

*A note to our readers:*

For a movement that, officially speaking, is dead, there seems to be quite an interest in existential matters. Be it “virtual” or “extreme,” be it “religious” or “narcotic,” people today crave experience. Existentialism (roughly speaking): thinking about one’s existence. Because this is an interdisciplinary journal, we try to include various takes on existentialism (creative writing, literary criticism, visual art, psychological analysis, philosophical and religious discourse) while maintaining a cohesive and intellectual rigor present throughout disciplines and genres. Because this is an undergraduate journal, we attempt to offer selections hitting on various levels of the broad realm of existentialism. Some readers have never encountered existential themes and lingo (at least not explicitly); others are steeped in it. We hope that the following selections cast light on various aspects of existentialism for you. Enjoy *The Reed*.

Sincerely,

Your editors

*To Submit a Work:* *The Reed* is an interdisciplinary journal of existentialism printed each spring. If you are interested in submitting a work for publication, please send an email attachment to [thereed@stolaf.edu](mailto:thereed@stolaf.edu). To find out more about *The Reed*, visit our website: <http://www.stolaf.edu/depts/philosophy/reed/reed.html>

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### Founder's Note

Peder Leif Kjeseth

Thinking Reed. It is not in space that I must seek my human dignity, but in the ordering of my thought. It will do me no good to own land. Through space the universe grasps me and swallows me up like a speck; through thought I grasp it.

Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*

Officially, one could say this publication is an undergraduate journal of philosophy centered around the school of thought most commonly known as "existentialism." However, the term "existentialism" has many definitions and can refer to altogether different issues. On the one hand, "existentialism," or perhaps more aptly "so-called existentialism," is a label conferred upon an intellectual movement that can be traced back to the 19th century philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard. I include the term "so-called" because the actual term existentialism was not coined until the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre broke on the scene defining the term and movement. Moreover, many of the thinkers associated with the movement, such as Sartre's contemporary, Albert Camus, flatly rejected the title. Despite the confusion surrounding the term, a definition of existentialism can and will be provided.

Perhaps a more commonly known usage of the root word "existential" refers to a moment or experience in life that forces reflective analysis of what it means to exist. For instance, Mary may allude to her recent automobile accident as an "existential moment" because the episode caused her to take stock of what she has, her life, and how she chooses to live it. A Volvo ad promises that their new rugged series is an answer to the "existential crisis" occurring in the individual's soul. Existentialism in this sense is a basic, gut reaction to an event in one's life. Both elements of existentialism are represented in this journal, as the authors of the work explore the multifaceted dimensions of the term.

"So-called existentialism" as a whole is a response to the school of thought labeled as essentialism. Essentialism holds that there does indeed exist a lasting essence within any given thing. For Plato, there existed a trans-temporal world in which the essence of things existed. In Plato's view, our senses were unreliable, and in order for an individual to be sure of what he knew, he had to access this world through his intellect. Aristotle later disagreed with Plato and asserted that the essence of things exists within the thing itself. Joe did not need a trans-temporal world in order to understand that the thing in his hand was a cup, simply because the cup possessed cupness in itself. Essentialism led nicely into Christianity and Thomas Aquinas who held that God conferred Joe's essence upon his flesh and that Joe's soul existed within him. Christianity came to be dominated by an essentialist philosophical and theological orientation. It was not until a Dane

### Born from Nature (2 of 3)



And so with coiled spring and rounding wheel, tightened calf and steady brow, we precede to count our steps and measure our time by names and numbers that comfort us in that odd way like familiar things tend to do when we find the clock's ticking has quickened its pace again.

**Born from Nature (1 of 3)**

Julia Waeffler



by the name of Soren Kierkegaard began writing in Copenhagen that the premise of essentialism was contested. Kierkegaard was the first of many thinkers to put an emphasis on the individual and the degree of choice involved in the development of a person. The individual is presented with a seemingly infinite array of possible forms of reality and is left to will one or another for himself. For Kierkegaard, Joe is this or that because Joe willed this or that form of existence. Joe chose and willed to become a Christian, a Jew, or a secularist. His belief in the wealth of possibilities is one reason why Kierkegaard wrote under numerous pseudonyms presenting various, and at times, conflicting positions.

The importance placed on individual choice and will is a common theme threaded throughout “so-called existentialism.” Other thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, wrote poetically on the beauty and power of individual choice and will. Joe and Mary are what they create of themselves. In a meaningless world, the only meaning Mary can hope to make sense of is the meaning that she ascribes to herself and the world. As Sartre wrote, each person is infinitely free to do and make of himself or herself as he or she pleases. To consider oneself under the dominance of another entity or power is to live in what is one of the most famous notions to arise from existentialism, “Bad Faith.” Bad Faith was explicated by Sartre, and is the denial on the part of the individual that he has control over himself and his experiences. For example, Mary lives in “Bad Faith” because she believes her unhappiness is due to a meaningless job that she cannot afford to leave. Her life is hopeless because she has no choice in the matter and must continue on this way. “Incorrect,” says Sartre, Mary simply is not willing to recognize that she has control of the situation and can at any moment choose another option. According to Sartre, the individual is infinitely free to pick among any number of possibilities; and in doing so, the individual has chosen whatever consequences may befall him. Thus, the individual is responsible for his own reality, whether it be disastrous or glorious.

A unique and freeing aspect of existentialism is that it has a literary outlet. Writers such as Camus, Kafka, Dostoyevsky, and Percy, have explored existential issues in brilliant literary pieces. Themes such as absurdity, free will, irrationality, disunity, revolt, and disillusionment appear and reappear in literary works considered to be existential, as well as those that are not. In this journal many of the submissions, whether wittingly or not, are literary excursions into the realm of existentialism. A phenomenological approach often provides what may be the best literary tool for some of our writers who furnish vivid episodes of pure consciousness. In all, *The Reed* attempts to represent the many faces of “so-called existentialism” and phenomenology, in both its academic and literary manifestations. Enjoy.

Scenery  
By Parker Jones

catch me before I  
    fall into myself  
        falling  
        falling  
            into my self  
  
                immortalized by the                  Fear.  
trying to hide my eyes  
trying to close my eyes  
turn off the lights  
    but  
        ...but its still following...  
  
                        without time and  
                without grace  
without space or  
  
                without bleeding  
                without crying  
                without moving  
                and  
                without the lights  
  
                I  
                a  
                m  
  
                f  
                a  
  
                ll  
                -ing

Untitled  
By Alicia Thompson

Oh wonderful, blissful night of storms with twisting, blowing winds that whip the shooting sparks of lightning out of the darkness and into our world of seemingly insignificant worries and sillier laughter. Our world of half hoped for dreams and frustrating reality, which bites at our lagging feet when we slow down to contemplate the forked path before us. But time will not let us stop to consider for too long and so the minutes push us ever forward into a future unseen, but almost felt through hands outreached and greedy fingers spreading wide, hungry for a touch of tomorrow's knowledge.

Ah, gentle time, patient perhaps and content, will not let us stop altogether, but like a clock that winds down will seem to slow. Surreal, over the gray moor like the descending haze of the lingering hour between dusk and twilight when the birds hush their day's singing and the rabbits pause, listening closely for the approaching evening.

Likewise, we feel ourselves wandering in this limbo of time with our breath caught and our eyes wide looking, searching for the coming stars to appear and the cool, silvery moonlight to be caught on its journey downward and to sparkle on dewdrops, clear and moist, which wait expectantly on nature's tough, green furry hide.

Whose hand is it that winds the clock back up? Calling us out of twilight, once again into the day's golden atmosphere, the sun's ever changing rays that we name: second, minute, hour. And our feet, which had grown laggard with the sluggish wheels and tardy turnings of the inner mechanisms behind time's numbered face, pick up again the desired pace of its clicking hands. And our steps become measured again, by humanity's yearning for immortality in the guise of christening time.

Once a man has named a thing has he control over it? Once a man has numbered and ordered, counted and put away a thing is it truly his? Perhaps he only wraps the cloak of illusion closer around his pale, limbed body that trembles with uncertainty's distancing chill.

Ah, but back to time and our dragging heels, that carry our questions and mind's musings out of time's forgetful mist. Back, back onto the path of life with the clock's rhythm reaching our ears, traveling on currents of sinewy flesh and jointed bone to make our worn soles diligent once more.

**Untitled**  
By Christina Osheim



**Actualizing the Solitary Self**  
By Carl Hughes

“Christianity in the New Testament is...the strongest  
expression of the most agonizing solitude.”  
—S. Kierkegaard<sup>1</sup>

In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard describes the nature of authentic selfhood by analyzing the pathology of the self’s most malignant sickness, despair. That Kierkegaard should address the topic of selfhood is not surprising, given the philosophical context in which he writes, and neither is the dialectical method he employs in treating the subject innovative. What is startling in Kierkegaard’s presentation of the self is his insistence upon the solitary nature of the quest for selfhood. The individual becomes a self by relating to God, and nothing outside the individual can help him<sup>2</sup> in his effort to do this. The individual must learn to recognize himself as standing in a position of pure immediacy before God, higher than the totality of reality that surrounds him. The struggle for selfhood permits no mediation between the self and God; the individual must become a self on his own. In this paper, I will argue, however, that Kierkegaard’s theory of selfhood implies that relating to other human beings is necessary for the full development of the self.

In order to understand the force of Kierkegaard’s argument in *The Sickness Unto Death*, it is necessary to be familiar with the Hegelian thought against which Kierkegaard is reacting. Though Kierkegaard’s work bears many striking similarities to Hegel’s, in both its method and its content,

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<sup>1</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom*, Walter Lowrie, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968) 163.

<sup>2</sup> I normally make an effort to use gender-inclusive language. In this paper, however, I am forced to refer so often to the characteristics of the particular individual that using inclusive language would be too distracting in the treatment of an already complex subject. Saying “he or she” at every point would be too wordy, and simply using “she” would conflict with the language of the authors studied. Please excuse this deficiency.

Kierkegaard finally diverges significantly from speculative philosophy. Like Kierkegaard, Hegel is preoccupied with the nature of authentic selfhood—or in his language, spiritual existence—and he believes, also with Kierkegaard, that existing as spirit means above all relating to the absolute, God<sup>3</sup>. But, for Hegel, this relationship to the absolute is never direct or unmediated. Rather, the individual relates to the absolute through spiritual realities, which both are part of the individual’s essence and nonetheless transcend his particularity.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* presents a long series of dialectics by which the individual learns to relate to the absolute through the mediation of the universal—as it is present in reason, the state, the family, the spiritual community, and so on. The individual comes to knowledge of the absolute by relating to realities which it finds immediately within itself, but which, upon closer examination, show themselves to be universal. One of the primary mediators in the structure of the *Phenomenology* is ethical and moral<sup>4</sup> law. Ethical consciousness emerges from the individual’s own rationality, but, upon reflection, the individual must acknowledge that ethical law has its own intrinsic being, with its own internal and independent laws that govern it. Seen in its objectivity, ethical law reveals itself to contain universal truth, and, as such, it seems directly opposed to the particularity of the individual. Spiritual consciousness emerges, however, when the individual, affirming the universal character of ethical law, nonetheless recognizes his own identity with it as a rational being. The individual conceives of ethical law—or, more correctly, now *moral* law—as both infinitely beyond himself and nonetheless part of his own intrinsic being. Hegel writes:

Should I Stay or Should I Go?  
By Brenna Rausch

conflict of interests  
    interesting clash  
        like the Clash tune  
            too cliché for words  
                were my reasons solid?  
                    have the seasons  
                        treasoned my logic  
  
logarithmically telling me  
    turn turn turn  
        and a time to every purpose  
            but the time is now  
                or is now not the time  
                    to pine and whittle  
                        and twiddle my thumbs  
  
until dumbfounded  
    I find my decision  
        make the incision  
            cut away the array  
                of choice on display  
                    and voice once and  
                        for all how I’ll  
  
settle this conflict

<sup>3</sup> In *Journeys to Selfhood: Hegel and Kierkegaard* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), Mark C. Taylor shows convincingly that Hegel and Kierkegaard essentially develop rival phenomenologies of spirit.  
<sup>4</sup> Morality is for Hegel a more sophisticated form of ethics.



Now I am the tickler. My younger brother is small, weak, and innocent. His most reliable tool is trust, and he idolizes me. The big questions I routinely suppress still have for him a potential of resolution. What is it for? What is it called? Why do I have to wear clothes? Where did I come from? I am reminded of how little I really know. I wonder at his wonder, and I am annoyed. He senses my defensiveness. I am losing myself in some distraction, a TV show or a book perhaps. I tell him I'm busy. Busy stifling my own discouraged sense of wonder, I admit to myself. How lucky he is to freely know how little he knows. Frustrated, I begin to tickle him as my father once tickled me. In him I see the honest vulnerability that I once had; I may have more physical power, but he has the remarkable potential to become something new. Ignorant as we both are, his relative unfamiliarity with our world affords him a precious liberty. He lives a time I wish in vain to have again. I can control his behavior and his body by tickling, but this alone is not my purpose. As he laughs, struggling against an act he solicited, I attempt to relive unclutchable memories with some success. I taste lost toddlerhood as he senses a coveted maturity through me. We lose a little of our present self-ness, but simultaneously apprehend a fuller sense of self.

Where once my father tickled me, I now tickle my little brother. In the act I invoke my past and future selves, attempting to fuse them with my present self. I 'know' my childhood in my brother's familiar behavior, and I play a once future role as the tickler. Experiencing one of my little self's future horizons, I strive to inhabit that forgotten self, while I pick up the scent of a present potentiality in reprising my father's role.

[The spiritual consciousness] is the *actual* 'I', the universal knowledge of *itself* in its *absolute opposite*, in the knowledge which remains *internal*, and which, on account of the purity of its separated *being-within-self*, is itself completely universal.<sup>5</sup>

The individual comes to knowledge of himself through knowledge of what is wholly other than himself. By containing within himself the absolute otherness of morality—through knowledge of its very otherness—the individual reveals his final identity with the universality of this law. When the individual learns that he contains within himself the universal, through the mediation of ethics and morality, the individual can then, as the universal, relate to absolute Being.

For Hegel, therefore, the immediate existence of the individual is lower than that of ideas such as reason, the state, moral law, etc. The individual must come to consciousness of the presence of such ideas within himself, so that they can mediate to him the universal. Here is precisely where Kierkegaard disagrees with Hegel. Kierkegaard asserts that the particularity of the individual is higher than any other sort of reality. While a reality such as reason is superceded by the thought of that reality, the particular individual cannot be thought—and thus cannot be superceded. Kierkegaard writes: "One cannot think a human being, but only the concept 'man'."<sup>6</sup> The infinite value of a particular human being can never be captured conceptually. For this reason, Kierkegaard rejects the process of mediation between God and the individual so dominant in the Hegelian system. No conceptual reality can be found to serve as a mediator because no concept is higher than the particular individual. The individual, in his particularity, stands higher than the universal—stands immediately before God. Here, as he acknowledges, Kierkegaard departs significantly from Hegel's speculative idealism. "This notion of the single human being before

<sup>5</sup> G.F.W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, A.V. Miller, trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 409.

God never occurs to speculative thought; it only universalizes particular humans phantastically into the human race”<sup>7</sup>. Kierkegaard’s individual will not seek consciousness of universals within himself which mediate to him the absolute, but will seek consciousness of his place immediately before God.

We can see already why the quest for selfhood on Kierkegaard’s terms so often takes the form of a solitary journey. But is minimizing the importance of social relations in the creation of self a necessary consequence of affirming the particularity of the individual? How does Kierkegaard’s understanding of selfhood play itself out, given this basic insight? On the first page of *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard defines the individual as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite. Becoming a self does not mean actively synthesizing the finite and the infinite, but becoming conscious of the synthesis already present. Despair, the opposite of selfhood, arises to the extent that one is unconscious of either component of the synthesis at the heart of one’s being. Consequently, Kierkegaard distinguishes between two forms of despair, each unconscious of one or the other element of the synthesis.

The baser, but more prevalent, form of despair is unconscious of the infinitude present within human nature. The person suffering from this form of despair makes no effort to be more than finite. Kierkegaard describes such a person in this way:

He is totally dominated by his sensuous and psycho-sensuous relations; he lives in the categories of the sensate, the pleasant and the unpleasant, poo-poops spirit, the truth, etc.; he is too sensate to have the courage to risk and endure being spirit.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, Alastair Hannay, trans. (London: Penguin, 1989) 152.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 73.

### Tickling

By Aaron McNutt

I cannot tickle myself (except maybe by touching the roof of my mouth with my tongue). When I dig hand my into my armpit, it is not a tickling hand. My hand and my armpit are both privy to my intention. As a being, I am preconsciously aware to the hand’s movement in and around my body-space. My armpit’s tactile sense is unsurprised by my own touch, precisely because it is a part of me: my intention is its intention. Although I frequently touch myself, perpetually refining my sense of touch and spatiality, I cannot make tickling without another.

I have not been tickled in a long time, so I will speak of distant but marked memories. I am on the couch with my father, asking silly questions or spouting ridiculous insults. Finally he has had enough, and promptly plunges his hand into my armpit. Just as I recoil, laughing frantically, he grabs the side of my torso. Or my inner knee. Or he holds my ankle against my body’s possessed writhe while caressing the bottom of my foot with his free fingers. When the ordeal ends, I am short of breath. While relieved that it is over, I feel a relaxed rush: heart pounding, I am more at ease than I was when the tickling started.

I, the ticklee, am apprehensive, but this is not my whole attitude. After all, I instigate the tickling. Tickling is a sort of benign fire; at a distance I wish to inhabit it, although I will struggle to escape it when engulfed. There is an intermingling of trust and fear, confidence and vulnerability, in the situation. I have faith that my bigger, stronger father will not harm me. Yet I can’t quite accept the invasion of my body as it happens.

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Living only according to what pleases his finite nature, this person is unaware of having a spiritual nature. Kierkegaard saw this form of despair as especially prevalent among the petty bourgeois of his day: those who seek nothing more than their next pay check and their next good meal. Prudence governs those afflicted with this despair, for they are constantly trying to protect themselves against the snares of life which might rob them of their pleasures. The person in this type of despair lives, Kierkegaard writes, in a mansion, but never leaves the basement. This sort of person is too weak to recognize that his nature transcends the world which is immediately visible to him. In more philosophical terms, Kierkegaard repeatedly describes this sort of despair as "not wanting in despair to be oneself." This type of despairing individual refuses to come to consciousness of his true eternal nature.

The second form of despair, less worldly but more pernicious, is conscious of infinitude but refuses to accept finitude. The individual who despairs in this way knows that he transcends the material and the temporal, but does not also acknowledge that his existence nonetheless depends on God. In defiance, this individual refuses to concede that he is finite, that he is not himself God. Intoxicated by his own infinitude, this individual embarks on an ever-more fantastic quest to choose for himself who he will be, confident that nothing limits him. If he decides he wants to be Caesar, he despairs when he, in the end, does not become Caesar. Kierkegaard describes this form of despair as "wanting in despair to be oneself." This sort of individual does indeed want to be an eternal self, but does not want to become this by acknowledging his dependence on God. "He wants to begin a little earlier than other people, not at and with the beginning, but 'in the beginning'"<sup>9</sup>. Concerned only with his infinite nature, this individual wants

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 99.

to create his own self, rather than become the self that God has created him to be.

The reason that this sort of individual despairs is that he cannot become in actuality the infinite self he knows himself abstractly to be. This second form of despair is characterized by the self-abstraction of the individual, and we have already seen that Kierkegaard consistently fights against the dissolution of the individual's particularity in abstraction. The despairing individual's mental image of himself is too fantastic to exist in reality. Kierkegaard writes:

When emotion becomes fantastic in this way, the self is simply more and more volatized and eventually becomes a kind of abstract sensitivity which inhumanly belongs to no human, but which unhumanly participates sensitively, so to speak in the fate of some abstraction, for example humanity *in abstracto*.<sup>10</sup>

Kierkegaard's criticizes Hegel most strongly for allowing abstract realities to be superior to the concrete particularity of the individual. In this second form of despair, the individual falls into the same trap of considering an abstract conception of himself to be greater than who he actually is.

This second form of despair contains an element of truth, but only abstractly; the individual has seen his infinite nature, but not as it is concretized in his finite individuality. Kierkegaard describes the dialectic through which faith must proceed in this way:

The development must accordingly consist in infinitely coming away from oneself, in an infinitizing of the self, and in infinitely coming back to oneself in the finitization.<sup>11</sup>

The naively ignorant individual who has no consciousness of what is beyond the immediate sensual world certainly does not achieve selfhood. But living in the negation of the concrete world, in the realm of pure infinitude, is an

resolve to will to suffer, that is, that thou mightest resolve to love Him, for Him thou canst love only by suffering, or, if thou lovest Him as He would be loved, thou wilt have suffering" (459). Again, Kierkegaard maintains that "Love is He, and it is out of love He wills that thou shouldst will as He wills; so it is He suffers when thou dost not will as He wills" (459). An important perspective can be gained from noting the fact that Kierkegaard says God desires us to suffer "for the sake of eternity." This statement commands attention in light of Kierkegaard, who maintains that "the terrible things of this world are as child's play compared to the terror of eternity" (459). God's infinite love always has humanity's best interest at heart.

Kierkegaard's presentation of a choice between unhappiness and suffering is the proper way in which to see one's options. Either an individual will remain masked and invulnerable in this life and thereby be eternally unhappy, or s/he will reveal his or herself to love and thereby suffer in this life in order to be eternally happy. This choice no longer appears to be too harsh or demanding, even though it is human nature to wish to avoid suffering. Further, it is in no way an unfair choice that God presents before humanity. God, out of His infinite love, has experienced and continually experiences grief and suffering that are infinitely deeper than humans can comprehend. This is a result of God descending as a man and revealing Himself to humanity and opening Himself up to the possibility of being misunderstood by those He loves. God is essentially giving men and women the privilege of becoming more like Him in suffering, which is the price for love and eternal happiness.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 61.

to know that he may repel the learner, that he does not need him, that the learner has brought destruction upon himself by his own guilt, that he can leave the learner to his fate” (166). God’s infinite suffering is thus based upon Him taking off His mask, revealing Himself, and becoming vulnerable. This alone constitutes love.

The very manner in which God chose to reveal Himself to His beloved creation was filled with suffering. The union of God and humanity was only possible through a descent on God’s part. God became a man in Jesus Christ, and in order to become the equal of all men and women, He came as the humblest of all servants. Kierkegaard, as J. Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments*, regards this as “the unfathomable nature of love, that it desires equality with the beloved, not in jest merely, but in earnest and truth” (168). Jesus is man and yet He is God. It is a wonder that “his eye surveys mankind with anxious care,” and that “his own life is filled with sorrow” (169). Indeed, His life is “all sorrow and all love: to yearn to express the equality of love and yet to be misunderstood” (169). In regard to this misunderstanding, Climacus writes that “if I begged him to save his life and stay upon the earth, it would only be to see him...stricken with grief also for my sake, because this suffering was for my profit, and now I had added to his sorrow the burden that I could not understand him” (170). Thus, as it is mentioned above, those who suffer are not to be pitied, but rather those that pity the sufferers. The “sufferers” in this sense specifically includes God, since individuals who pity the grief and suffering of Jesus misunderstand that the entire point of His suffering is an act of expressing His infinite love for that individual.

In “One Only Lives Once,” Kierkegaard views God sitting in heaven and fondly loving each individual. It is out of this love that God desires everyone to love Him, and in so doing to suffer. For God yearns for everyone to “will as He for the sake of eternity would that thou...mightest

even more dangerous state. Though this state is in one sense nobler than the first, as recognition of the spiritual greatness of human nature, it is, in another sense, farther from true selfhood, which can only be lived in the concrete realm of daily existence. The second movement of which Kierkegaard speaks, the infinitizing of the self, is necessary to selfhood, but stopping there leaves one at the very opposite of selfhood. The true self must be conscious of being both infinite and finite. The true self participates fully in everyday finite existence with the consciousness that it contains the infinite. Selfhood means fighting the battles of everyday life according to the knowledge that one is a child of God.

We have seen that throughout *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard is concerned that the concrete particularity of the individual never be lost. Consciousness of the infinitude of the individual is incomplete if not accompanied by consciousness of finitude. Does such an insistence on the primacy of the individual necessarily imply that the quest to selfhood is a solitary one? It is true that Kierkegaard usually treats the subject in this way. However, viewed in a certain light, Kierkegaard’s argument as presented so far in fact implies the opposite—that selfhood can only be achieved by relating to other human beings. Kierkegaard insists that selfhood requires full immersion in finite existence. Only by assuming the finite fully does the self become concrete. Existing in the world, for all Kierkegaard’s talk of solitude, inevitably involves relating to others. To renounce relating to others in the name of a pure relationship to God is a refusal to accept finitude, a form of despair.

Though Kierkegaard did in many ways lead a solitary life, engaging in deep introspection and writing ceaselessly in his journal, his personal development is unquestionably dependent on his relationships to other people. Kierkegaard’s writings themselves are the product of social

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

relations. His theory of selfhood would be impossible without Hegel's thought and the teachers who imparted it to him. Further, Kierkegaard's encounter with Regina Olsen unquestionably informs his understanding of his own selfhood. Kierkegaard's own conception of self seems inextricably tied to the fact that he considered himself unfit to marry her. For whatever reason, Kierkegaard believed that God called him not to marry Regina, though he loved her deeply. For Kierkegaard, assuming his status as a synthesis of the finite and the infinite before God meant choosing not to marry Regina. Had he isolated himself in a monastic cell, rather than encountering Regina, Kierkegaard would not have become conscious of this aspect of his selfhood.

Kierkegaard's relationship to Regina is illustrative of the way in which all personal relationships contribute to the development of selfhood. Encounters with other human beings are part of the actualization of the self in the finite; they reveal to us the concrete self that God calls us to be in the world. If the self is only the product of the relationship between the isolated individual and God, nothing distinguishes one self from another. The commandments of God are the same to all; only their correct application in concrete social situations varies. By insisting that the self relates only to God, isolated from other humans, Kierkegaard leaves the self partially abstract. Fully assuming the finite after becoming conscious of the infinite requires full engagement with the other human beings with whom one inevitably lives. Only in living as the conscious synthesis of finite and infinite within the concrete realm of these social relations does the self assume its full particularity. Though we may know ourselves to be children of God, only through relating to others do we learn what this means for us concretely.

In his book *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Lévinas affirms against Kierkegaard that seeking selfhood through one's relations to others does not

Suffering is by nature an unpleasant experience. Thus, it is natural to desire life without pain or suffering. Indeed, Kierkegaard writes that, as humans, "we consider suffering an evil which in every way we strive to avoid...[and] we think everything depends upon slipping through life happily and well" (459). However, according to Kierkegaard, true Christianity "distinctly does not depend upon slipping through this life happily and well, but upon relating oneself rightly by suffering to eternity" (459). Suffering as the way of the true Christian life is also expressed in "Short and Sharp." Kierkegaard says that "when it pleased God in the form of a lowly servant to suffer in this world the world says, 'Poor man'; when an Apostle with a divine commission has the honor to suffer for the truth the world says, 'Poor man.' – Poor world!" (448). Humanity in general wishes for the elimination of suffering, whether it be their own, a fellow Christian's, and even Jesus' own sufferings. However, Kierkegaard maintains that those who suffer are not to be pitied, but rather those that pity the sufferers ought to be pitied. For those who pity others who are suffering for God's sake do not grasp the fundamental idea that such suffering is a necessity.

God is neither flippantly nor unfairly calling humans to suffer. Human suffering can never in the least compare to the grief and pain that God endures. The grief God experiences arises from His love for humanity in the face of humanity misunderstanding God and His love. In fact, this "grief is infinitely more profound than that of which men commonly speak, since it strikes at the very heart of love, and wounds for an eternity" (164). God's suffering is infinitely deeper from the very fact that He alone is able to completely understand the misunderstanding that is taking place. However, people rarely think of God as being grieved. This is due to the fact that "men sometimes think this [misunderstanding] is a matter of indifference to God...but in this we forget that God loves the learner" (166). This means that God has reserved for only Himself "this unfathomable grief:

## Kierkegaard on Suffering

By Mark McCreary

Soren Kierkegaard does not permit an individual to profess Christianity while living an aesthetic life. An aesthete is a speculative person, and he or she cannot truly be a Christian due to his or her distant and impersonal nature. Kierkegaard, writing as Victor Eremita (the Hermit) in *Either/Or*, illuminates the aesthetic life from the inside. The ethical character Judge William is writing a letter to his friend “A,” who is the exemplar of an aesthete. The Judge asks, “Do you not know that there comes a midnight hour when every one has to throw off his mask?” (Kierkegaard, 99). He goes on to assert that “he who cannot reveal himself cannot love, and he who cannot love is the most unhappy man of all” (100). Much later in Kierkegaard’s career, he non-pseudonymously writes a series of essays entitled *The Attack Upon “Christendom.”* In “One Only Lives Once,” he writes, “for [God] thou canst love only by suffering, or, if thou lovest Him as He would be loved, thou wilt have suffering” (459). Each individual therefore has a choice – either to stay masked, not love, and be the most unhappy person, or to be vulnerable, love God, and therefore endure much suffering and grief. This choice between unhappiness and suffering may appear too harsh or demanding. It also seems nonsensical that the happiest people will be those that suffer most. In short, it seems unfair. However, a deeper look reveals that God is not unfair in his demands insofar as He is only asking us to endure an infinitely smaller amount of the grief and suffering He constantly experiences. An understanding of this demand illustrates God’s desire for His people to be like Himself as well as His infinitely deep love for all people. Kierkegaard is correct in his presentation of the situation, which hinges on the fact that from an eternal point of view, God has humanity’s best interests at heart.

necessarily dissolve the individual in abstraction, as in Hegel. Lévinas writes:

‘Being for others’ is not the negation of the self, which disappears into the universal. Universal law itself refers to a face to face encounter [between two concrete individuals].... Only a self can respond to the injunction of the other’s face.<sup>12</sup>

Being a self ultimately involves recognizing in the face of each person whom we encounter an infinitely valuable self whose particularity could never be reduced to abstraction. Knowing ourselves to contain the infinite in our finitude, we must value the infinite in the particular individuals we encounter. Being a self means loving one’s neighbor as oneself. Though this love takes the form of self-sacrifice, it ultimately actualizes the self who we are implicitly. I may believe myself to be a child of God, but I do not actually become this until I treat others as children of God. By living for others, I become conscious of my particular role in the world as God’s child. Kierkegaard’s insight that the individual’s particularity can never be reduced to a concept is a profound one. But relating to others in love only actualizes the particularity of the individual self. The opportunity for self-sacrifice is ultimately a gift, which enables the realization of authentic selfhood. Through self-giving we receive ourselves back in concrete particularity and infinite value.

<sup>12</sup> Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totalité et Infini* (Paris: Kluwer Academic, 1971) 340. My translation.

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### We Can't Forget We Are Creators By Dan Campbell

Evolution is dead  
Or it is simply irrelevant?  
Or better said – what's your mutation?!  
It's all analogy, flashy tautology  
into infinite regress;  
At the end of the day – it's self-fulfilling psychology,  
Psychosomatic intent bent on contentment and the path of  
Least resistance (not a natural drive),  
But unnurtured, unstrengthened will  
To irresponsibility;  
We are expending our existence on external excuses  
The dog eat dog reduction of our free consciousness –  
Boundless, limitless – but for our Impatience  
and fear of change, which make  
Worship of pattern, not possibility, conquering ability.

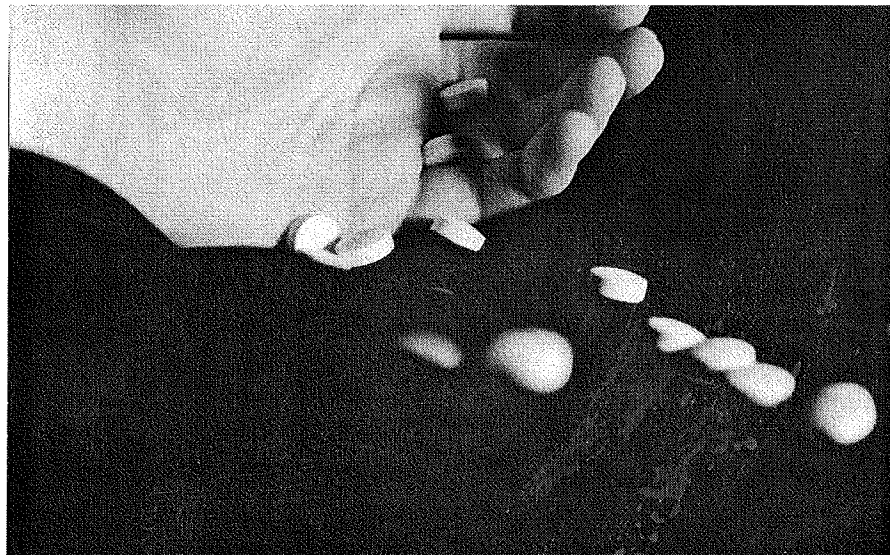
This acceptance is assumption, is  
Dismissal making inevitable, that which  
Once was only possible, probable, changeable –  
It's a restless sleep, a "taint of death"<sup>16</sup> and lies,  
Save for Life's ever-present persistence,  
Which begs more than survival, power, obedience, ambition;  
Yet we are told these are our laws,  
That everywhere are laws.

We can be  
celestial bodies and have no hidden orbit;  
Posit with me beyond patterns  
And *their* petty claims to truth;  
We learn little if we study  
Only the results;  
The Justification Project is only an excuse –  
A bow to make-believe  
Inevitability:  
the origin of danger to every human's way of life.

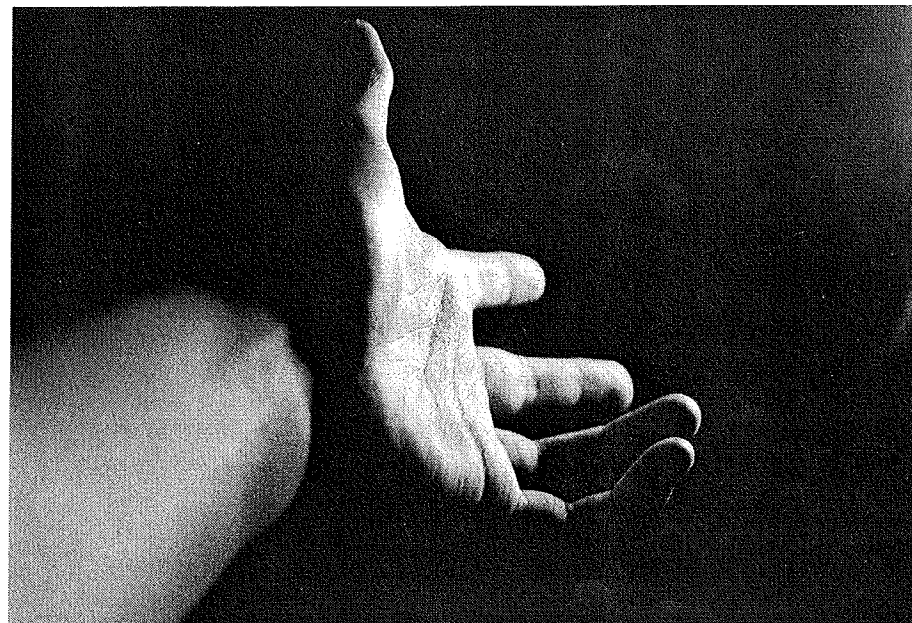
<sup>16</sup> Joseph Conrad: *Heart of Darkness*



**Pills**  
By Kristen Justus



**Light**  
By Kristen Justus



## HEIDEGGER, INAUTHENTICITY, AND CHOICE

By Ryan Keller

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger sets out to uncover the primordial nature of Being and in particular, the 'Beinghood' of Dasein. Until he developed his philosophy, Heidegger believed that the philosophical tradition and the sciences had uncovered the ontical, or present-at-hand structure of Being, but largely had yet to uncover the primordial grounding of the Being upon which all of their theories depended. Heidegger believed that there was something much more significant and primordial to Being itself. For him, man, by his very existence is thrown into a World of significations, and is continually falling or absorbed in activity. Furthermore, he continually projects himself into future modes of Being, which are either authentic or inauthentic. Inauthenticity is an important component of Heidegger's work and in his *chef d'oeuvre*—*Being and Time*—Heidegger gives a phenomenology of Dasein's inauthentic modes of Being and explicates the ways in which Dasein may escape inauthenticity and become authentic.

Heidegger's analysis of inauthentic versus authentic Being reveals significant aspects of man's existential nature while generating questions about it as well. What is inauthenticity and authenticity at the most primordial, ontological level? Is it possible to detect inauthenticity in one's own life? Is authenticity even possible? Heidegger attempts to answer all of these questions, and we shall discuss these questions in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the 'Beinghood' of man and an inauthentic versus an authentic life. In doing so we will ascertain whether Heidegger's proposed problem of inauthenticity and his resultant answer to it sufficiently discloses the primordial aspect of the Being of man.

Prior to embarking on this phenomenological journey, I will give a brief overview of a few Heideggerian terms that appear throughout his work,

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failed to kill death itself and finds himself completely alone with the weight of a murder on his conscience for which he denies feeling any guilt<sup>15</sup>.

Like the window in his apartment that separates him from life and people in the street, Meursault generally succeeds in putting up a glass between himself and his experiences in order to hide his emotions, maintain a mask of stoicism and give off an appearance of indifference that he is never able to truly attain. Paradoxically, the murder trial both excludes Meursault from society and places him at the center of the action, where he is least comfortable (Jones, 33). Theoretically, Meursault, like Sisyphus, should have triumphed over the absurd through his own indifference and resignation to the meaninglessness of his existence. Meursault's indifference can be argued, but it will not be *felt* by Camus' readers, because as a human rather than novelistic experiments such as Meursault, the reader does—perhaps futilely but invariably—search for meaning.

Even the existentialists, in arguing against transcendent meaning in life are implicitly acknowledging the natural human impulse to search for meaning. Camus is able to maintain the authenticity of Meursault's character only in allowing his hypothesis to fail. His mother's death, his relationship with Marie and her love for him, and the weight of a murder are all too significant, too full of meaning, for Meursault to be able to continue to suppress his emotions and remain detached from life, without assigning meaning to the relationships he has with other people. Meursault's embrace of death is not a triumph, but a cowardly escape from the responsibility of life and the pressure of suppressed emotions.

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<sup>15</sup> O'Brien provides a convincing explanation as to Meursault's easy conscience, arguing that, in accordance with the imperialistic and racist climate of the times, Meursault doesn't regard the Arab as fully human. He is nameless to both the reader and Meursault. "When the narrator shoots down this blank and alien being and fires 'four shots more into the inert body, on which they left no visible trace,' the reader does not quite feel that Meursault has killed a man. He has killed an Arab" (O'Brien 26).

and which are critical for gaining a solid understanding of his notions of Being and inauthenticity. He introduces new terms to eradicate what he considered the philosophical tradition's tendency in language to obfuscate the ontological structure of Being. Thus, according to Heidegger, 'Dasein' or "Being-there" is the "Beinghood" of human beings. "Dasein is an entity which, in its very Being, comports itself understandingly towards that Being" (Heidegger, 53). The 'World' he defines as that structure of significations wherein Dasein lives. It is never a 'thing,' nor is it a collection of things—i.e., rocks, trees, and air. It is that wherein Dasein's Being-alongside-things and Being-with-Others are made possible. In such a World, entities can be present-at-hand—i.e., exist incidentally as objects *qua* existing in spatiality. This, according to Heidegger, has been the dominant, traditional mode of seeing Being as *res extensa*.

To begin then, as Being-in-the-World, Dasein is always *thrown* into a World of significations (i.e., relationships), it always *projects* itself in terms of its possibilities for taking a stand on its Being, and it is always *falling*; that is, it is a factual Being-in-the-World which is always absorbed in doing something. Given its ontological Being as thrown, projecting, and fallen, Dasein proximally and for the most part falls into inauthentic modes of Being. Heidegger states in *History of the Concept of Time* that "Dasein which is in its essence delivered to the World gets entangled in its own concern. It can yield to this tendency of falling to such a degree that it thereby cuts itself from the possibility of returning to itself" (281). This cutting-oneself-off-from-oneself is what Heidegger terms 'inauthenticity.' It is "a distinctive kind of Being-in-the-World—the kind that is completely fascinated by the 'World' and by the Dasein-with of Others in the 'they'" (Heidegger, 175). The 'they' is "not this one, not that one, not oneself [man selbst], not some people [einege], and not the sum of them all" (Heidegger, 126). The 'they' is *das man*, the generalized, non-entity, yet omnipresent 'Other' that dictates 'what one does.'

In inauthenticity, the individuality or “I” of Dasein, and its genuine pressing into its own possibilities are swallowed up in the ‘they,’ as the ‘they’ presses into possible modes of Being. I no longer respond to my particular situation *qua* myself; I *qua* ‘*das man*’ respond to the general situation as ‘they’ respond. For example:

In utilizing public means of transport and in making use of information services such as the newspaper, every Other is like the next. This Being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of ‘the Others’, in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the ‘they’ is unfolded. We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [man] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; ... we find ‘shocking’ what *they* find shocking” (Heidegger, 126).

Despite the overwhelming force exerted upon Dasein by the ‘they’ to succumb to inauthentic modes of Being, Heidegger makes it clear that it is possible to overcome inauthenticity. Of course, there is a continual pull toward Being average and public, and toward fleeing responsibility. However, “this process can be reversed...if Dasein specifically brings itself back to itself from its lostness in the ‘they’.... [To do so] it must first find itself” (Heidegger, 268). For Heidegger, this is clearly not just a cognitive function of recognizing that “I” am lost in public talk or behavior. Nor does such “coming back” result from an ‘awareness’ imparted by the superficial modes of *das man*’s idle talk—ungrounded gossip passed off as knowledge—such as reading it in a book or hearing about it on the television. Rather, for Dasein to become authentic (i.e., to gain an authentic comportment towards its ownmost Being), “it must be ‘shown’ to itself in its possible authenticity...attested by the ‘voice of conscience’” (Heidegger, 268).

This call of conscience directs Dasein back to its own authentic possibilities for Being. The “call comes from me and yet from beyond me”

be read as suicidal. Camus considered suicide to be the only really major philosophical problem: “If you decide your life isn’t worth living, should you therefore logically and honestly end your life?” (Jones, 17). Critics have interpreted the “central message” from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, however, to be “that the true revolt against the absurdity of existence consists not in suicide but in continuing to live” (O’Brien, 31). Meursault’s wish for his own death at this point, or else his ready acceptance of, almost eagerness for his death after his moment of epiphany, then, may indicate that he has become not more, but *less* indifferent to life.

Meursault consistently removes himself emotionally from his life experiences. At the end of the day that he spends as a spectator, isolated in his apartment following his mother’s funeral, Meursault reasons with himself against emotion, “I *thought* that it was still a Sunday like any other, that Maman was now buried and that I was going to go back to work and that, all things considered, *nothing had changed*” (Camus, 41 emphasizes mine). His perspective is a realistic one, since his mother long ago ceased to be a part of his life; but the very fact that he reminds himself of the cold facts and chooses to include a reflection on the obvious continuity of life in his narrative indicates a suppression of a deeper emotional reaction. Similarly, the most troubling aspect of the murder for both Meursault’s lawyer and the reader is that Meursault shot the Arab not just once, but five times. According to one critic’s interpretation, however, what overtly appears to be the mark of a cruel and amoral man can in fact be read as sensitivity rather than indifference toward death: “Meursault finds himself confronted with the death that he has just created. It is at this death that he shoots four more times, in order to prove to himself that the inertia of the body that death now possesses is, in fact, indifference to life” (Treil qtd. in Fitch, 67 translation mine). Meursault embraces death only after he has

indifference is the secret to triumphing over the absurd. Critics have likened Meursault to Sisyphus in this moment, inferring from his epiphany that he has unified himself to the indifference of the universe and found happiness (Jones, 19). This interpretation of Meursault as indifferent to his condemnation to death and accepting of the meaningless of life may be acceptable to the critic but is thoroughly unconvincing to the reader. Even if, through *The Stranger*, Camus manages to convince his reader's mind of the absurdity of existence and of indifference as the only appropriate response to the meaninglessness of the universe, he is still not able to prevent his reader from responding emotionally to the murder Meursault commits and his subsequent condemnation to death as a tragic end to a tragically empty life.

Although the protagonist's suppression of his emotions and reluctance to act as narrator contribute to an *impression* of indifference, Meursault never does become completely indifferent. Rather, he strives after indifference without ever managing to attain it. If Meursault fears that his social, sexual, and potentially legal attachment to Marie may bring with it the danger of emotional attachment, it may be her love for him that pushes Meursault to grasp even more desperately for indifference. If trying to adopt an attitude of indifference, a murder—not a premeditated murder, but an existentially motivated one, brought on by the heat and light of the sun—would be the logical extreme of such indifference.

If Meursault can accept, even for a moment, the meaninglessness of life, the taking of a life loses some of its gravity. It would have been in the interest of Meursault's own life not to kill the Arab, as the trial and Meursault's conviction go on to prove. Although Meursault doesn't reveal any thoughts of the future to the reader, it may be that at least subconsciously, in committing this murder he is willing his own death. If not the murder itself, Meursault's unwillingness to defend himself can also

(Heidegger, 275). It disrupts the idle talk of everyday Being and summons Dasein to itself and makes possible the state or mood of 'anxiety.' In anxiety, Dasein's circumspective concern for things in the World ceases and more importantly, fascination with the 'they' is abandoned as irrelevant. In this condition of nullity, Dasein is able to hear the call of conscience in its state of *wanting-to-have-a-conscience*. One must be careful, however, not to interpret this as a religious prescription of how one ought to press into authentic possibilities. To the contrary, the call of conscience 'keeps silent' and never dictates what one's possibilities should be. Thus, conscience calls Dasein to "project itself upon [its own possibilities], without holding up to Dasein an ideal of existence with any special 'content,' or forcing any such ideal upon it 'from outside'" (Heidegger, 266).

Thus, in Heidegger's view, what is required to gain an authentic stand on one's Being, is to hear the call of conscience and to project oneself authentically into one's own (not *das man's*) possibilities. To do so, according to Heidegger, one must anticipate resolutely the *possibility of the impossibility of existence* or, in common parlance, what we call 'death.' For Heidegger, Dasein's primordial Being is Being-towards-Death. Death is not an ending *qua* disappearing, completing, or fulfilling itself, nor is it an unfortunate event that happens at the end of one's life. Rather, it is Dasein's certain, indefinite, ownmost possibility of Being. To anticipate resolutely one's own death does not mean to wallow continuously in the omnipresence of death, but rather to understand that death is one's ownmost, and that one's Being is to be given up, and to thereby take responsibility for how one lives one's life. Interestingly then, death—to which many existentialist philosophers attribute the nullity and meaningless of life—in Heidegger's estimation is the very possibility of Being that makes Dasein's authenticity possible. Indeed, only by understanding my own death, comporting myself meaningfully toward it, and taking responsibility for my actions as well as my very Being can I fully reclaim my existence from the 'they.' Thus, by

coming to grips with my own death I am able to take up my own way of Being and become responsible for my own actions, thereby completely freeing myself from the dictates of the 'they.' In essence, I become authentic.

By formulating this view of inauthenticity and authenticity, Heidegger leaves a few questions unresolved and a number of issues open to debate. The two central components of Heidegger's concept of 'authenticity' are pressing into one's ownmost possibilities of living, and taking responsibility for one's own Being. First, in terms of pressing into one's ownmost possibilities, according to Heidegger, Dasein's Being is Being-in-the-World and Being-with-Others. Thus, given our very Being as Being-thrown-into-the-World-with-Others, we never "exist" first and then "enter" society, via a "social contract" or any other secondary, occurrent structure. The very Being of Dasein involves being in a World of relations with Others, and as such "Dasein itself...gets its ontological understanding of itself in the first instance from [Others] which it encounters 'within' its World, and from the Being which they possess" (Heidegger, 58). Therefore, whether I press into the possibility of being a painter, a professor, or a politician, I am always pressing into possibilities offered to me by Others. My ontological understanding of myself in painting or teaching as being absorbed in modes of being is already established by the 'Other' or the 'they.' If Heidegger is correct that Dasein is inherently a fallen being (i.e., is always absorbed in 'doing things') and that every possibility into which Dasein may succumb to *das man*, it would be impossible for Dasein ever to take up its ownmost possibilities. Heidegger himself claims that Dasein does not create his own possibilities. They are already provided to Dasein; they are a given in Dasein's very Being *qua* fallenness.

In such a case, it would be impossible for Dasein to ever become authentic. Yet, Heidegger says that authenticity *is* possible. From this it is clear that Heidegger did not mean that authenticity *qua* 'pressing into one's

*The Stranger* actually *limits* the reader's knowledge of Meursault and what's going on in his psyche, because Meursault filters his own thoughts and emotions, attempting to recount the events in an objective, pseudo-omniscient manner. In contrast to the present tense of stream-of-consciousness writing characteristic of many modern authors that allows the reader to very nearly approximate the protagonist-narrator's own experience in their imagination, here the protagonist, although not obviously conscious of a reader, is nonetheless allowed to provide us with his own subjective, filtered view of himself. Several critics have noted that "Meursault's *je* approximates to an *il*: we know no more than if we were observing him from the outside" (Jones, 44).

Through his simple, direct, unanalyzed sentences and superficial and simplistic observations delivered in close chronological order, Camus may give off the false impression to the reader that they are sharing Meursault's experiences, or at least his consciousness. The subtle but marked distinction between the *je* of the narrator and the *je* of the protagonist, however, is maintained by the use of the past tense. We don't witness Meursault receiving or reacting to the news of his mother's death. Instead, he narrates his receipt of the news in the simple past tense: "I received a telegram from *l'asile* yesterday" (Camus, 9). His interactions with his boss are similarly narrated to us in the simple past tense, almost as a simple matter of course to catch the reader up to the present. In control of the narrative, Meursault is able to choose to leave his emotions *out* of the narrative, either because he judges them inconsequential or simply because he doesn't deign to share them with the reader.

The critics who do not insist upon Meursault's indifference from the beginning of the novel do, however, agree that by the end of the novel, Meursault has become indifferent to life. This second interpretation is more consistent with Meursault's epiphany while in jail awaiting death—that

present tense that's hard to situate, coupled with Meursault's contrasting of his own perspective *then* compared to that of an ambiguous now: "I even had the impression that this dead person, lying in their midst, meant/signified nothing in/to their eyes. But *now* I think that it was a false impression" (Camus, 21 emphasis mine). Other critics maintain that he wrote the first part of the novel chapter by chapter or in other small chunks and only the second part from his jail cell, which would account for its relative coherence, distinct tone, and more thematic rather than strictly chronological organization. Arguments for both are convincing, and the very irreconcilability of the various possibilities points toward the absurdity of the debate itself.

Meursault's very character defies even the existence of a first-person narrative account. The possibility is made unbelievable by the text itself, which is, ironically, the only means through which we know Meursault and the only sense in which he exists at all. Paradoxically, even Meursault's reticent narrative style points to the absurdity of Meursault actually caring to record any part of his life. Throughout the rest of the *récit*, there is never any reference to Meursault writing anything at all except to help with a letter that is not his own and has no relation to his own life.<sup>14</sup> Camus is the only author of this first-person narrative that he forces upon an unwilling protagonist of his own creation. The tension between the inherent silence of Meursault's character and "his" first-person narrative account from Camus' pen results in a hesitant and grudging bare-minimum narrative that contributes to Meursault's façade of indifference.

The strength of a first-person narrative typically lies in its ability to cause the reader come to identify with the protagonist-narrator, with the trade-off of obscuring the truth of the narrative through subjectivity and a single, narrow perspective. Ironically, however, the first-person narrative in

ownmost possibilities' includes only those possibilities that are wholly one's own—i.e., created by oneself. The given possibilities of 'Others' must somehow become my own, but how?

This question holds serious implications for the concepts of *das man* and inauthenticity. As we will see, in addressing the primordial modes of Being of Dasein, the seemingly clear lines between authenticity and inauthenticity become quite blurred. To show this, it will help to recall that the tendency toward inauthenticity for Dasein is powerful and always present. This inherent proclivity to flee to inauthentic modes of Being is reinforced proximally and for the most part in all of our human relations. From infancy to death, a common statement heard by Dasein in any culture is "you're supposed to" or "you shouldn't." This ontic expression of *das man* is especially pronounced in such languages as French and Spanish in which the use of "il faut..." (one ought to...), "hay que" (it is owing or proper that), or "ca ne se fait pas" (one doesn't do that) is much more pronounced. But seen from the World into which we are thrown, is it always the case that what is dictated to each of us as 'what one does' is universal?

I will concede that the pressure to conform in every society is forceful and omnipresent. But what happens to our conception of the 'they,' or the 'one' [*man*], when what one ought to do in milieu X goes contrary to what one ought to do in milieu Y? Is there really only one *das man* in a World filled with different religions, cultures, languages, and habits? A more encompassing look at the World would probably suggest the opposite. Is there not an 'American way' to be patriotic that differs from a 'Venezuelan way,' or an 'Islamic way' to worship God which differs from a 'Hindu way'? It does not require Being a French expatriate in Laos to see that 'universal' dictates of *das man* vary not only from culture to culture, but also from individual to individual. Cultural considerations aside, in my own personal college experience I have faced the conflicting dictates of

<sup>14</sup> Meursault helps Raymond lie to his ex-girlfriend by writing a letter to her for him.  
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numerous 'theys' that surround me. To illustrate, 'what one does' in my religion on Sunday is go to church. However, 'what one does' as part of my college's NCAA crew team is travel to other colleges to compete on Sunday. Each '*das man*' around me dictates something I should do, each different from and perhaps opposing the other.

But what does it matter if there is one or many *das mans*? And in suggesting that there are, in fact, many *das mans*, are we not distorting Heidegger's primordial concept of the 'they' that is really the general phenomenon of the pull felt by every individual to conform to society's standards? For the sake of argument, let us suppose that such is the case that Heidegger's conception of *das man* is a single, unified 'they.' Yet, even if Heidegger is only describing that general phenomenon, the fact that there could be multiple (in reality, innumerable) sources manipulating that tendency in Dasein by dictating divergent, even conflicting '*what one ought to do's*' carries significant implications for the Heideggerian notion of inauthenticity. Most significant is how can I know when I am choosing those possibilities which are my ownmost or which are those of *das man*? If in my Mormon religion I commit myself to God by refraining from alcohol and premarital sexual relations and by going to church on Sunday, is that conformity because that is 'what one does' in my religion? If I am living in a region such as Salt Lake City, which is predominantly Mormon and is going to church, more inauthentic than if I were living in an area with few Mormons and thus there were no social pressure to go? Is authenticity thus based on the social climate around me and what the particular *das man* is at that point in time dictating to me? What if one's parents dictate 'what one does' and this contradicts 'what one does' according to dictates of the church (or sports team, teachers, etc.)?

Theoretically, it is easy to agree that the phenomenon of *das man* pervades society, but analyzed more closely in everyday life, it is much more difficult to define what is and is not inauthentic. However, if we are

From his perch, Meursault speculates on people's activities and surmises from the hour that certain groups of them must be going to the cinema. Based on their gestures and expressions upon their return from the cinema, he conjectures as to what movies they've seen, speculating that those who appeared "more decided" must have seen an adventure movie and noting that others seemed "more serious" than before (*Camus*, 40). Whereas these people have taken on the role of spectator for a time at the cinema, Meursault at this moment is taking on the role of spectator in life itself, declining to participate. He notes, "Several of the girls that I know waved to me" (*Camus*, 40) but leaves no indication that he responded to their gestures. The perspicacity Meursault demonstrates in this scene alone precludes the possibility that he is simply a socially inept sociopath, but his apparent coldness and seeming attempt at detached objectivity leave the reader unsettled. Much as Meursault can only speculate as to the sort of experience the cinema-goers are coming from, the reader is left to blindly conjecture as to the life experiences that have influenced Meursault's own seeming indifference.

Meursault's characteristic reticence in his speech and thought patterns as seen in the story is mirrored by his narrative choices and style, and more so than either the novel's story or Meursault's detachment, the narrative itself obfuscates Meursault's underlying emotions. Critics have debated as to when Meursault wrote his first-person narration that is commonly regarded as a journal or as a *récit*, with the question of his perspective at the time of writing at stake. Some argue that Meursault wrote the whole account at once from his jail cell, very near the end of his life. This would account for instances that could easily be characterized as foreshadowing, such as when he feels the old people sitting around his mother's casket are judging him: "For a moment I had the impression that they were there to judge me" (*Camus*, 19). It would also explain an occasional jump to a



same conclusion that Meursault is, in fact, deeply affected by his mother's death. Many critics also concur that he does in fact care for both Raymond and Marie, evinced not in his recognition of abstract categories or terms such as "love" or "friendship," but through his actions (Jones, 25). The absence of emotion in Meursault's narrative does not necessarily preclude its existence. Meursault does not complicate his narrative with emotion simply because he either does not want to have to talk about it or doesn't care to include it. Judging by his own first-person narrative in *The Stranger*, to say that Meursault is a man of few and simple words would be an understatement. On the way to his mother's funeral, when he meets an *ex-militaire* on the train who asks him if he's come from far away, Meursault tells the reader that he responds with a quick "yes," simply "to not have to talk anymore" (*Camus*, 11). Similarly, when he returns from his mother's funeral, he consciously alters his routine, avoiding eating at Céleste's because "they would have asked me questions and I don't like that" (*Camus*, 36) and even avoiding going downstairs to buy bread.

Mersault, whose chief pleasures include the sensual experience of the sun and the sea, spends the entire day following his mother's funeral cooped up in his apartment, avoiding both people and questions. Meursault generally seems detached not from the existential experience of life itself, but rather from any shade of meaning or significance attached to it. In what may very well be a more vulnerable point in time for him right after his mother's funeral, however, he stops participating completely, relegating himself to a spectator's role as he watches people on their Sunday outings from his apartment window. The notice he takes of families and their relations to one other within the family unit (two little boys, a little girl, mother, father) (*Camus*, 37) indicates that his own mother and his own family, of which the reader knows nothing, are likely on his mind, although his thoughts in the narrative include no mention of either.

ever to attain a primordial understanding of the nature of inauthenticity, it seems quite clear that basing the ontological meaning of inauthenticity solely on the concept of a singular, unified *das man* leaves the notion of inauthenticity open to too many inconsistent variables. To determine whether a life is inauthentic or not, based on one's surroundings—be it social, religious, or cultural—may be an interesting study in psychology, but it comes far short of a solid ontological grounding of the inauthenticity of Dasein.

Thus, to understand inauthenticity, it is necessary to do what Heidegger has done all along, that is, to go beyond the phenomenal, psychological or incidental descriptions of Being, and to uncover the primordial grounding of the Being upon which such 'surface' descriptions are based.

According to Heidegger we are constantly pulled toward inauthenticity, toward doing 'what one does.' We feel as 'they' feel, we act as 'they' act. Furthermore, in Dasein's Being *qua* Being-thrown-in-a-World, all possibilities are already established or dictated by the 'they,' but given this, how then does one take up a mode of Being and make it one's own authentic possibility?

At the most primordial level one makes a possibility one's own by making a choice. There are so many factors involved in Heidegger's conception of the 'they' that any attempt to establish a solid ontological understanding of inauthenticity and authenticity upon those bases is insufficient and fails to get to the primordial root of Dasein's *capacity* for inauthenticity. What is it in Dasein's Being that makes authenticity possible? The fundamental answer that makes it possible is Dasein's inherent ability to choose. If all possibilities are already given to me, *qua* Being thrown into a World with Others, to make these possibilities my own and thus authentic, the primordial ontological basis for doing so can be nothing other than Being-to-choose. The ability to choose is the very basis

upon which the existence of authenticity and even *das man* is possible. As Victor Frankl once said “Everything can be taken from a man ... but the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s way” (Frankl, 104). Thus, just as biology is dependent upon a presupposition of Being itself, any notions of authenticity or inauthenticity presuppose Dasein’s ability to choose as fundamental to its structure of Being.

This notion of Being-to-choose *qua* Being the primordial basis upon which the authenticity is possible is further illustrated by Heidegger’s second significant demarcation between inauthenticity and authenticity—the idea of responsibility. Central to the character of inauthentic Dasein is its disburdening itself of its Being; of its responsibility toward its own existence. According to Heidegger, in Being caught up with the “averageness” of the ‘they,’ I relinquish my responsibility for my Being since *das man* “presents every judgment and decision as its own [and thus] it deprives the particular Dasein of its answerability. It was always the ‘they’ who did it....It was no one” (Heidegger, 128).

Yet, conversely, what would it mean to be authentic by accepting responsibility? How then is responsibility defined? Is it an occurrent, mental state in which one feels content in one’s heart for having made a particular decision, or because that decision is what I “really wanted?” Defining responsibility solely in terms of the mental acceptance for my actions is vague and unsatisfactory. For example, if I kill someone because everyone ‘is doing it’ and use that as my justification, does that make it inauthentic? Three years later, after a jail sentence, I “repent” and realize “I was responsible, I pulled that trigger.” Does that then make my crime authentic? Of course it would not, and yet, according to Heidegger, it is by taking responsibility for my actions that my actions are authentic, and they are my own. I would argue that by virtue of the fact that I am always given the choice by *das man* to follow or not, *in every case* I am given the choice.

## Grasping For Indifference

By Eleanor Griffith

Literature’s most existentialist protagonist and mythical Sisyphus’ real-world counterpart, Meursault is Camus’ most ambitious postulation. A novel is an opportunity to test the feasibility of a life that has only been conceived in the mind. In *The Stranger*, Camus brings the idea of “life lived without any transcendent meaning” (Jones, 19) out from the mythical world of the Greeks in *The Myth of Sisyphus*<sup>13</sup> and into the lived, day-to-day reality of this world. Unlike Sisyphus, however, Meursault is unable to equal the universe in indifference, and in this sense he can be studied as a novelistic experiment that ultimately fails. On one level, Meursault himself tries and fails to lead his life without assigning any meaning to it. On another level, Meursault, as the author’s creation, is Camus’ own failed hypothesis. The genius of *The Stranger*, however, lies in the fact that Camus does not construct an artificial ending but maintains the verisimilitude of Meursault’s character and *permits* his hypothesis to fail, relegating to the realm of the purely theoretical and the mythical world of Sisyphus the notion of a life lived in indifference with no search for meaning.

Careful character studies of Camus’ Meursault from *The Stranger* all find him to be a deep, multi-faceted character rather than the one-dimensional, amoral killer he may appear at a first read. Although some critics insist upon Meursault’s indifference from the beginning of the novel, many others have pointed to numerous textual clues and devoted many pages to come to the

<sup>13</sup> *The Stranger* was originally meant to be published as part of a trilogy with three other works: two plays and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, each dealing with the notion of *the absurd* (Jones 16): the clash between the indifference of the universe and humans’ search for meaning. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* his treatment of the Greek myth, Camus delineates corresponding indifference to the meaningless of the universe as the only means of triumphing over the absurd. Sisyphus is able to find peace because he looks for no meaning in his never-ending task of rolling the stone to the top of the hill, accepting the inherent futility of the task that consumes his existence.

**Becoming**  
By Parker Jones

bleeding thoughts and emotions  
anxiety overrunning my being  
looking  
searching  
deep within my core

they speak to me  
the others call to me  
but I've fallen  
fallen  
out of the world

outside they, where am I?  
but outside of they I can see.  
I can see all of myself.  
all of my memories  
all of my fears  
I can see all of my life

My-self is gone  
the chatter is gone  
the running is gone  
the ambiguity is gone  
the everydayness is gone  
They are gone.

The world is back  
slowly.  
They are back in view  
slowly.  
The others are back in view  
slowly  
slowly.

I am no longer mastered  
I am no longer ensnared  
I am no longer lost  
by the publicness.

With Understanding.  
With Resolution.  
With Discussion.  
With Identity.  
I live my life  
With truth.

Even in choosing to conform, I still make a choice. I make it mine because I choose to do so.

Thus, much more primordial than secondary mental states, what makes me responsible is the fact that I choose this action, or this mode of Being. Again, for Heidegger, I never create my own possibilities. I am always thrown into a World, and I choose from among the possibilities given to me. What then for Heidegger makes authenticity is Being responsible, which we have already discussed, and making that possibility (although already created and opened up to me) my own. At the most primordial level, I make it my own by choosing that possibility. If I desire to conform in manner of dress, for example, and acceptance is more important to me than comfort, my 'own way' is gaining acceptance. That is my ownmost choice, my ownmost chosen possibility. Would it not then be completely antithetical to require, in order to "become authentic," that I abandon my ownmost possibility—acceptance—for another standard that is not my own?

In summation, Heidegger uncovers significant aspects of the ways in which Dasein can take up stands on its ownmost possibilities for Being. Clearly, there is a tendency for Dasein to flee from the possibility of the impossibility of Being—death—and to relinquish decision and responsibility for one's Being. As Fyodor Dostoevsky said: "Man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone quickly to whom he can hand over that gift of freedom with which the ill-fitted creature is born" (Dostoevsky, 235). Thus, at the occurrent psychological level of Dasein's Being-in-the-World, Dasein flees from its agony of decision, and thereby makes itself open to the dictates of some form of *das man*; it seeks the secure, anesthetizing *Being-as-without-choice*. Yet, despite man's attempts to flee from choice, a primordial understanding of Dasein's Being discloses that choice is the very existential mode of Being that in every case makes each possibility one's ownmost possibility. It is only because Dasein's Being is Being-to-choose

at the primordial level that inauthenticity is possible at a more secondary psychological level. Thus, what makes every possibility of my Being my own is that I *choose* it and *do* take up that possibility. As a result, every decision and every mode of Being into which I press myself, at the most fundamental level, are in every case authentic.

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**Untitled**  
By Nick Wakem

