

# **The Reed**

Spring 2010  
Northfield, Minnesota

“Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed... It is not from space that I must seek my dignity, but from the ordering of my thought. The possession of lands would give me nothing more. By space, the universe envelops me and swallows me up like a point. By thought, I envelope it.”

-Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

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Cover Photo: Dylan Nelson, St. Olaf College



# Untitled

By Gil Thompson

St. Olaf College

Writers,  
who write to be read,  
They do not exist.

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inner realm from the noisy external world. What would they say, if she suddenly plopped dead right then and there, having hung herself from the excess cord of the espresso maker? Probably just end up being another boorish anecdote at a different coffee house some other time. Pay it forward.

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Received the letter back in the mail today, apparently “you’ll know where to find her” isn’t a legitimate address to put on an envelope. Likely story. Maybe it’s true, I don’t know. You never can tell with these things. Just as likely, a dimensional rift opened up from under her flat and wiped her out of existence as we know it—or at least as I think we know it. Too bad, really, because from what I remember of her we probably would have had a nice time together; I’d guess anywhere from a week to a couple years, depending on circumstance and dumb luck. I grow sad thinking of all the experiences we could have shared. Like forgetting to buy her a Christmas present. I’ve always wanted to try and think my way out of forgetting someone’s Christmas present. In any case, it’s too late to dwell on things like that now, since she’s gone forever. I’d erect a small memorial for her or compose some dramatic art but, to tell the truth, I forgot her name too. I suppose I could ask our mutual friend about it, but I bet he’s taking this girl’s sudden annihilation harder than I am. Me? Well, I’m just too rational to believe that life could be any other way.

the general process doesn't sound much different to healthcare today. Forget I even mentioned it.

Anyway, where was I?

Just kidding, I'm thinking about the girl that I'm killing a thousand times inside my head. Maybe one of these times I'll get it right and rid myself of the annoying impression of her that's lodged beside my heart like a Dorito swallowed whole. Coughing on the smoke of this cigar has never felt so good as when I believe that my idea of her will be ejected along with my phlegm. So far, nothing has come up. So I think about a building collapsing. The structural integrity of old buildings is all too often suspect since inspections are lackadaisical in such areas of town as she's presumably from. I can imagine a twitching dusty figure under a pile of stereotypical rubble, spelling off mumblings into the nothingness of a cramped empty space. Should have packed a hard hat along with a toothbrush and comb. O well, live and learn. I'd hate to think that her death was slow, though, like being tortured. Put on the rack, for example, or the Chinese water method. I hear she takes quite a few shifts at a quiet little café down the street from her flat. Maybe she was caught one night without any customers or her book so, after tiring of twittling her thumbs and the mop and rag, she finally died of boredom. Or worse, maybe there were two loquacious customers who decided to take up residence until close after buying only one measly cup of decaf and getting a free water. College students, probably, kids talking like adults pretending to be carefree like children. My love sits there, no doubt, as the constant flow of meaningless chatter drowns out any independent train of thought. I bet I would be surprised too if I found my petunias dead after only a week. Why the hell would she get in the car with that guy, anyway? How long can someone last trying to remain sane amidst the unbroken chain of cheery platitude and flippant misfortune of two people desperate to share the nonsense of their private lives with another? An hour, perhaps, maybe two.

It would be enough for one to consider ending it right then and there. Suicide becomes the only way to salvage the sacred

## Editors' Note

The editors of this journal are occasionally confronted with the questions "what is the value of an undergraduate existentialist journal," or even, "what is existentialism?"<sup>1</sup> To the latter, and not without a sense of the irony, we would first venture to reply with one of Sartre's most concise existentialist mantras, "existence precedes essence."

This definition is most appropriate and desirable as an explanation for the existence of an undergraduate journal of existentialism because it resonates with the extraordinarily existential experience of undergraduate college life (especially at residential schools). For many undergrads, arriving to college in the fall of their freshman year marks the beginning of an interval of life in which "existence" truly does precede "essence" –in which decisions precede social and intellectual identity, and the identity of the self is explored and even created.

Perhaps for the first time, many of us choose new courses of life, uniquely free of former orientations' influence, whether familial, social, or regional. As we choose our identities, many of us experience Kierkegaardian-sized helpings of angst. At times generating radically new personas, some of us endure a distinctive form of despair which Kierkegaard dubbed the "despair of not willing to be oneself."

The problem engendered by the question of identity has been both exacerbated and mitigated by the age of electronic communication. As it becomes easier to indulge in the apparent freedom of creating new, artificial personas, we may actually be distracted from confronting and shaping the real, inward self. The desperate egotism of these structures might be ameliorated by a regimen of existentialist reflection, a philosophical movement that stresses personal fulfillment and action.

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<sup>1</sup> For a more comprehensive answer than we can provide here, we would recommend one explore a volume like *The Basic Writings of Existentialism* edited by Professor Gordon Marino.

Thus, we provide the spring 2010 issue of *The Reed*. A real, materially substantial journal composed of reflective analytical essays and creative works. Many of the following analytical pieces focus on thinkers typically categorized as existentialists. But do not think that the movement is passé; existentialism and its themes are both persistent and pervasive. It continues to exert influence in continental philosophy as well as in contemporary creative writing, art, and film.

As we are deluged by insidious categorizing systems like Facebook and ego-feeds like Twitter, we may stand to benefit from existentialism more than even those existentialists that were dwelling and flourishing in the ruins of authoritarian Europe.

So, while you, dear reader, might not yet fully know all the nuances of what existentialism is, we assure you that you are wrestling with it all the time.

and the reflection that it's too silly to laugh at...soon the muscles in her belly and chest produce guttural noises reminiscent of a hungry hyena. She needs to hold her side for mechanical support and wipes tears that have been jettisoned from her head because of the mounting pressure, and eventually bends over into the fetal position. She wonders why it was so funny in the first place, decides it wasn't after all but it's too late and it's ridiculous anyway but now there's no going back and the rub is that this too becomes absurd!

She's been laughing for minutes now. After a while it all becomes too much and BAM! Guts and gore all over the grimy tile that she's been meaning to wax for ages but hasn't. Well, that's not probable. Rather, she looks like a crumpled daffodil as she lies pathetically close to the cat's water bowl during her last moments, staring at a few little soggy food bits and wondering why that always seems to happen. Cats are just wicked little pissants. Her twisted expression, between that of circus audience member and just plain "uh-oh" greets a flat-mate upon his brisk arrival. After calling for help, he wonders what must have been so funny.

Resting my head on the big ugly futon outside my front door always brings a rush of blood to my cortex that disorients me. Thinking about thinking—the commonest activity for a neurotic like me—is abruptly interrupted by the bizarre sensation of blood pumping through my own brain plus the visual kaleidoscopic grey-out that accompanies it. Awakening, to know I'm all neurons. I think, therefore I have a brain. Not as impressive as the famous expression. The ancients used to think of the brain as a cooler, or rather fantasize and speculate about it like kindergarteners. Descartes knew better, he was a medical man. If you can call anything that doctors thought and did back then as having anything to do with medical care. Leeching, for example, just think about that a moment. Doctors would prescribe leeches to suck out the patient's life under the presumption that that would cure them. Then they would demand payment. Who would ever believe anything like that, unless the leeches themselves had comical little aprons and nurse caps on; that would be too cute to reject. I doubt that happened though, they were probably quite feral little devils. Actually,



Yeah, better not to muse about it. Besides, I don't think prisons even have striped uniforms anymore.

The whiskey I'm drinking is good. Although it's blended, I'd put it ahead of some single malts. I don't know what that means, exactly, but I heard a respected friend of mine say this once and I've repeated it ever since. Still, the liquor doesn't burn enough to distract me from my lost love.

Ever wonder why nobody says "go jump off a cliff" nowadays? Well, my guess is that it's not because of a recent shortage of cliffs or something silly like that, but that it has become a cliché. The thing with clichés is that they're often authoritative but just so overused from people always talking but never doing anything that the expressions lose their original potency. Maybe this virtuous lady of mine decided to redeem this overused expression by going out and simply doing it. Geronomo! The seagulls would mutter to themselves as she soared by, "that's a cliché too," but she wouldn't hear them, the roar of the wind drowning out all other sound like the waves below would soon drown her. Then that poor friend who once told this girl to jump off a cliff—only because she thought the cliché would be funny—would just sit there and whisper to herself, "I must have great and terrible powers!"

If it could be one way I'd prefer? Okay, let's say dying from laughter, just for shits and giggles. She wouldn't suspect it: humor needs to be spontaneous. Even when going to a comedy show, I think everyone convinces themselves that they won't find anything funny about it, just to set themselves up for a good chuckle. Since the bathroom would be too predictable, I bet it would take place in the kitchen, most likely while scrubbing dishes. She'd be humming quietly to herself when, out of nowhere, comes an unexpected punch line! Probably from some unconscious train of thought that wishes to be in the spotlight of attention for a change. Imagine her furtive smile as she hesitates to pick up the next dirty utensil. She then thinks that repeating the punch line will devalue the joke, but to her surprise that results in only more humor and another—wider—smile. She reflects that it's too silly to laugh at but this only provokes laughter at both the punch line

## Leave Moment, Leave

by Jonathan Cappelli

St. Olaf College

Once while trying  
(without success)  
to turn Time  
into molasses,  
I wondered: if Time  
was a sort of Speed,  
then slowing it down,  
meant being here—fast,  
which-meant-thinking-a-pace-  
that-it-cannot-pass,  
and reach to the clock  
between you and your lead.

Be-tween two ticks  
Of an old clock  
I packed-tight  
dozens of my thoughts.  
Time seemed to slow—  
as I dammed it down;  
like honey sprinkled  
with sawdust or sand,  
when clogged-up by my thoughts,  
Time walked, while I ran;  
each thought like a foot  
leaving light from the ground.

I found it hard  
to keep the pace.  
The second  
moved across the face  
and I lost my lead.  
I glanced back too long;  
reflecting upon  
what I left ahead.  
I think I'd truly miss  
the passage of time;  
I for one, once cut,  
expect something to bleed.

## A letter for a dead girl

By Jacob Zillhardt

St. Olaf College

I sent a love letter to a pretty girl I met about two weeks ago but haven't heard anything back from her yet. I fear she has died.

I find little solace in the quiet of my scholar's den, my mind being preoccupied with the various ways it could have happened. A car crash, maybe. No, I don't think those happen if you predict them like I just have. Come on, think. Of course! Bears must have eaten her. Black bears, probably, not that I'm a bigot or anything. That's it, she fed honey to the ones at the local zoo but it was too sticky and sweet so the bears just kept going until it was too late. Now she is no more. Nothing remains other than a pair of shoes and an empty jar. Oh damn you most merciless descendents of Pooh! How wretched your once amiable and adorable race has become! Wait a tic, I forgot that she hates zoos for some boring reason. Probably because she's afraid of bears.

More likely it was a stabbing, a horrific way to go. How many times, I wonder? Seventeen comes to mind, I'm not sure why. Something intuitive about the number seventeen. Who wants to stab something any more than that, anyways?

On second thought, forget I mentioned anything. Stabbings are way too violent to muse about to this extent. An unthinkable crime of passion, as it were. The awkward hello followed by distracted small talk then: flash! A rush of nerves accompanies the surprise guest appearance of Mr. steel, followed by the smooth plunge and abrupt halt as the blade lacerates soft viscera until it strikes bone. A wet warm sort of guilt and uncanny aroma of rust flood the self-estranged stranger's senses; he's soon to become a full-time striped-pajama model. Meanwhile, my love's wasted body would lay in a dark thick pool reflecting the wasted soul of a killer better off like her. Nothing will ever be the same again.

## Winter

By Whim, Po, & Emili

St. Olaf College

Winter

In the morning, when I'm sleeping  
And you're the only soul awake  
Heavy silence below the pine boughs  
Grown so heavy, but scared to break

Winter

Like the quilt your mama sent me  
On the bed we used to make  
Just like my mother telling me  
Baby, if you love her  
Let her be

Winter

The wood floors creaking softly  
On the porch, we used to sway  
Above the lilac locks in July  
Sweating tired, in the shade

I don't know if these hands  
Can still spin you slow  
I don't know if I'll ever dance again  
Guess we'll see  
When the snow melts  
What's left of summer's glow

## Nietzsche: Masks, Continuity, and the Will to Nothingness

by Bethany Somma

Belmont University

*"A great man—a man whom nature has constructed  
and invented in the grand style—what is he?"*

*...When not speaking to himself, he wears a mask.  
He rather lies than tells the truth: it requires more spirit and will."*

— Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, sec. 962.

"Whatever is profound loves masks."<sup>1</sup> The use of masks in Nietzsche's philosophy is inextricably bound to the development of his conception of philosophy and the philosopher. An inescapable esotericism seems to follow upon these masks, and an explication of these masks will undoubtedly assist one in the journey to understand Nietzsche. It will also reveal profound consequences for the way in which Nietzsche's will to power is generally understood. I shall examine Nietzsche's use of masks throughout his texts to reveal two analogous continuities in Nietzsche's philosophy. One is the continuity between dogmatic philosophy and Nietzsche's philosophy. The second is the continuity from Socrates to Nietzsche's *free spirit*. I shall use these continuities to show how the will to power is necessarily the will to nothingness, tracing the will to nothingness from its roots in the ancient world to Nietzsche's will to power. I shall begin by examining the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, and broaden my examination to other passages as they provide insight into this investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1989.), p. 50.

I am proposing that there are two parallel lines of thought in Nietzsche's philosophy. Each sequence has three parts that move in a historical progression. One continuum comprises philosophical systems and viewpoints. It begins with dogmatic philosophy, moves into science, and ends in Nietzsche's philosophy. The other continuum comprises philosophers or individuals that advocate a particular system of belief. This continuum begins with Socrates, moves to the profound spirit, and ends with the free spirit. Socrates is the representative of dogmatic philosophy. Next, the profound spirit holds a role analogous to that of science. The free spirit is the last step in the continuum and the representative of Nietzsche's philosophy.

With the first part of each sequence, the ascetic ideal is formed. With the second, the ascetic ideal is freed, but loses its immanency or excuse to exist. In the third and final part of both sequences, the ascetic ideal is destroyed. Nietzsche ironically reveals these two sequences through his use of masks. In the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, he says that dogmatic philosophy is a promise across millennia. I am proposing that Nietzsche's philosophy is that which is promised through dogmatic philosophy.

In the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche says that all great things must first bestride the earth in monstrous and frightening masks before they become established in the hearts of humanity.<sup>2</sup> These masks represent things to be overcome, although sometimes they are employed for self-preservation or the protection (perhaps exclusion) of others. Nietzsche made clear that masks are necessary to the progression of philosophy: "Every philosophy also conceals a philosophy; every opinion also a hideout; every word also a mask."<sup>3</sup> The masks are often used in reference to dogmatic philosophy, and Nietzsche singles out Platonism in his critiques of dogmatic philosophy. In the aforementioned preface, he says that Platonism and Vedantic philosophy wore such masks. Here Nietzsche expresses his hope that such terrors were only "promises across millennia,"<sup>4</sup> a foreshadowing of great things.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

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experiencing through passions, as Part I Meursault, only now he is enlightened and surrounded by (and recognizing) a meaningful life.

### *Conclusion*

Using Solomon's evaluation of Camus, we have been able to acknowledge meaning in the present, as well as meaning extending beyond the present, without destroying Camus' philosophy of the absurd. The absurd recognition is still necessary in discovering true reality. Humans live mechanical lives that are either temporarily or permanently interrupted by the onset of the "why." They are then met with the silent indifference of the world, rendering them uncomfortable and alienated because they still hold onto the classic understanding of meaning. Camus simply created unnecessary limitations for himself, including the idea that meaning is only found in the abstract or cosmic and the exclusion of reason, which resulted in long-term meaninglessness. Solomon's philosophy fixed these problems while still keeping the structure and major ideals of the absurd.

With Solomon's improvements added to the absurd, we have a complete philosophy of life. His understanding of the meaning of life combined with Camus' semi-complete notion of how one ought to live, finally answers the question of why one ought to live. We are to live wholly in the concrete sense of the world, looking only to our lives and our experiences for passion and meaning. Reason allows us to examine our passions, as well as allot degrees of importance to them. Those passions with greater degrees of importance are those that have heightened meaning for the individual. This notion of evaluative reason is responsible for long-term meaning, specifically seen in relationships with other people, lovers, family members and friends.

Overall, the philosophy of the absurd tactfully addresses the issues humans face in their lives. Through Solomon's philosophy on the meaning of life, the few holes in Camus' philosophy of the absurd are repaired, creating a convincing philosophy concerning human life.

The next place we find a mask to demonstrate a move within the development of philosophy is in Nietzsche's destruction of the *ascetic ideal*. The ascetic ideal develops as a manifestation of humanity's need for a goal.<sup>5</sup> The need of a goal is a manifestation of unhealthy instincts such as an inclination toward truth and the desire for an objective reality. The ascetic ideal originated in dogmatic philosophy, and over time, it evolved into Christianity, changing value systems and terminology. The ancients used moral terms such as "good" and "bad" – terms of evaluation used among peers of the ruling class to assess each other. The terms used in Christianity are "good" and "evil." These terms are connected to the ascetic ideal, and are terms of judgment according to moral standards set forth by base men who resent their superiors.

In the third treatise of his *Genealogy*, Nietzsche breaks down the outer layer of the ascetic ideal in order to call the concept of truth into question. Nietzsche adamantly denies that science is the natural antagonist to the ascetic ideal. Although science denies the truth claims of Christianity it still attempts to understand the world objectively. Nietzsche is not interested in antagonists to Christianity, but to the *entire concept of objective truth*. What science *does* do, however, is call the value of truth into question.

When speaking of science as the next movement in the development of the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche says science itself is never value-creating. Science still needs a value-ideal, and this is why it relies on the ascetic ideal. Since science requires the ideal, its "protest and battle" are not aimed at the ideal's core, but at its play of masks.<sup>6</sup> He says that science is aimed at the outworks of the ideal, at its dogmatization, *at its right to truth*. Science is not fighting against the truth by aiming at the ascetic ideal itself, but instead by destroying what gave it an excuse to exist. In fact, *because* science destroys the exterior of the ideal, it sets the life in it free again. Here there is a fine line between how science promotes the ascetic ideal and how science vitiates it. Nietzsche says that science and the ascetic ideal are necessarily confederates because

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1998.), p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, *Ibid.*, 111.

they operate on the same over-estimation of truth.<sup>7</sup> Science continues the search for objective truth that the ascetic ideal began. What science does that is most detrimental to the ascetic ideal is destroy its divinity. This destruction negates the excuse for truth (God), and gives Nietzsche further grounds to question the value of truth.

Although science's destruction is aimed at the ascetic ideal's play of masks, science's role in the development and eradication of truth is itself a play of masks. Let us not forget where we are in Nietzsche's account of the history of thought. We established that dogmatic philosophy was a promise across millennia, a great thing in a frightful mask. The great thing Nietzsche refers to must be his own philosophy, for he is certainly not referring to the development of the ascetic ideal via Christianity or science. At the end of the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche refers to free spirits, and begins to talk about the need for radical action in the eradication of dogmatism. He begins the first section of *Beyond Good and Evil* with the question of the value of truth. Based on his assessment of science as the ascetic ideal's "most recent and noblest form,"<sup>8</sup> we may conceive of science as the link between dogmatic philosophy and this great thing, the continuation into his own philosophy. This has extensive implications that we shall examine later, but let us first discuss the second sequence in order to compare the two. The continuum of philosophers begins with Socrates.

Socrates is an erotic figure in Nietzsche's work. Nietzsche opposes the man and his ideas, but his obsession with him can lead us to wonder. Clearly Socrates had a great effect upon Nietzsche's thought, for Nietzsche considered him to be the main perpetrator in the formation of dogmatism. But there is something in the way Nietzsche handles Socrates that is laudatory.

Consider the way Nietzsche portrays Socrates in his account of the philosopher's relationship to society. Nietzsche says the philosopher is necessarily a man of tomorrow, one always in conflict with the ideal of his day. "The greatness of their task," he

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

Through the absurd, humans rid themselves of the notion that meaning is beyond their lives. Only at this point can humans begin to acknowledge and experience the vast amount of meaning surrounding them.

In Part III Meursault has overcome the problem of abstract meaninglessness and is ready to experience a true reality. The absurd hero may now live passionately taking up many possibilities, but also experience meaning from these possibilities. Meursault, freed from jail, returns home and reconnects with Marie. His relationship may still be dominated by the sensual passions she arouses in him, but his newfound reason adds to the meaning of those passions. He sees Marie in a new light and may even begin to love her. Knowing that their relationship ultimately amounts to nothing (in the abstract sense), Meursault focuses all of his attention on the concrete aspects of their relationship and the meaning it creates in his surreality.

Other than his relationship with Marie, Part III Meursault will continue living a life without ultimate goals as he did before he killed the Arab. However, he will be doing so with a different perspective provided by reason. The presence of reason will keep Meursault from falling into the habitual mechanical life and the empty desire for abstract meaning in the world. But more importantly, it will give him the ability to reflect on his actions. Had Meursault rationally examined his situation that day on the beach, he would probably have changed directions and avoided a confrontation with the Arab. Reason will prevent Meursault from making another foolish (rational-free) mistake again.

Part III Meursault embodies both the idea of the absurd hero and a meaningful life. He can find meaning in every experience, and develop long-term meaning with those experiences that matter most. He is not blinded by false promises of abstract meaning in the world so he is not overcome when encountering the absurd. Neither suicide nor leap of faith tempt this absurd hero. His balance of both passion and reason when examining experiences gives him the ideal outlook on life, one that enjoys and finds true meaning in life without a notion of falsity. He is a man that is

for him felt by everyone in the courtroom. Before the onset of rationality, he was so completely dominated by the passions of his senses that he was totally unaware of anything beyond that point. Meursault was unable to relate to or make any kind of (meaningful) connection to anything. This attitude is what caused the entire courtroom to hate and fear him. In Algeria at the time, few Europeans would have been hated for killing an Arab, nor would they have been condemned to death for it. Meursault's lack of emotion toward his mother's death (because he simply did not reflect on it) created the dislike in the courtroom. Toward the end of the book, Meursault recognizes this and understands the hate felt toward him.

Once Meursault is condemned to death, he returns to his cell with a new outlook on the world spurred by reason and rationality. It is this point in Meursault's development that he encounters the absurd. He recognizes the absurd and accepts it as a desperate man about to lose his life. He realizes that nothing mattered<sup>16</sup>. The fact that Meursault kills a man and is condemned for not crying at his mother's funeral does not matter in the whole scheme of things because there is no grand abstract meaning to life. In his last hours, Meursault accepts the abstract meaninglessness of the world, finally ridding himself of the miscalculated understanding of meaning. In the book, he dies an absurd hero.

If Meursault had lived, somehow freed from execution and imprisonment, what would Part III in Meursault's life be like? I argue that he would remain the absurd hero, rejecting the abstract meaning of the absurd while at the same time living a meaningful concrete life. In Part I Meursault begins as an unreflective, immediate passion receiver, guided by his desires. In Part II, Meursault discovers reason and begins self-evaluation. At this point in Part II, Meursault recognizes the meaninglessness of the world. There is no meaningful cosmic entity giving purpose to Meursault's life, and the recognition and acceptance of this notion is completely freeing for him. The opening of oneself to the world is a necessary step in shedding the old (and incorrect) notion of meaning.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 121

says, lies "in being the bad conscience of their time," and philosophers have found their task difficult and inescapable.<sup>9</sup> In this section, Nietzsche uncharacteristically defends Socrates' irony by suggesting that it may have been the only way for Socrates to be rightly called *megalopsychos*. Nietzsche says that he admires "the courage and wisdom of Socrates in everything he did, said,—and did not say,"<sup>10</sup> for Socrates' willfulness and success in countering the common ideals of his day makes him the philosopher *par excellence*.<sup>11</sup>

Examining how Nietzsche positively portrays Socrates is necessary for understanding the continuity between Socrates and Nietzsche's *free spirit*. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, before Nietzsche discusses the character of a philosopher, he says that Socrates was rich in secrets, and at bottom, had seen through the irrational element in moral judgments, and had satisfied his conscious through self-trickery.<sup>12</sup> This is a clear parallel to Nietzsche's earlier claim that dogmatic philosophy is a great thing in a frightening mask. Socrates' position as "a man of tomorrow"<sup>13</sup> sets up a natural continuation into the forerunner of free spirits, whom Nietzsche calls a *profound spirit*.

This profound spirit recognizes in himself the greatness of man. This spirit too wears a mask. He wants his mask, for the mask inhabits the hearts of his friends — even his most intimate associates — and Nietzsche says the profound spirit recognizes that *this is good*.<sup>14</sup> When Nietzsche most extensively discusses the ascetic ideal in the third treatise of his *Genealogy*, he examines the philosopher of his day, one who sounds like the profound spirit. Just like Socrates, Nietzsche says the philosopher must withdraw from his time with his heart in the future and be *posthumous*. The ascetic ideal provides the desiderata for the philosopher's survival and the

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1974), 272.

<sup>11</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 403.

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 104.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

best conditions for him to be fruitful. Also like the profound spirit, this philosopher seeks seclusion, and does so in the desert he inhabits. The philosopher appears to follow the ideals of his time, but does not take them to heart, as in the case of the profound spirit.

In Nietzsche's account of Socrates and the profound spirit in *Beyond Good and Evil* and his account of the philosopher in *On the Genealogy of Morality*, we find a certain *falseness*, a concealment of both the healthy instincts and the goal. We find a mask. When Nietzsche describes the free spirits, we learn of a new type of philosopher. As expected, they counter the ideals of their day, and Nietzsche says that, like the other philosophers, "it belongs to their nature to *want* to remain riddles at some point."<sup>15</sup> But he goes on to say that these philosophers do not want to be misunderstood or mistaken for something other than what they are. They use no concealment, no mask. As new philosophers, these free spirits must be strong enough to oppose all values and establish a revaluation of values.<sup>16</sup>

The free spirit is a natural continuation of the philosopher from Socrates to Nietzsche's philosopher. Through his irony, Socrates countered the ideals of his day and recognized the irrationality in moral judgments. He recognized his own greatness of soul, just like his successor, the *profound spirit*. This midpoint philosopher also rejects the ideals of his day, but he uses the ascetic ideal as an *escape*, as the excuse to form the necessary conditions needed for his success. Like Socrates, this philosopher is concealed behind a mask as a promise of things to come. The successor of this philosopher is the philosopher of the future, the free spirit. This philosopher is one that rejects the necessity of truth and is an advocate of Nietzsche's philosophy.

A parallel continuity is found in our previous exposition of philosophy as a whole. Dogmatic philosophy is classified as a great thing bestriding the earth in a monstrous mask, a promise of things to come, just as Socrates was a promise of the free spirit. Science as the destroyer and releaser of the ascetic ideal is the next step

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

ing in the relationship, but to eliminate any sense of goal or end designed by society. As the absurd hero, Meursault cannot fall prey to a societal goal like marriage. Camus mistakenly overlooks the fact that love, one of the most powerful passions, is too powerful to be defined by society. Camus is correct in rejecting the notion of marriage as a goal that provokes the mechanical life. But love is exactly the opposite of the mechanical and should not have been overlooked.

Not only is Meursault and Marie's relationship meaningful in the sense that he has recurring and intense passions toward her, it is also in their shared passion that it finds its strength. In the previous section, Solomon describes our passions as being real entities in the world. Therefore, they can be shared by others who experience them. Meursault and Marie can experience the passions and emotions the other experiences toward them, creating a more heightened level of passion. It is here that long-term, deep meaning develops between two people. Through their relationship, we not only see the existence of meaning from smaller passions (e.g. Meursault's sensual desire for Marie), we also see how meaning extends beyond the present (through the deep and shared passions between Meursault and Marie.)

### *Part III of The Stranger*

What would Meursault's life be like if he had somehow avoided execution and was able to live for a long time after he accepted the absurd? To answer this, we will look to Avi Sagi's book *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*. Sagi recognizes differences in Meursault's character in Part I and Part II. Sagi recognizes Part I Meursault as unreflective. Completely drunk with the present, he can see neither behind nor beyond it. He does not reflect on his mother's death, his relationship with Marie, or the murder of the Arab.

In Part II, the murder trial begins. Throughout the course of the trial, Meursault begins to reflect on his actions; he becomes reflective for the first time. He is suddenly aware of the contempt



against the absurd. Passions do not. Only through reason do humans choose acceptance rather than suicide or the leap of faith. Why is it, then, that Camus ignores reason in his explanation of how one ought to live? His conception of the 'most life,' taking up as many possibilities passionately, requires a massive quantitative intake. Camus initially rejects the notion of quality of life when revolting, which is also when reason is rejected. He fails to realize the presence of reason in respect to all of our passions.

Camus believes in the subjective reality, which is very clear in his emphasis on the passions, seen as wholly subjective intakes of the world. Meursault's passions define his experience of the objective world, creating his own personal surreality. If we expand Solomon's surreality to Camus' philosophy of the absurd, we discover a place for meaning. As humans experience in Camus' absurd world, they passionately pursue possibilities. These passions are subjectively unique to those humans. As a result, the passions and the objects or people that provoke them have meaning for the person who experiences them. This meaning belongs to the self, not to some abstract or distant entity, as Camus thought. Meaning surrounds humans in the concrete sense. Furthermore, humans not only have present meaning provoked by immediate passions, there is also long-term meaning that exists in Camus' reality.

The longevity of the passions exists through reason. Reason is responsible for assigning greater or lesser importance to the numerous passions taken up. Those that receive more importance often have the ability to reoccur and/or extend beyond the present. For example, Meursault's relationship with Marie is a heightened and important passion. It occurs over a period of time, which in itself displays some element of heightened importance to Meursault. Were it not an important passion for Meursault, why would he continue seeing Marie and not any attractive woman that crossed his path? Caught up in his idea of the 'most living,' Camus tried to eliminate any depth or meaning in Meursault and Marie's relationship. When Marie asks Meursault if he loves her and if he would like to marry her, both questions are met with indifference. However, this indifference Camus creates is not to eliminate mean-

in the continuation. It is itself a play of masks in its battle for and against the ascetic ideal, for although it sets the ascetic ideal free, it actually destroys its excuse to exist. This gives Nietzsche more ground to question truth as a whole, and fulfills the promise of things to come – Nietzsche's philosophy.

Both continuities begin with a promise in dogmatic Greek philosophy, continue to something that requires the ascetic ideal to survive (as is found in science's reliance on the ascetic ideal and the profound spirit's concealment behind the ideal), and finally into Nietzsche's philosophy and its advocates.

We shall now examine this continuity in the light of the will to power. The will to power is the life-promoting drive of the individual. Nietzsche says the will to power expressed in a decadent manner is the *will to nothingness*.<sup>17</sup> The will to nothingness is present when man is fundamentally decadent – it is the will to power expressed in an unhealthy manner. The will to truth is a particular form of the will to nothingness. Man's healthy instincts are thwarted when a man is decadent, and this decadence is manifested as the will to truth and the belief in metaphysics. The ascetic ideal is just such a manifestation. It *is* the will to power itself, but it is also its *antithesis* because it necessitates that one fight against his healthy instincts to affirm decadent instincts. Nietzsche says that anytime it is necessary for one to fight against his instincts it is a sign of decadence.<sup>18</sup> Let us examine the will to nothingness as it appears in our three philosophers with this in mind.

Socrates was a reaction. Aware of the *micropsychia* of those around him, he recognized that in order to be great, he must counter the popular morals of his time. Although Socrates was fighting decadence, his will to truth was also, in itself, decadent. The profound spirit was a continuation of this reaction – except this philosopher *required* that which is decadent in order to survive. The ascetic ideal was his covering, his *mask*, that allowed the philosopher his escape into the desert, and that inhabited the hearts of his friends, both of which were necessary preconditions for his

<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 118.

<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1990), 44.

survival and the cultivation of his greatness. Here we see even more of a reliance on the ascetic ideal, one working in it and *with* it. Next comes Nietzsche's free spirit, with the same basic need to oppose common ideals, but a rejection of masks and concealment. This philosopher rejects the ideal altogether, but is still the logical and necessary outcome of his predecessors. Let us now examine our three philosophical systems.

First is dogmatic philosophy. Classifying this as a hope across millennia, Nietzsche says its frightening mask was necessary in order to inscribe itself "in the hearts of humanity with eternal demands."<sup>19</sup> Dogmatic philosophy, the very beginning of the ascetic ideal, was somehow a *necessary* forerunner of a great thing. The next step in the continuum of this great thing is the establishment of science and its relation to the ascetic ideal. Science, just like the profound spirit, worked in and with the ideal. It was the beginning of the ideal's destruction, yet it completely relied on the ideal for its existence. Science then continues into Nietzsche's philosophy. Just like his free spirits, Nietzsche's philosophy is the great thing promised across millennia by dogmatic philosophy. But Nietzsche's philosophy runs into the same problem that its free spirits do – *it has been necessitated by that which it aims to destroy*. Dogmatic philosophy was the manifestation of mankind's need for truth. Remember, mankind's will to nothingness as the will to truth manifested as the ascetic ideal, and science was the next manifestation of this ideal. The continuum of humanity's will to truth ironically culminated in Nietzsche's philosophy. Nietzsche promoted the will to power to fight *against* the will to nothingness, but he and his will to power came about *through* it as the next necessary step in humanity's will to truth.

It appears that this may not be a problem, for it seems plausible that Nietzsche can account for the role of the will to nothingness in his philosophy. But in *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche says it is self-deception for one to think he is combating decadence by making war against it. In the end, his is only a decadent reaction to

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<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 2.

essentially living passionately in the moment, taking up as many possibilities without regard to life goals or ends. Living the most life is simply a fulfillment of immediate desires. Camus glorifies Meursault as he lives passionately in the present without regard to his past or future. Although Camus is a very rational philosopher, he places the majority of importance in the passions. With Meursault, reason is absent; he is guided by a string of passions. Toward the end of Part I in *The Stranger*, two Arabs at odds with Meursault's friend, Raymond, follow them on the beach and stab Raymond in the arm. Later in the day, Raymond returns from the doctor and decides to take a walk in the direction of the earlier fight. Meursault accompanies him. They come upon the Arabs again, at which point Raymond pulls out a gun. Meursault talks Raymond into giving him the gun; the Arabs flee. Meursault and Raymond walk back to their bungalow on the beach, but instead of staying at the bungalow with Raymond, Meursault turns and walks back in the previous direction. Meursault eventually comes across one of the Arabs lying in the sand. He continues in the direction of the Arab, getting closer and closer. Meursault states, "It occurred to me that all I had to do was turn around and that would be the end of it. But the whole beach, throbbing in the sun, was pressing on my back"<sup>15</sup>. It is as if Meursault has pockets of reason, but his passions greatly overpower any rationality attempting to take control. Meursault continues walking toward the Arab until he comes very close. The Arab pulls out his knife slowly, but does not attack. When Meursault's own sweat clouds his vision, he reacts by pulling the trigger. Following the initial fatal shot, Meursault fires into the lifeless body four more times. Had Meursault's reason been given precedence, he would have surely turned around and walked home before ever putting himself in such a compromising situation. For some reason, Camus convinced himself that the absurd man lives only through passions as rationality takes a very distant backseat.

Camus' avoidance of reason contradicts many elements of his philosophy and at the same time causes the problem of meaning. Reason plays an important role in the human decision to revolt

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 58

surrounding world. Because our passions are real entities in the world, we may share them with others. In relationships, passions are shared and interpreted in the same way, creating a special bond between the two experiencing them. Solomon believes reason and reflection are what is responsible for taking the immediacy of the passions and extending them into the long-term by enhancing the perspective of passions<sup>14</sup>. Here, we have an understanding of how the passions extend beyond the present. Reason evaluates all of the passion, giving longevity to the most valuable and important ones. Through this, we now understand how certain objects and people have meaning for us over long periods of time: familial bonds of love, one's first car, a beloved pet. Through reason, our most powerful passions for certain subjects find meaning beyond the present.

The Meaning of Life and the Absurd

Can there be meaning in the absurd world Camus has created? Camus places all emphasis of meaning on the abstract in his philosophy of the absurd. When the absurd disrupts the everydayness of human life, Camus explains their discomfort when encountering the indifference of the world in the cosmic sense. He completely ignores, or rather does not even conceive of, meaning in a concrete sense. His definition of meaning is one that relies on an individual's relation to other things beyond themselves in order to have meaning. He fails to acknowledge concrete meaning that comes from the self. This misinterpretation of meaning is the root of Camus' belief in the meaningless of the world. The world is absolutely meaningless if humans look to the abstract for purpose, for there is nothing there. We are indeed met with indifferent silence when inquiring into the abstract. However, Camus ultimately fails here because he overlooks the obvious meaning and importance of the concrete world surrounding humans.

Like Solomon, Camus places great emphasis on the passions. However, Camus does not share Solomon's belief in the importance of reason. The passions dominate Camus' notion of freedom when revolting against the absurd. As said before, humans use their freedom to live the 'most life.' Living the most life is es-

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 59

a decadent problem.<sup>20</sup> In the same passage of *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche is addressing Socrates' faith in rationality, and he says that as long as life is *ascending*, happiness and instinct are one. Although this statement is supposed to make room for Nietzsche's evasion of decadence, he cannot account for the fact that his refocused will to power is the outcome of the will to nothingness. Just as he noted in his autobiography, Nietzsche *is* decadent, but he is also the antithesis of decadence. He says that his decision to choose the *right* things proves this.<sup>21</sup> Although he might be right, we cannot overlook that he is a decadent man revolting against a decadent society. Although he is *the* advocate of the will to power, he comes out of the will to nothingness, which seems to be an impossible thing to do.

Having demonstrated that Nietzsche's re-establishment of the healthy will to power comes straight out of the will to nothingness, I shall now establish what the will actually is for Nietzsche. It has a specific role within a human being and is manifested according to the health or decadence of the person. In a healthy individual it emerges as the will to power, in a decadent one the will to truth, or the will to nothingness. As the driving force of an individual, it operates most clearly as a cause. It is the driving force behind a human being, so much so that Nietzsche says man would rather will to nothingness than not will at all.<sup>22</sup> The will to power is the will to life,<sup>23</sup> and it is curious – if not troubling – that Nietzsche says the will both does and does not exist. He discusses the development of the will at length, but in many places he says that it does not really exist. He says that weakness of will can be misleading, for there is no weakness of will because there is no *will*.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps we should set this aside. What happens if we overlook Nietzsche's diatribes against all objective truths and just consider the will as a cause? Again we run into a problem. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche discusses the error of causality. He says the

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1992), 10.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 67.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*. 292.

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1968), 28.

will is not a cause, but that it is a phantom, a false light. The ego too is a misconception – one that no longer feels, thinks, or wills.<sup>25</sup> Along with the mind and “I,” even *things* are merely errors that follow from the misconception of an ego. Since a man conceives of *himself* as a thing, he conceives of the outside world as being made of separate things as well.

This is radical. Without a will, mind, “I,” or things, mankind has no basis in physical reality. But we must remember – it has no metaphysical basis either, for Nietzsche destroys the need for metaphysics along with the “real” world. We now have separable properties neither within an individual nor in the outside world. This destruction of the “real” world is most clearly stated in the section of *Twilight* Nietzsche titles “How the ‘Real World’ at last Became a Myth.” Here Nietzsche outlines the gradual process by which the idealized world (like Plato’s *noētos topos*) was found useless and refuted. He says that the apparent world has been destroyed in addition to the “real” world.<sup>26</sup> He is obviously referring to the collapse of dualism; however, reflection on Nietzsche’s metaphysical system may suggest that he means more by the statement. The destruction of the ascetic ideal led Nietzsche to obliterate metaphysics by calling truth into question. Without metaphysical truth or the erroneous concept of “I,” there cannot be anything to call an “apparent” world. Although Nietzsche is referring to the annihilation of the “real” world, he may be referring to the annihilation of the *real* world as well.

All willing now appears to be, if anything, the will to nothingness. “‘Will to truth’—that might be a concealed will to death.”<sup>27</sup> In fact, Nietzsche seems to have proven just this much. If it is possible to point out anything that looks like truth, it is that nothing may be called such a thing, for after all, there are no things. Nietzsche illustrates the ways in which this will to truth is manifested in the ancient Greeks and continues throughout history. Nietzsche himself is the end of the continuum, the consequential bearer of bad news. His will to power is the ultimate will to noth-

25 Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, 60.

26 *Ibid.*, 50.

27 Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 282.

appropriate combination of the two. The wisest are motivated by passion and guided by reason. Without passion, there would be nothing to reason about. Reason is an enlightenment of our passions, passion with reflection. Solomon refers to the shared importance of both passion and reason as “rational Romanticism.” Each entity is incomplete without the presence of the other.

Humans have a tendency to accept only an objective explanation of reality, an entity full of objective facts. Solomon calls this a “lifeless conception” of the world<sup>11</sup>. Yet, he does not deny the presence of an objective reality. He believes that reality and “the world” are the result of an objective viewpoint<sup>12</sup>. However, objectivity is not the only aspect of reality, because there is also subjectivity. For Solomon, both objectivity and subjectivity are equally necessary in order for an individual to experience reality. Solomon states, “What distinguishes subjectivity from objectivity is not a denial by the former of “the facts” of the latter; rather, subjectivity adds to reality a personal perspective and values. I shall call the result of this addition surreality (literally from the French), ‘reality plus’<sup>13</sup>. While we all live in the objective reality, we are at the same time living in surreality, in which our passions and values make up our lives. Through experience, our passions connect us to the world. The passions are our interpretation of the objective aspects of reality. Through our subjective experience, we begin to see the meaning in our lives. The individualized analysis of our surroundings places meaning for us in the world around us. Solomon recognizes through surreality that our passions are equally real in the world as well as in our minds.

Once we acknowledge the importance of subjectivity, the meaning that our passions create for us becomes apparent. Through our passions, we have interest and concern for things in the world. Those things that captivate our attention have meaning for us. No longer must we look to the abstract or cosmic realm for meaning, rather we should rely on our passionate concrete experience of the

11 *Ibid*, 18

12 *Ibid*, 18

13 *Ibid*, 19

attempting to understand its place in our lives. It views meaning as nothing on its own, but defined by its relationship to things outside itself. Rather than look to the abstract in this sense, Solomon believes a focus on the concrete brings us closer to understanding the meaning of life. The concrete keeps our focus on the passions and emotions provoked by experience. In another sense, Solomon is saying that meaning results from our present experiences and the passions used to interpret them. For too long humans have been overlooking the actual meaning in their lives, found in the passions of experience. Instead, they have been searching for meaning in something greater than themselves; a “something” that Solomon and Camus argue is nonexistent.

Once the focus is transferred to the concrete, the passions from our experiences may be examined. Historically, passions have been viewed narrowly as the enemy of reason. The struggle between the highly favored reason and the distracting passions is a common theme in philosophy, which Solomon calls the ‘Myth of the Passions.’ This notion also extends to art, literature, and religion. Solomon quotes Alexander Pope from *An Essay on Man*, “What reason weave/By passion is undone”<sup>10</sup>. Humans have always viewed passion as a threat to their reason, distracting them from “true knowledge.” They have allowed themselves be victims to their passions. To justify their acts, especially the regrettable ones, they blame the passions; she killed out of anger, he cried for love. To understand the meaning of life, passion and reason must be acknowledged together.

In order to discover the meaning of life, humans must recognize both reason and the passions as equally important entities. Solomon believes reason is neither for nor against the passions, but a reaction to them, giving them particular levels of value. To explain this, Solomon looks to the common conception of wisdom. Wisdom is understood as a heightened state of reason, devoid of misleading passions. In actuality, reason is only a part of wisdom, for no one, even the wisest, lives without passion. Wisdom is the

10 Solomon, Robert C. *The Passions*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993. 10.

ingness. This destroyer of metaphysics does not disguise itself. Unlike the decadent will to nothingness as seen in the ascetic ideal, Nietzsche’s will to nothingness is revealed in full force. The ascetic ideal was, indeed, the same will to nothingness, but it at least allowed for something like life to take place. The very point of the will to power is the will itself willing toward itself. Since the will to power is now the will to nothingness, it is nothing, willing toward nothing, all for the sake of nothing. Nietzsche’s will is like a black hole that eradicates everything with which it comes into contact.

This seemingly unavoidable will to nothingness suggests certain things about what Nietzsche was intimating in his philosophy. Although it is important that one be circumspect in making judgments about what Nietzsche actually believed, the evidence must not be ignored. There is an esoteric element in all of Nietzsche’s works, an element that he thought essential.<sup>28</sup> In the history of his philosophers, Nietzsche appears in between the profound and the free spirit.

In this position he is bound to work in a certain amount of esotericism.<sup>29</sup> Nietzsche’s philosophy is in its own way the removal of a mask, a glimpse into the great thing concealed for millennia. Nietzsche is well aware that he cannot openly state his answer to the multitude’s demand for truth – they would be repulsed by the smell of putrefaction.

Tracing the will to nothingness through the continuum of philosophical systems and the continuum of philosophers suggests what Nietzsche believed his philosophy to be, and provides a key

28 Ibid., 343. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* in its entirety.

29 From *The Gay Science*, 43:  
Lured by my style and tendency  
you follow and come after me?  
Follow your own self faithfully—  
take time—and thus you follow me.

Here Nietzsche is referring to his rejection of truth: if one is to truly be a disciple of Nietzsche, he must reject his master. A true Nietzschean understands how to throw off truth, and thus, Nietzsche would no longer be considered the standard of truth. The free spirit knows Nietzsche cannot be understood as offering a path, but a clean slate, a new dawn hindered by no values.

into what Nietzsche actually believes himself. The explication of Nietzsche's destruction of metaphysics reveals the will to power as the *horror vacui* of all willing, for the will to power unmasked Nietzsche's will as the ultimate and inescapable will to nothingness.

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conception of living the most life. Living freely and passionately is perfect in the present moment, but it excludes all chances of a continued passion or emotion that extends farther than the present. Herein lies the problem of meaning in the absurd. For true and deep meaning requires that something be recognized as valuable and important, and this generally results from something that extends beyond the present.

Meursault's fervent attitude against any meaning is in itself a passion or concern, which ultimately leads to some kind of meaning. Passion is the result of an extreme desire. Extreme desire, no matter if it is good or bad, arises when an object is meaningful to an individual. In the case of Meursault, when he speaks with the priest in prison, he repeatedly denies God's existence. Although it would be easier for Meursault to pretend to believe in God so the priest would leave him be, Meursault is adamant about his disbelief. Meursault's passionate resistance and firm disbelief is in itself meaningful to him. Our mere interest in something requires that that something have meaning for us, even if it is at a very low level.

Meursault finds his relationship with Marie meaningful; he desires her physically and finds her presence enjoyable, enjoyable enough to continue their interactions. However, the meaning described here is stuck in the present. Meaning that rouses passion remains a present entity that prevents any connection to the past or the possible future.

## *The Meaning of Life*

Setting the absurd aside, I would now like to examine Solomon's conception of the meaning of life and the role the passions play within it. To begin with, humans often look beyond their actual lives for meaning. Abstract thought leads us away from the true answers to the questions we desire to discover. For example, when people are confronted with the "why," as Camus describes, they immediately look to the abstract or cosmic realm for the answer. The traditional definition of "meaning" causes a problem when

mus uses the fictional character to represent his idea of the ‘most living’ as the proper way to live, over the notion of the best living. In his book *Camus: Love and Sexuality*, Anthony Rizzuto states, “Don Juan...has his place in this new order because he replaces the notion of quality of sexual experience...with a doctrine of sexual quantity”<sup>8</sup>. Don Juan’s numerous sexual escapades represent a freedom from the social and moral regulations placed on us by society. These restrictions are congruent with the goals and aims Camus believes dominate the mechanical life. Don Juan acts on his immediate desires and takes up whichever possibilities please him most, rather than take up possibilities that will lead him to a qualitative end of sorts.

Through this philosophy, it is impossible for anything to exist in the mind beyond the present. Although Meursault’s mother raised him alone from birth, he was unable to express any sorrow or mourning at her funeral. At his mother’s wake, instead of crying and feeling the emotional pain death arouses in most, Meursault studies the others in the room, their clothing, their wrinkles, their smell. Meursault’s reality is determined by his sensual relation to the world. The Sunday following his mother’s funeral, Meursault looks back on the weekend saying, “It occurred to me that anyway one more Sunday was over, that Maman was buried now, that I was going back to work, and that, really, nothing had changed”<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, Meursault treats his relationship with Marie like he does everything else, with passionate immediacy and long-term nonchalance. Several weeks after their relationship begins, Marie asks Meursault if he loves her and if he would like to marry her. His replies are indifferent and distant, as if he were answering “yes” or “no” to sugar in his coffee. Anything that requires an emotional connection to something beyond the present seems impossible in Camus’ philosophical understanding of the most life.

Through these examples in Camus’ writing, we see a repeated pattern of emotional disconnect resulting from Camus’

<sup>8</sup>Rizzuto, Anthony. *Camus: Love and Sexuality*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998. 29.

<sup>9</sup>Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*. New York: Vintage International, 1988. 24.

## Julian

by: *Whim, Po & Emili* (A Collective Composed of Emily Robertson, Colin Weaver, Riley Sattler, and Clifton Nesseth)

St. Olaf College

Julian, mm  
 Like a mirror in the stone  
 Brick by brick  
 Climbs the steeple  
 Patient mouths  
 Down below  
 There’s a window to the city  
 There’s a window to our grace  
 Sunday rain, fill our bodies  
 And wash my face, Julian

Burning low and crying loudly  
 Baby’s sleeping upon the clouds  
 Tired eyes fell so heavy  
 ‘Neath the fire’s fading glow  
 Papa runs to Sarah’s blanket  
 Oh, the smoke fills the room  
 Sunday rain, calm our ashes  
 Wash my face, William, oh

Mother, may I  
 Watch you dreaming?  
 Working hands held strong at rest  
 Voice that sang my eyes to trusting  
 Curled and covered  
 The smell of skin  
 Mother, may I  
 Draw you breathing?

May I find our bodies' shape?  
Sunday rain, know our stories  
And wash my face, Mama, please

control of our lives, knowing the world as it truly is and living life as we see fit. However, freedom is limited in that it is born from our revolt against the absurd and is overshadowed by our mortality. Camus states, "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"<sup>7</sup>. The continual defeat of the absurd results from revolting through living the most life. Living the most life is living passionately, using our freedom to take up as many possibilities as we can and fervently pursuing them. As a result, humans use the meaningless world to satisfy themselves, therefore conquering the absurd.

### *The Problem of the Absurd: Meaning*

The absurd is a key element in our existence. If it is recognized, we can begin to live an enlightened life through revolt and through our freedom. However, there are some problems with Camus' absurd and the life it permits us to have. Living the 'most life' is Camus' solution to our limited time on earth, but this notion causes another limitation. Living the 'most life' has only one place: the present.

Camus' character Meursault in *The Stranger* exemplifies the notion of living the most life. The way in which *The Stranger* is written gives the reader a sense of immediacy and shortsightedness. We are completely immersed, through Meursault's thoughts, in the passionate moment. Meursault begins a relationship with Marie Cardona the day after his mother's funeral. The thoughts going through Meursault's mind concerning Marie are immediate and passionate. It is in Meursault's relationship with Marie that the most living is clearly apparent. Every description of Marie is dominated by her immediate appeal to Meursault's senses. When they are together, he takes her in wholly and ardently. But when she is elsewhere, she is almost forgotten, just as he forgets his mother once he has left her funeral.

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In the section "Don Juanism" in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Ca-  
<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 60-61



transcends reality<sup>5</sup>. One commits the leap of faith when placing false hope and meaning in the world. Often, the leap of faith takes the form of a belief in God, which adds elements, such as hope for the future and meaning beyond the world, to the world's truly indifferent state. It essentially covers the absurd with an optimistic and idealistic façade, hiding the meaninglessness of the world. The final reaction, recognition, confidently confronts the absurd without shying away. This is the option one must take in order to experience real living. After this recognition, the individual must then revolt against the absurd with their entire being.

Humans must relentlessly rebel against the absurd so as not to let it defeat them. To use Camus' example, Sisyphus is condemned to push a rock up a hill for all eternity. Sisyphus has several options in this situation: he can commit suicide to end this meaningless and repetitive task that proves too much for him, he can allot false meaning to the task, giving it unrealistic importance, or he can revolt against its meaninglessness by continuing the task and not allowing its lack of meaning to overcome him. Sisyphus' task is meaningless and he is well aware of this, just as those who recognize the absurd know the world is meaningless. Yet, he continues to push the rock up the hill, rather than give in to the temptations of suicide or the leap of faith. Sisyphus defeats the absurd by consciously revolting against it, completely unconcerned with the "point" of the task he performs. His awareness gives him the ability to confront the absurd and then choose to live through it. Camus admires the determination of Sisyphus' spirit, which is why he concludes, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy"<sup>6</sup>. Although his task is miserable and meaningless, Camus sees his internal state as the best and most free it can possibly be.

Once an individual chooses to revolt as Sisyphus does, one begins truly living for the first time. It is here that humans meet their freedom, take it up, and live passionately through it. Our freedom comes from our revolt. Once we choose revolt, we are in

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 37

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 123

## Odacer and the Eternal City

by Joshua Banta

Emerson College

Odacer strode into the city  
like Christ into a hollow heaven.

Ready to vanquish,  
but finding only the dust  
of remains carried off long ago  
by lesser marauders.

Pantheon, heart of the city,  
with its fifty foot monoliths  
brought down the Nile,  
across the great sea,  
to open a hole in the sky  
where the gods could peek through:  
a keyhole to their finest house.

The marble gods looked on  
as Odacer drifted through the catacombs  
under the Colosseum.  
The vaulted ceilings laughed at him.

He followed a rat  
to the porace flesh of a half-eaten Tiger  
left shackled too long.

At the palace a new olive coronal  
adorned the throne waiting for Odacer  
and his thirty-thousand.

Wind swept the ash of pillaged mausoleums  
across the street, over the forum, through the senate  
and across the laurel in Odacer's hand.

Clutching the sewn branches, he looked about the city,  
it's emptiness,  
and let the leave's spin on death's air, over the ghost of an empire.

### *Camus and the Absurd*

The absurd arises in the encounter between a human desire and a world that cannot fulfill that desire. Most humans live a mechanical life, repeating countless acts, falsely assuming this to be a true reality. These people spend their lives ignoring the absurd. They live for the goals they have chosen for themselves: to become a writer, to have children, to secure a spot in heaven. Goals determine the course of the mechanical life; all actions are carried out to progressively move the individual toward that end. Spontaneity decreases as the individual falls into the habitual acts of daily life. However, life does not always go as planned.

When the world goes awry, it forces humans to become aware of their surroundings. Habitual bliss is interrupted by, what Camus calls, the "why"<sup>2</sup>. The "why" initiates a conscious reflection of surroundings, an awakening from the mechanical. At this point, the veil of purpose in the mechanical life has been stripped away. This is the moment when the meaninglessness of the world is thus encountered, and the absurd first appears. It is here that the relationship with humans and the absurd truly begins. Following the encounter with the meaninglessness of the absurd, there is either a return to the mechanical or there is a "definitive awakening"<sup>3</sup>. If the encounter is ignored, human life resumes those mechanical habits and remains shadowed imitations of something real. Those who experience the awakening become conscious of the absurd and will be bound to it forever<sup>4</sup>. These men and women will react in one of three ways: suicide, a leap of faith, or recognition. For some, the encounter with the blatant lack of meaning and purpose in one's life is simply too much, and the ultimate escape, namely suicide, appears to be the only escape. Suicide, for Camus, is an easy and cowardly way out; therefore it is not a viable option. The second, which Camus refers to as a leap of faith, occurs when one attempts to place meaning in the world through an entity that

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 13

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 31

## The Absurd and the Meaning of Life

Brigette Courville Chapman

Birmingham-Southern College

### *Introduction*

The absurd arises from the human tendency to desire meaning and purpose in a vastly indifferent and meaningless world. For Albert Camus, the most significant question in philosophy is whether or not life is worth living<sup>1</sup>. All other concerns are secondary.

In this paper, I will focus on Camus' philosophy of the absurd and the problems it poses concerning the meaning of life. I will focus on his philosophical essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and his novel, *The Stranger*. Meursault in *The Stranger* acts as a vivid exemplification of the absurd notions explained in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Explanations of the absurd coincide in both books, making Meursault an absurd hero along with Sisyphus. Camus misunderstands the overall notion of meaning, which causes him to concentrate on entities beyond our existence rather than ones within reach. There is also an unnecessary focus on the passions in Camus' conception of living, in which reason is almost completely ignored. These two issues create countless problems in his overall philosophy. While the general purpose of the absurd remains successful, I will use Robert Solomon's understanding of the meaning of life in his book, *The Passions*, to fix the problems within the absurd. Following this, I will take Avi Sagi's interpretations of the different personalities of Meursault in Part I and Part II of *The Stranger* to inquire into the behavior of a hypothetical Part III Meursault after he has encountered the absurd and been exposed to Solomon's notion of the meaning of life.

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<sup>1</sup> Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays*. New York: Vintage International, 1983. 3.

## Reflecting upon The Concept of Anxiety

by Christina Danko

Clark University

We live in a wild, wild world. I often find myself leery of turning on the nightly news, fearing the inevitable bombardment of reports on the day's seemingly senseless crimes.<sup>1</sup> Just the other week, for instance, there was a deeply disturbing story about the murder of the adoptive parents of 14 children, 12 of whom are disabled. What would motivate the individuals involved to commit such a horrendous act? Can it be traced back to their childhood? Can we explain it in terms of psychological conditions? Is it a consequence of the nihilistic milieu of the times? Or, are human beings just innately evil? At the heart of these questions is another: why do we do the things we (should not) do? It is one that not only applies to the stories that make the headlines of the *NY Times*, but also those from our everyday, non-newsworthy lives. Perhaps the answer is even most accessible at this 'mundane,' personal level. This is precisely the innovative avenue through which Søren Kierkegaard approaches the issue in *The Concept of Anxiety*, namely he advocates that "How sin came into the world, each man understands solely by himself...[he] will find the place as surely as he who hunts for the burning tow finds it when he is unaware that it is burning in his own hand."<sup>2</sup> In it, he uses psychology to objectively penetrating the depths of his own psyche (subjectivity) to investigate the cognitive aspects of affective anxiety to ultimately reveal the extent to which we are in fact responsible for our conduct. It is important to point out, as Kresten Nordentoft does, that he was able to do this while keeping a "critical, analytic

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<sup>1</sup> You may point out how civilized they are in comparison to the savageries of past ages. To a certain extent this is true. However, our advances have also allowed for globalization, the collapse of time and space. This means that we more readily able to interact with others as well as more apt to be aware of and influenced by their actions (i.e., clash of cultures, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Concept of Anxiety*, trans. R. Thomte and A. Anderson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), 51.

distance” from the sicknesses from which he himself suffered.<sup>3</sup> This strikes me as interesting given that we live in an age in which more people than ever are diagnosed with psychological conditions, pay for therapy sessions, and take prescription medication. Perhaps the sheer prevalence of this phenomenon speaks to the successes of science in identifying and treating our “neuroses.” Yet, at the same time I wonder if this is not, for some, the doctor’s note that pardons us from the gym class of life. For, there is a sense in which we issue a sigh of relief when ‘professionals’ detect our anxious ‘ailment,’ drug it into oblivion, and explain our previous and *subsequent* behavior as manifestations of it. Each of us has our own demons, so to speak, even Kierkegaard, who is often referred to as the melancholy Dane. However, his attitude towards anxiety and the like differed greatly from ours. In fact, in numerous places throughout the work it is said that the greater the anxiety one experiences, the greater one’s spirit. Moreover, there is also the suggestion that anxiety is educative. If this is the case, then it would seem as though we, by medicating away our anxiety, ignore its inherent instructive, redemptive value and simultaneously sedate, or more directly, diminish our spirit. Or could we argue that this is just another instance in which we have outsmarted nature by overcoming what it had intended to inflict upon us? I wonder, whether, in revisiting Kierkegaard’s work, we can glean from it any helpful insight or would we merely see it as something we have surpassed and thus inapplicable? Assuming that these different psychologies can even be superficially compared, it seems as though our current approach to anxiety and bad behavior is antithetical to the spirit of his. If this is so, is there an advantage to Kierkegaard’s conception of anxiety? I would ardently argue that there is.

In our thoroughly psychological culture, we are accustomed to talk of anxiety. What we are less aware of is the extent to which we are indebted to Kierkegaard for having unearthed and developed the notion, particularly its connection with sin. In light of our current attitude towards anxiety, one could argue that we either fail to truly recognize the real significance of it or grasp it all too well.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

## Girl Song

by Whim, Po, & Emili

St. Olaf College

Sad friend came to me the other day, she asked me what to do.  
Things had not turned out her way. She gave up and was through. I  
held her up the best I could, gave her words I knew, but words are  
wasted favors if you don’t let them go through.

So she went alone, to the shore, down by the farmer’s stream.  
Cried herself to sleep so deep and this is what she dreamed: a place  
where all the colors met, and love was made for fun. Nothing was  
unless she will and love was made for fun.

Out of the mud  
And into the stream  
I float on my back  
Water makes clean  
I’m laughing at clouds  
And the places that they’ve been  
They sun kisses my skin  
For days and days I spin  
Farms and fields  
I see them from afar  
But life’s never tasted  
Tractor  
Red barn

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However, before we address that (i.e. his conception of anxiety and our 'appropriation' of it), it is important to understand the reason why he brought it up in the first place. Much like with our time period, Kierkegaard observed that the prevailing ideologies about sin (or evil) were responsible for the wrong relation people had with their actions. This is revealed at the beginning of *The Concept of Anxiety* when its pseudonymous author, Vigilius Haufniensis, rebukes the free for all that seems to have been common practice amongst the sciences of his day. He goes to great lengths to delineate the proper diameters of said sciences, along with their corresponding moods and concepts, in an effort to uncover what has been overlooked in the muddle. In particular, he examines the various treatments of sin in different disciplines, such as ethics and dogmatics, and finds that, where it is not lacking, it is merely presupposed and/or explained in terms of hereditary (i.e. it follows from Adam's fall that we, his descendents, are sinners). Dogmatics, for instance, allows us to view ourselves and others as sinners and our acts as instances of it; which, as Carlisle suggests, is helpful in the sense that such an understanding enables us to see ourselves as always in the wrong before God.<sup>4</sup> However, like Democritus' vortex, the theories explain everything except "its coming into existence."<sup>5</sup> They do not account for how we, as individuals, become sinners and, as such, avoids attributing to us any real sense of accountability. Interestingly enough, this is the issue with which we are still struggling; perhaps the very fact that we cannot adequately answer it means that we too have overlooked something. Nevertheless, for Vigilius, it is at this point that psychology enters the picture. With the meaning of sin in mind, psychology aims to observe and analyze what actually occurs within our own self-consciousness as we sin so as to yield better self-understanding.<sup>6</sup>

What he finds in his investigation of sin is that it enters into existence by way of an all-pervasive, insinuating anxiety. It is an anxiety that predisposes us to sin, but importantly does not neces-

4 Clare Carlisle, "Chapter 5: The Problem of Sin" in *Kierkegaard: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2006), 95-6.

5 Kierkegaard, 21.

6 Carlisle, 96.

sitate it. In fact, as we shall see, it is our response to freedom (and the responsibility it entails). By examining sin in light of this lurking anxiety, Vigilius is able to approach the sinful situation from the vantage point of the actual individual, something that the other sciences had hereto been unable. Rather than treat the Genesis account of Adam's fall as a myth (as had been tradition), Haufniensis asks us to look at it in terms of the truth it may reveal to us about ourselves.<sup>7</sup> This means that Adam is not to be viewed as some fantastic figure that willfully brought sin into the world and thereby secured the state of sinfulness for the rest of us. For, if this were the case then we would be absolved of agency and, hence, there would be no real need for divine mercy.<sup>8</sup> Instead, we ought to view Adam, whose name means human being in Hebrew, as symbolizing both himself and the race (i.e. exemplar vs. cause). Essentially, his experience explains ours (and ours his). Sin comes into the world for each of us, including Adam, by way of a qualitative leap that changes us; this is in spite of the fact that sin grows quantitatively as well throughout the ages (thereby making each generation more sinful than the last): "The race has its history, within which sinfulness continues to have its quantitative determinability, but innocence is always lost by the qualitative leap of the individual."<sup>9</sup> The story is about the universal fall of man – the universal response to anxiety, to freedom.

Pre-fall, or sin, we begin in a state of innocence. Here we are primarily psychical and physical as our spirit - that which unites, disturbs, and sustains the former relation - is dreaming. Interestingly, spirit is said to relate "itself to itself and to its conditionality...as anxiety."<sup>10</sup> This means that anxiety is present in all aspects of man's life, because he is spirit, even if to varying degrees. For, without the spirit, man would merely be an anxiety-absent beast. So, even before sin, when the spirit is unreflective and immediate, anxiety is present: "In this state there is peace

<sup>7</sup> Gordon D. Marino, "Anxiety in The Concept of Anxiety," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*. Ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 314.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>9</sup> Kierkegaard, 38.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-4.

us we have to deal with him as a subject, and as such we must find him morally perverse or willfully disagreeable; and we have to make these moral judgments to his face if the friendship is to retain its human content.... At the center of the sickness of the psyche is a sickness of the spirit. Contemporary psychoanalysis will have to eventually reckon with this Kierkegaardian point of view...<sup>27</sup>

To every sinful or evil act there is an element of the, albeit anxious, will. Is it helpful to view the actions of ourselves and others as manifestations of such? While, on the one hand, it is frightening that we are capable of such, on the other it also speaks to the hopeful notion that we are at least able to do otherwise. Something tells me that properly addressing the anxiety we experience will be far easier than ultimately coming to terms with the reality of having not used our freedom wisely.

<sup>27</sup> William Barrett, "Chapter 7: Kierkegaard," *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Anchor Books, 1990), 170.

ourselves. We sin when we err in doing so and/or, worse, try to flee from it. Importantly, Kierkegaard, by way of Haufniensis, shows that we *willfully* sin. Arguably, this insight gets at the heart of the issue of his time as well as ours. There is the tendency to explain away the things we do as opposed to why we do them. Kierkegaard's criticism of his contemporaries was that anxiety predisposes us to sin. As his ancestors, we have the advantage of having the awareness that anxiety pervades all that we do. Yet, perhaps this hints at the very reason why we view it as a negative neurosis and try to medicate it away. Could it be that we treat anxiety because the awesome freedom from which it arises proves to be too much reality to bear? And yet I cannot help but wonder whether we, in confronting and enduring anxiety authentically, would still be better off. Take for instance, writing this paper. I agonized over writing it and stared at a blank screen for days on end, entertaining endless possibilities. The longer I dragged it out, the more anxious I felt. It was only in deciding to do what I was supposed to that I, little by little, began to feel the anxiety decrease. It reminds me of the Goethe quotation: "Whatever you think you can do or believe you can do, begin it; for action has magic and grace in it." Anxiety is not negative itself, but rather can be a clarion call to action, authenticity, and accountability. With anxiety sedated, we may act as we please unaware of the damage we do to ourselves and others. That is, by viewing it as a medical condition to be treated, we rob ourselves of the possibility of becoming ourselves and deceive ourselves into thinking we are not responsible for our actions. Barrett put it best when he said,

We are in the habit nowadays of labeling morally deficient people as sick, mentally sick, or neurotic. This is true if we look at the neurotic from outside: his neurosis is indeed a sickness, for it prevents him from functioning as he should, either totally or in some particular area of life. But the closer we get to any neurotic the more we are assailed by the sheer human perverseness, the willfulness, of his attitude. If he is a friend, we can up to a point deal with him as an object who does not function well, but only up to a point; beyond that if a personal relation exists between

and repose, but there is simultaneously something else that is not contention and strife, for indeed there is nothing against which to strive. What, then, is it? Nothing. But what effect does nothing have? It begets anxiety."<sup>11</sup> Anxiety here probably has to do with the sense of the power of the spirit, which, although the dreaming spirit projects its own actuality, is taken to be something that is outside of itself. All the while there is the premonition that there is something in the nothing.<sup>12</sup> Anxiety is then intensified with the prohibition,<sup>13</sup> the introduction of the forbidden and punishment.<sup>14</sup> Although we do not yet know of the difference between good and evil (as knowledge follows from the act), it makes us aware of "the anxious possibility of being able to."<sup>15</sup> Or, more explicitly, "The prohibition induces in him anxiety, for the prohibition awakens in him freedom's possibility."<sup>16</sup> Here we begin to see that anxiety is fundamentally our reaction to freedom: anxiety is "freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility."<sup>17</sup> Somewhere in the midst of our ambiguous attraction to and repulsion from it, we sin. Behind the first sin, then, is not evil, but anxiety over possibility and incertitude that is part and parcel of freedom. Further than this, psychology cannot go. "Anxiety is the psychological state that precedes sin. It approaches sin as closely as possible, as anxiously as

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>12</sup> George Price, *The Narrow Pass: A Study of Kierkegaard's Concept of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963) 44.

<sup>13</sup> Vigilius mentions that the account is a myth only in so far as it "allows something that is inward to take place outwardly" (CA 47). In another, he mentions the difficulty with assuming "the prohibition and the voice of punishment as coming from without" and so instead he suggests that "one need merely assume that Adam talked to himself" (CA 45). To be honest, I am not entirely sure I understand what he means by this. There is a sense in which Adam does not understand what is spoken to him from without, but if it were to be from within then perhaps he would. If God, Eve, and the serpent are objectifications of what occurs within Adam's dreaming consciousness, as Price suggests, then the prohibition can apply to us as well; this is the way in which I am interpreting the story so that it applies universally. However, in both instances – whence would the original notion of the prohibition come? Even if it were a sort of superego would that too not end in an infinite regress?

<sup>14</sup> Although it is not actually understood, we know of this in a similar way in which animals know of death.

<sup>15</sup> Kierkegaard, 44.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

possible, but without explaining sin, which breaks forth only in the qualitative leap.”<sup>18</sup> Importantly, we find that anxiety, as the ground of freedom, is what makes sin possible.<sup>19</sup>

Not only does sin begin with anxiety, but it is perpetuated by it. “As soon as the leap is posited, one would think anxiety would be cancelled.... However this is not the case...this time the object of anxiety is a determinate something and its nothing is an actual something, because the distinction between good and evil is posited *in concreto* – and anxiety therefore loses its dialectical ambiguity...”<sup>20</sup> After the prohibition, the categories of good and evil are concretized. One must choose among possibilities, real or even imaginary, to actualize. This is compounded by the fact that we, as human beings, are a synthesis of the finite and the infinite; we are finite in terms of our facticity but infinite insofar as there are indeterminate possibilities open to us. Although exciting, it is also frightening for we must do so in light of what previously occurred as well as in terms of what might yet happen. Thus, our initial anxiety is not quelled by the fact that we acted, but rather remains as each act opens us up to new possibilities that must be decided upon. It follows that anxiety is an increasing part of our lives. As such, it begets sinfulness which, in turn, begets more anxiety. All of this occurs because of the fact that anxiety initially and continually arises out of freedom. We can see then why Vigilius would say that “anxiety is the dizziness of freedom” and that “he whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy.”<sup>21</sup> Through anxiety, which is tied to the uncertainty of (future) possibilities, we learn of and experience our freedom and, importantly, the tremendous responsibility that comes with the choices we make – a notion which the previous accounts of original sin neglected! Not only that, but the same quotation also seems to suggest that there is a sense in which we may be responsible for our anxiety due to the relation we bear to it “it is just as much in his own eye as in

the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down.”<sup>22</sup> Someone, for instance, may be anxious about the good (the demonical).<sup>23</sup> This person, having sunk in sin, would be anxious about possibility and freedom and therefore try to flee from it by inclosing in on themselves.<sup>24</sup> These are the individuals who say it is too late for me, etc. Yet, there is a way of relating to anxiety that does not entail our demise, but rather “renounces anxiety without anxiety.” The answer, it seems, lies with freedom’s possibility and faith. Through anxiety we gain the awareness of our freedom to become ourselves in terms of our possibilities and faith is the mood in which we aim to achieve it. By having the right relation to externals, finitude, and our sins, we place things in their proper perspective and, importantly, make space to endure with faith (i.e. renounce anxiety - inclination to sin): “Whoever is educated by possibility remains with anxiety; he does not permit himself to be deceived by its countless falsifications and accurately remembers the past. Then the assaults of anxiety, even though they may be terrifying, will not be such that he flees from them. For him, anxiety will be a serving spirit that against its will leads him where he wishes to go.”<sup>25</sup> Just as faith and atonement enter the picture, psychology ends and dogmatics begins.<sup>26</sup> Thus, at least in terms of psychology anxiety seems to be something to be endured.

The question quickly becomes whether or not anxiety can be endured by us, normal people. According to Kierkegaard, anxiety is the experience of our tremendous freedom and the recognition of the concomitant responsibility we have for our actions. We are accountable for actualizing our possibilities, for ‘choosing’

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>23</sup> While I was overwhelmed by the discussion of the demonical, there were many interesting insights, such as the disciplines’ different treatments of it. Could our psychological illnesses be seen, to a certain degree, in terms of various ways of sinning?

<sup>24</sup> Frederick Copleston, “Chapter XVII: Kierkegaard,” *A History of Philosophy: Modern Philosophy from the Post-Kantian Idealists to Marx, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 349. See also Price, 48.

<sup>25</sup> Kierkegaard, 159.

<sup>26</sup> As Copleston interestingly points out, anxiety is overcome with faith by way of a leap, but insofar as commitment to an objective uncertainty must be constantly renewed so too must be the relation with anxiety (350); does that suggest that anxiety, even with faith, is never truly overcome?

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>19</sup> Marino, 317; Price, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Kierkegaard, 112.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.