the decisions she made while she was alive. She knows the implications of these decisions and openly calls herself "cruel" and "a damned bitch,"<sup>85</sup> knowing full well this is what Others call her. She is the only one who is open from the beginning about her past, and is the first to tell the complete, true story of her life, matter-of-factly stating she had an affair with her cousin's wife, Florence. Not only this, but she drove Florence so mad with her cruelty that Florence killed them both in a murder-suicide. Though wicked, Inez is in good faith as she does not deny who she is or the decisions which made her this way, as she constantly reflects upon herself.

While Garcin and Estelle are in shock and denial as to why they are there (despite the glaring reasons justifying their presence), Inez is not. Not only does she know she belongs in hell, she knows

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<sup>84</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 9; Sartre, *No Exit*, 19

<sup>85</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 25-26

the other two do as well. This is true when she says, “Yes, we are criminals—murderers— all three of us. We’re in Hell, my pets; they never make mistakes, and people aren’t damned for nothing.”<sup>86</sup> Inez laughs every time Garcin or Estelle suggests a mistake has been made. She knows each has committed crimes that earned them a rightful seat in hell.<sup>87</sup> Inez has reflected on her decisions enough to know they were sinful, compromising her character.

Garcin and Estelle were shocked about going to hell due to their lack of self-reflection. Garcin avoided self-reflection by infinitely debating whether a bad decision he made was actually bad, never allowing himself to reach a conclusion. This is how he deals with his cowardly death. Estelle avoided self-reflection by focusing only on her appearance and objectivity, which allowed herself to think highly of herself, as neither involved her freedom or character. Because she is in good faith, Inez perceives Garcin and Estelle in ways that conflict with their bad faith perception of themselves.

Garcin and Estelle each undergo additional suffering because of their bad faith. Inez suffers less because, being in good faith, she was never in denial of her actions. Unlike Garcin and Estelle, Inez experienced no shock upon entering hell. Additionally, it was much easier for Inez to talk to Garcin and Estelle about her. This is because Inez did not resist self-reflection during her lifetime; she was self-aware.

## **The Role of Pride in Bad Faith and the Look**

Being looked at is a vulnerable state in which the Other places the subject in a position of judgement and analysis. The Other acts as a mirror, yet the reflection is generated solely by the Other,

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<sup>86</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 16

<sup>87</sup> According to Schonsheck, this idea is the “philosophical linchpin” of the play: “(1) You are—your life, (2) Your life consists of your actions, of your deeds (not your “dreams”), and (3) You have the (ontological) freedom needed to choose (at least some of) your deeds, and thus the freedom to choose (at least some of) your projects” (Schonsheck, 241). Here, Schonsheck argues that the takeaway from the play is that people define themselves during their lifetime with the way in which they use their freedom.

whether or not the subject approves. This in turn creates bad faith, especially in people with immense pride. As Debra Bergoffen aptly states, “Pride exhibits the structure of bad faith insofar as it is an escape from freedom. It uses one mode of my being—its objectness for the other—to close off another mode of my being—its power to objectify the other.”<sup>88</sup> This can be seen in Sartre’s play *No Exit* through the characters Garcin and Estelle.

Both Garcin and Estelle demonstrate tremendous pride in *No Exit*, demonstrated by how often they “check-in” on their friends and family on Earth, and how they interact with their companions in hell. Garcin’s reason for caring about the Other concerns his inner debate over whether or not he is a coward. Estelle cares about the Other because, in her bad faith, she measures her self-worth through her desirability to men. This results in their seeking help from one another via a sexual relationship. While Garcin and Estelle spy on their acquaintances on Earth to maintain their bad faith (similar to how they did when alive), Inez loses her ability to do this, as there is nothing for her there.

Garcin, Instead of taking responsibility for his actions and owning that his actions were cowardly, decides it is up to others, desperately hoping someone interpreted his cowardly actions as brave. Garcin obsessively watches his friends on Earth, invading their thoughts for anything involving him: “There they are, slumped in their chairs, sucking at their cigars. Bored they look. Half-asleep. They’re thinking ‘Garcin’s a coward’... That’s what they’ve decided, those dear friends of mine.”<sup>89</sup> He feels betrayed by his friends for thinking this, even though there is no denying his actions were cowardly. However, he does deny and endlessly debates it, putting him in bad faith.

In his bad faith, Garcin devises another way he can save himself from being a coward— Estelle. He is so deep in denial and bitter that his friends regard him poorly, he decides he needs only one person to think he is brave. He pleads, “Look at it this way. A

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<sup>88</sup> Bergoffen, “The look as bad faith”, 22

<sup>89</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 38

thousand of them are proclaiming I'm a coward; but what do numbers matter? If there's someone, just one person, to say quite positively I did not run away... that I'm brave and decent and the rest of it— well that person's faith would save me.”<sup>90</sup> Garcin shamelessly begs Estelle to oblige, not caring that this detracts from its meaning. He has no faith in himself because it is a fact he ran away. However, since all he cares about is what others think, he convinces himself that Estelle can save him by lying and telling him he is brave.

Estelle also indulges in visiting Earth and intently watches Peter, a boy who used to be in love with her. She says “He belonged to me” and even begs him to think of her: “Peter dear, think of me, fix your thoughts on me, and save me.”<sup>91</sup> In her bad faith, Estelle strictly cares about being wanted by men for her beauty. This is the only way she places value on herself.

Estelle asks Garcin to save her in the same way, and in doing so asks him to fulfill her need to be approved and validated by the Other. Though she can no longer have Peter, being desirable to any man will suffice, as this is enough to validate her and keep her in bad faith.

Estelle: I'll sit on your sofa and wait for you to take some notice of me. I promise not to bother you at all.

Garcin: I'll give you what I can. It doesn't amount to much. I shan't love you; I know you too well.

Estelle: Do you want me, anyhow?

Garcin: Yes.

Estelle: I ask no more.<sup>92</sup>

Estelle is extremely persistent in her bad faith, just as Garcin is in his. Because her appearance is her sole concern, she is willing to sit and wait, for eternity, for Garcin to notice and appreciate her beauty. Furthermore, the fact Estelle does not need to be loved, just wanted, coincides with her desire to be objectified. Love requires an appreciation of one's character, as Garcin acknowledges when he says

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<sup>90</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 39

<sup>91</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 32

<sup>92</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 35

he knows her too well. However, it is possible for attraction and desire to be based strictly on physical appearance, and this is all Estelle needs from Garcin to maintain her bad faith.

Though Inez spends the entirety of the play flirting with Estelle, there is a major difference between Inez's desire for Estelle and Garcin and Estelle's desire for each other. Garcin and Estelle seek a savior in one another— someone to keep them in their bad faith.<sup>93</sup> Inez knows there is no being saved: "I assure you I know everything, and I can't feel sorry for myself. A trap! Don't I know it, and that I'm in a trap myself, up to the neck, and there's nothing to be done about it? And if it suits their book, so much the better!"<sup>94</sup> Inez exhibits awareness in a way the others do not. She has no self-pity because she knows that she used her freedom to make every decision that landed her in Hell. She also knows she is in an inescapable trap and can't be saved. Knowing this, she does not seek to be saved by one of the others, which Garcin and Estelle each do.

It is no mistake that Inez, the only character in good faith, is also the only character who has a profound understanding of the look and the hell that arises from it. In response to Garcin's proposal to spend eternity ignoring each other, she says "Forget about the others? How utterly absurd. I feel you there, in every pore. Your silence clamors in my ears. You can nail up your mouth, cut your tongue out—but you can't prevent your being there. Can you stop your thoughts? I hear them ticking away like a clock."<sup>95</sup> Inez is mindful of the inability to forget one is in the presence of others. She ridicules Garcin for even suggesting this possibility. In her good faith, she is the most aware of the effect the presence of Garcin and Estelle has on her. This in-depth understanding of the look arises from the fact she is "painfully conscious"<sup>96</sup> of herself. Therefore, she is perfectly aware of the impact the presence of the others has on her.

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<sup>93</sup> Bergoffen notes this relationship between bad faith and the look when she writes "The kind of lying to oneself that Sartre identifies as bad faith is not a solipsistic enterprise. The self deceptions of bad faith are encouraged and reinforced by my social situation (the look)" (Bergoffen, 221).

<sup>94</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 30

<sup>95</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 22

<sup>96</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 19

This is less clear for Garcin and Estelle who seek saving in one another.

In his article, “On Teaching Jean-Paul Sartre’s *No Exit*,” Schonsheck writes, “By the end of the play, each character has been savaged by the unceasing, critical judgment of the other characters. Other people are hellish, because our interacting with them strips us of our pretense, demolishes our facade, reveals our true selves—preventing our living in bad faith.”<sup>97</sup> This is precisely what Sartre portrays in his play. Garcin and Estelle feel this more painfully and shockingly because of their bad faith. Both Garcin and Estelle live in a façade and hide their true selves. Garcin will want Estelle like she needs to be wanted if Estelle will say Garcin is not a coward. It is Inez who is especially hell-ish for these two characters- she constantly drives her clarity and good faith into them.

Sartre’s line from *No Exit*, “Hell is other people,”<sup>98</sup> refers to the way the Other simultaneously puts one in bad faith and forces one out. Once again, bad faith would not exist if only oneself existed. Garcin and Estelle live in bad faith because of their pride and their refusal to take ownership of their decisions. The hell portrayed in *No Exit* illustrates the pain and shock of being forced out of bad faith. This is especially shown by the look of Inez on the other two, which is harsher due to her good faith. Inez’s good faith relieves her of some of the hell experienced by Garcin and Estelle as she accepts she was not a good person and belongs in hell.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to show not only that Sartre’s concepts of bad faith and the look are deeply intertwined, but also to illuminate the vicious cycle that can result from this relationship between them, especially in the presence of pride. As evidenced by Garcin and Estelle in *No Exit*, pride often coincides with bad faith. This is worsened by the fact one has no control over the way the Other perceives them. Because of this lack of control, someone who

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<sup>97</sup> Schonsheck, “On Teach Jean-Paul Sartre’s *No Exit*”, 229

<sup>98</sup> Sartre, *No Exit*, 45

cares immensely about how the Other perceives them is almost inevitably going to live in bad faith. However, this is a vicious cycle because bad faith, which is often induced by the look and the existence of others, causes one to live inauthentically and in denial. Yet, living inauthentically is bound to place one under the scrutiny and disapproval of others, forcing that person out of bad faith. Inez's character in *No Exit* epitomizes the ability of the Other's scrutiny to force an individual out of bad faith. She constantly reminds Garcin and Estelle they are in hell and they deserve to be there. Both initiated and shattered by the look of the Other, bad faith is a vicious, hopeless cycle.

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## Ascending

By Teresa H. Gao

They tried not to see the baby bird  
shuddering its broken feathers on  
the parched earth;  
they seemed not to know it had fallen,  
tumbling from its nest, then collapsing  
into a mound of splintered bones,  
and they pretended not to pity the bird  
cooing feebly from the ground  
like a spring blossom choked by frost  
desperate for hope;  
but everyone watched as the bird  
folded its wings and lifted  
its head above the dying leaves  
and whispered a melody that with every verse  
grew louder and louder  
until there was no fallen bird to pity,  
no broken soul to feel sorry for,  
only the music of a reborn heart  
carrying its song into the sky.

## Existential Prayer

By Abby Wesnofske

Dear God,

I know we haven't spoken in a while. My rosary beads have been sitting in a tangled pile in the depths of my jewelry box, and I'm sorry for that. I was doing okay for a while and I feel bad for only reaching out when I'm broken and crumbling. I haven't been to mass in awhile either but you already knew that. Maybe it's a good thing. Maybe it shows my independence, I've learned not to lean on you for every little thing. Maybe it shows that I have real friends now who listen to me and let me cry. I haven't forgotten about you though. I look up to the moon and walk along the beach and whisper hoping you'll hear me. All my wishes are selfish though. I could pray for an end for covid, or world hunger but if the thousands of others prayers aren't being answered for that then mine won't either. So I pray, for the people I love and about the people I've lost. I'm not looking for anything major, just to lessen the burden of their chaotic lives. I mean we are here against our wills so why not make it a little more bearable.

But I can pray for Brenden. I hope you help him get his shit together. I know he's still young but there are people who love him with their whole heart and it breaks them to see him be so erratic and solitary. Thank you for letting me see him again. Even if it's not meant to last I can still thank you. Now I can dream of the life he and I could have had; We'd have two houses, the house next to the one I grew up in so we can look over my family's farm and a small cottage

on the beach in Amagansett where we can fish all day and lay around on the sand. And I'd give everything to go back in time with him to Montauk while it was still paradise for gritty fisherman with their callused hands and yellowed teeth. He understands the land and the sea like I do. And it breaks his heart just like it breaks mine to see our town get eaten up by a greedy builder who unfortunately shares his last name. I know I should be mad for letting him break me again, for letting me have all of these fruitless dreams that sparked from his empty promises of marriage. But that's what love is isn't it? Jumping off the boat into the deep blue nothingness hoping that someone will be there to join you. I'm not expecting anyone to rescue me, I'm a strong enough swimmer, but I wouldn't mind some company along the way.

I hope he finally learns to love a girl and appreciate her instead of running, I hope he gets that life where he can come home to his loving wife after months away at sea. And I hope he figures out that he's not as awful as he thinks he is. Yes, he makes me wail until my eyes are so blurry it's like trying to drive 70 in the pouring rain. But it's because he is the same as I am, broken, a fool, and reckless, but the difference is that I learned how to keep people around. I have you to thank for that. Everything seems trivial in the hands of God. People come and people go and you taught me how to hold onto the good ones. And no matter how hard you try to hold on there is always a fish that gets loose from the hook and you learn to let it go and try again for the next one. It's the fisherman's curse, or blessing whichever way you look at it. Fish are autonomous but they can't break hearts. If you learn to let fish go it makes it a little easier to let humans go too. And maybe one day off some crazy one in a million chance you'll catch that same fish again and it'll have grown and it will finally be a keeper. But that's wishful thinking of course.

I pray for Uncle Benny too. What a long life he's lived. 85 years old, farmer through and through. I hope he recovers from his broken hip, but you and I know that that is always the beginning of the end. I know we all die but he shouldn't have to go yet. It's not my place to decide who gets to go and when, I'm not you, but he's been like a surrogate father to my mother and is my grandfather's best

friend. And you know how many funerals my poor mother has been to in her life, it's not time for another. But if it is his time, let him be happy and don't let it drag on too long. And when he does reach heaven, which I'm sure he will, give him all the acres of land that got taken away from him. Death isn't so scary when you think about it that way, when there is something to look forward to. I don't know if I want that though. Sometimes it's nice to think that nothing exists after we die. I was nothing before I was conceived, why can't I be nothing after I die? I've never really been scared of death. Ever since I could talk I would scream about how much I didn't want to exist anymore. But maybe since I already exist the best I can do is live, I'd rather do that than wait around to die.

At the same time though I don't wanna end up like poor Benny. Is that too much to ask for? I don't wanna die young but I don't wanna get old. Being old scares me more than death. For so long I wished to die a tragic death and everyone would comment on how I still had so much more life to live. I talked about getting shot in the forehead or getting into some mangled car accident, I'd hate to be reduced to a hospital bed in the middle of my living room, sedentary until I finally exhale for the last time. I hope that doesn't happen to Benny, I hope he gets up again. But that's the price of old age isn't it? Sentenced to death by the failing of our own bodies. Of course I don't wish for him to live forever, eternity scares me more than anything. How awful it would be to live forever and see the world change in unimaginable ways, knowing that there is no way to escape it. As humans our only certainty is death, and I think that is a wonderful thing. However there is a load of uncertainty that follows death, when someone goes and how always remains a far away question. So for Benny I hope he doesn't dwell on it too much, waiting around to die is a sad fate.

And I pray for T, what an awful life she lives. A manipulative mother, a son who hates the world as much as he is scared of it, a father who couldn't bear to live anymore, a brother who became a stranger after a tragic brain injury, an ex husband who's coked up. Yet she carries on. And isn't that a life lesson for the rest of us. No matter how many times my mind eats away at my soul, or how unbearable

my pain is I just have to keep trucking. Is that why you put her in my life? So I could see the persistence of such a fragile woman? I pray that you ease her burden ever so slightly, pray that you take time off of her days that are so insufferably long. Time is such a fickle thing isn't it? How we wish for some days to stretch long and for some days to end short. How years go on in the blink of an eye but a minute can feel eternal. And how one day in a far off year feels like it was yesterday. There's no escaping the ever ticking clock. They say time is a human construct but I think that's a good thing. It gives some semblance of order even if it all gets distorted anyways. So I hope T gets more good time and less bad time. Less achingly long days and more days that go by in a euphoric blur.

At last I pray for myself. It's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. As the great Bruce Springsteen said, "They wanted to know why I did what I did. Well sir I guess there's just a meanness in this world." You know how impulsive I can be, and how I get filled to the brim with bitterness sometimes. So I go buckwild. I scream and dance and drink and fuck without anyone in the world. I should start to take it slow but where's the fun in that? I think I've done a decent job with the shitty hand I've been dealt. It all got a lot better after I stopped cursing your name and wondering why you would ever make someone's life so hard. Yes I've got my vices, I drink too much and can't stop pulling out my hair. And maybe someday I'll quit smoking and settle down with a man who's not more trouble than he's worth. Until then I'll sit here on this floating rock in the great wide nothingness and go at my own speed. It's all relative really, and what an interesting thing that is. We all end up in the same place so why make our lives so incredibly different? That's the human experience, learning to see people as they are and striving to understand them as best you can.

So I end this letter with a weight lifted off of my heart. It takes a certain person to be able to look at all the things we can't control and to be okay with it. I think that's where faith and love come in, things that I've struggled with so much. And maybe that's all I'm asking for. That everyone gains a little faith and learns how to love.

