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“The Unfading Beauty of the Inner Self”
Beauty and Faith in Sartre and Kierkegaard

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Beauty and Faith in Sartre and Kierkegaard

As Friedrich Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*, “God is dead, and we have killed him,” and with Him goes any possibility of faith.¹ This view, stated explicitly by Nietzsche, is the predominant view of faith proposed by modern existentialists such as Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Martin Heidegger. Without God, and the objectivity that comes from Him, what is considered good and beautiful is no longer based upon objective considerations or a supposed “thing in itself,” but rather is entirely dependent upon the subjective views and ideas of a particular person or community. In these different philosophical views, humans who put their faith in a God who calls for their conformity to His plan are seen to be weak, for they avoid the challenging freedom of the human condition, which is the obligation of self-creation. Beauty, then, is not to be found in the world, for the post-modern world has uncovered the ugly truth that we are alone in a world that is indifferent or perhaps even hostile to us.

For one who has faith, however, all things are beautiful as they point back to the beauty of God the Creator. For one who rejects the death of God, nothing in life is considered accidental or coincidental, but rather all encounters with other created things refer continuously to the beauty of the divine. Belief in God is not a renunciation of freedom but rather a free act of cooperation with God’s call to celebrate and create beauty. Rather than being chained to a restricting fideism, such a conscious decision allows one to rightly use a faculty given to the person by God and thus live more freely. Even if a free choice eventually leads to ugliness, brutality, or even death, the believer is called to see how God’s transforming power can bring

good out of evil, and beauty out of ugliness. The person who believes in a living God who died and rose again chooses faith freely for him or herself, and thus receives the grace to see more fully, to see that beauty is not an illusion but rather the key to unlocking the deepest mysteries of life.

Yet, especially in the face of the scientific revolution’s “demystification” of the universe and of the horrific suffering we see all around us, it is hard to deny that such claims of the believer seem like so much wishful thinking. Jean Paul Sartre, writing with a post-God worldview, makes a bold statement about faith, arguing that:

Existentialism […] affirms that even if God were to exist, it would make no difference [in a truly meaningful life] […] it is not [a question of whether one] believes God exists, but [instead] that the real problem is not one of his existence; what man needs is to rediscover himself and to comprehend that nothing can save him from himself, not even valid proof of the existence of God.²

The nature of faith that might reasonably follow from a Sartrean existentialism is one that is creative, because, as will be discussed in the coming pages, any idea one has of God is merely a subjective conception of Him one creates for one’s own life, rather than a conception of God given in divine revelation. Beauty, too, for Sartre reaffirms such a subjective view and, stripped of its signaling to objectivity, holds a diminished power and authority in life.

Soren Kierkegaard, conversely, argues that faith allows one to become the best version of oneself – the individual before the universal creator, God himself – while losing nothing of one’s unique personality. The faith of Kierkegaard comes as a response to God, who calls one through different stages of life to this unique closeness before Him. Because people have free will, each

person must respond to this call individually through action and taking a ‘leap’ into the unknown and into something beyond their control; choosing to create one’s own vision of life, as Sartre contends we should do, is itself a choice to reject God’s invitation to faith. This ‘leap’ itself is beautiful because one must make a free, active, and conscious decision to make it, and is the precondition for coming to see true beauty.

Thus, what we see are two, competing and irreconcilable philosophies of life, for one tells us that life consists in choosing, the other in the faith that we are chosen. In this review, I hope to explain the difference between creative and responsive faith, and how each views beauty, through an analysis of two characters, one from each author – Antoine Roquentin from Sartre’s novel Nausea, and the Knight of Faith found in Kierkegaard’s treatise Fear and Trembling – as indicative of each author’s general theory related to freedom, action, faith, and the existential person. As such, I make the following claim: Sartre’s notion of creative faith is inferior to Kierkegaard’s responsive faith because Sartre’s notion dogmatically rejects the experiences of beauty that are central to the human pursuit of meaning.

To make this claim, I first begin by discussing the method of life explored by Jean Paul Sartre, then moving to discuss the method of Soren Kierkegaard. To test the strength of each methodology, I will then analyze how the two characters mentioned above, Roquentin and the Knight of Faith, would view and respond to beauty in life. I choose to analyze beauty because, though some aspects of beauty are subjective, I argue that to exist is to be beautiful, and further argue that because subjective beauty orients itself towards an objective essence of beauty, how one responds to beauty in life speaks volumes about how it simultaneously views objectivity.3 This connects to the modern view of objectivity enunciated by Nietzsche and others, and thus

offers a rebuttal to the Nietzschean sentiment. I will then conclude by offering some insights into what this analysis might mean for future studies in theology and ethics, among other things. In writing this, I hope to provide a compelling defense of believing in the God that Nietzsche boldly claimed to be dead. To begin this discussion, let us look at the theory of Jean Paul Sartre.

I. The Theory of Jean Paul Sartre

In this section, I address Sartre’s claim from *Existentialism Is a Humanism* quoted in the Introduction by analyzing his method and approach to faith and freedom in life. I first begin by exploring Sartre’s conception of freedom and its conclusion in action. I then explore how the concept of ‘bad faith’ is a denial of this action and leaves one in a precarious state of denying who one truly is in the Sartrean system. After analyzing some ethical implications of the Sartrean view, I then explore the rather phenomenological example of Antoine Roquentin as the prime example of the Sartrean person regarding faith.

*Freedom and the Necessity of Action*

A discussion of Sartre and faith would be lacking in clarity if it did not address the Sartrean conception of freedom. In the discussion that follows in this section, I draw primarily from his work *Existentialism Is a Humanism* to show that freedom necessarily leads one to act.\(^4\) I

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\(^4\) While it would be appropriate to include other sources here, notably *Being and Nothingness (BN)*, my aim is to offer a sufficient overview of the method Sartre takes to reach the conclusion. *Existentialism is a Humanism (EH)* outlines his process sufficiently well, in much less space than *BN* does. Thomas Flynn notes the compatibility of the two works, though *EH* is the transcript of a speech without any notes and *BN* is an in-depth philosophical treatise, at least in that *EH* carries on the “ontology of *Being and Nothingness* to counter historical relativism” in a more accessible fashion. Flynn does note, too, that the argument of *EH* is somewhat rushed compared to *BN* and has a few more logical jumps to make in its argumentation, but asserts that it should be understood in its proper context as a speech rather than a treatise. See Flynn, *Sartre: A Philosophical Biography*. First Published 2014. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2018. Pp. 239-240.
do this by exploring the major theme of this particular work that ‘existence precedes essence’. I then move on to discuss the fact that each individual is fundamentally alone in pursuing such action in freedom, using the concepts of anguish, abandonment, and despair to elaborate on this point.

Sartre begins his work with one of his most remembered maxims: “Existence precedes essence.” To illustrate what this maxim means, Sartre discusses the difference between humanity and other created things through the use of an example – the paper knife. The existence of a paper knife is preceded by its essence in the mind of the one who creates, designs, and manufactures it, or else there would be no aim to making it or no conclusive, usable product. Humanity, on the contrary, exists prior to any ability it has to define itself: “man first exists: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterwards defines himself.” Humanity has the freedom, then, to define itself as it wants and desires on an inherently subjective level, and cannot be held back or defined by any existing mode or method of existence posited by others. Regarding the essence and nature of subjectivity, Sartre notes it is rather paradoxical in its meaning – subjectivity means simultaneously both the freedom of an individual to choose what they desire to become, and the inevitable conclusion that humanity cannot transcend this freedom. In a certain sense, then, humanity is doomed to be eternally subjective and free, without the ability to refer to anyone or anything else in how to exist as a person. Thus, if existence precedes essence, humanity is essentially free.

Our freedom is essentially and necessarily our own, and cannot be transferred to or accessed by anyone else. Exploring this condition of being alone, Sartre introduces and explains

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5 Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. P. 20
6 Ibid., 21.
7 Ibid., 22.
8 Ibid., 23-24.
three accompanying conditions. The first, anguish, is described by Sartre as the feeling one gets when one realizes he or she must choose to act for themselves, while also realizing concurrently that they must act in a way humanity ought to act. Incidentally, this concept in its concrete application is rather paradoxical, because though one acts for how humanity ought to act universally, the result cannot be binding upon others and can only affect the individual who makes those decisions and actions. Still, though, it is necessary for one to act, and act freely, in this manner.

Sartre’s second condition, abandonment, is the realization that “God does not exist, and [that] we must bear the consequences of that assertion.” Thus, one is alone both in how they act and in the fact that God does not exist – the consequence is that there is nothing one can turn to at all. This concept of God, importantly, includes the idea of “some a priori good” that could be said to exist. As a result, one must conclude that there can be no universals, only subjectives: “there could no longer be any a priori good, since there would be no infinite and perfect consciousness to conceive of it.” Further, if God does not exist, then everything is permissible, and humanity can do whatever it must, in so far as it must act. Humanity is thus “condemned to be free” because it did not choose to be created, yet is thrust into the world and is responsible for everything it does. To illustrate this point and offer a critique of a priori knowledge, Sartre uses the example of the Free-French Soldier, who must choose between staying to help his ailing mother, or going to North Africa to fight on the side of the Free French out of a sense of duty and desire. No ethical system that exists would adequately be able to tell him what to do in that

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9 Ibid., 25.
10 Ibid., 27.
11 Ibid., 28.
12 Ibid., 28.
13 Ibid., 28.
14 Ibid., 29.
situation, for each option has its pros and cons. The man must act by himself and weigh his options independently of anyone or anything else, choosing to pursue what he desires most.\textsuperscript{15} According to Sartre, seeking the advice of a particular person signifies what direction one wants to take, but this is an example of relying upon signs and emotions as signifiers of ‘truth’. The existentialist cannot take these signs for truth in all circumstances, but only in individual situations: as such, whatever choice the man makes in this situation cannot be taken to be the true answer for all people found in a similar scenario.\textsuperscript{16}

Sartre moves to respond to those, especially Catholics, who would argue that signs are important signifiers of truth. He introduces and describes the example of the Jesuit priest, a priest he encountered while imprisoned in a German prison camp in the early stages of World War II. The priest goes through four or five major vocational changes, including pursuing art school and entering the military, before deducing that he was meant to find success for himself in the religious life and entering seminary to become a Jesuit: “he saw in all of this a message from God, and so he joined the order.”\textsuperscript{17} The key to this example is that it shows the Jesuit determined this outcome and meaning on his own, actively choosing what the signs in his life meant for him. Sartre notes that an outsider looking at this story from a relatively neutral and objective standpoint could come to an infinite number of different conclusions, yet the man those situations affected subjectively chose to interpret those signs for himself as a calling to enter the Jesuits.\textsuperscript{18}

Describing the third condition, despair, Sartre notes that one can only act upon those things that require an individual will to exist, and thus one can only rely upon oneself and what

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 30-31.  
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 31.  
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 34.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 34.
\end{flushright}
one can control: the conclusion is that “we should act without hope.”\textsuperscript{19} Sartre notes that there is a universality that exists in that all humans can understand human activity as being universal, regardless of historical situation or cultural scenarios, yet each person can only understand the life of another person from their own particular viewpoint and not from the other’s “shoes” or vantage point.\textsuperscript{20} The only universal truth is the Cartesian \textit{cogito}, which is inherently subjective; thus, the cogito is objective in that it is universally valid for all possible subjects, but is subjective because our cogito is always and essentially our own. Given this information, these three existential conditions conclude in the idea that an individual is called to action in reality, not to dreams or aspirations – dreams and aspirations define and affect a person negatively, describing what they are not, compared to what they are.\textsuperscript{21}

Given the connection between freedom and action, freedom must be described as inherently creative. If people choose for themselves, as Sartre repeatedly mentions humans do, then the act is \textit{creative} because, if existence precedes essence, there is nothing \textit{a priori} one can go off of or rely upon when living; put another, more colloquial way, there is no preestablished blueprint one can look at when trying to determine what it means to be human.\textsuperscript{22} Through this creativity, humanity creates an image for itself that must be applied to all people universally, though it is he that creates the image himself. This evokes a certain image of the Kantian categorical imperative,\textsuperscript{23} though it is evident that this image does not come in Sartre from some “abstract formalism,” as it does in Kant, but rather from concrete reality and experience.\textsuperscript{24} Instead, the Sartrean version of the \textit{cogito} focuses specifically on the act of performing

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 42.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 38.
\textsuperscript{22} Flynn, p. 237.
\textsuperscript{23} Kant strongly believes in \textit{a priori} knowledge, and considers the idea of the categorical imperative to be \textit{a priori}.
\textsuperscript{24} Flynn, p. 239.
“exemplary” actions. Further, whereas Kant sees the categorical imperative as a way of discovering the objective norms that govern practical rationality, Sartre sees it as a formula for the creation of the “essence” humans choose to bring into existence.

The Influence and Contradiction of ‘Bad Faith’

When one rejects this freedom, and the action that necessarily stems from it, one enters into a contradiction of self within the Sartrean system, and one thus is in a state of what Sartre calls “bad faith.” One might reject this freedom because of the discomfort one feels with knowing he or she holds such broad, creative authority, and the responsibilities it implies. One might also be afraid of oneself and one’s own weakness, or of possible unintended and unforeseen consequences from any action committed, among other reasons. One who refuses and rejects this freedom might live in fear and cowardice, refusing to act at all, or might act in a way that negates this creative authority. This person would perhaps seek comfort above all else, and as such would become intellectually lazy, at the very least. One in this situation would be living in bad faith, as will be explained and explored in-depth in this section through a close reading of Sartre’s work *Being and Nothingness*. First, however, it is necessary to describe, at least briefly, the dual concepts of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. While separate and distinct from bad faith, the two ideas are important for an adequate discussion of bad faith, and become important for later points in the discussion.

Being-in-itself and being-for-itself are the two types of being that exist in the world as humans encounter it, according to Sartre. Being-in-itself accounts for anything that contains

25 Ibid., 239.
26 As such, I offer here a cursory view of the ideas from several secondary sources that discuss the topic. While in an ideal setting a thorough examination and analysis of these ideas would be essential, for my purposes it is sufficient only to describe their basic function in the overall Sartrean view. For a thorough examination, see Part II of *BN*. 
being within itself entirely, with no “capacity or requirement to alter either its essence or existence.” This is the idea of essence preceding existence, or ‘facticity’, relating to the example of the paper knife from Sartre’s previous example mentioned above. Being-for-itself, conversely, affects humanity singularly. Since humanity cannot offer anything universal when it decides and desires to act for itself, it must act and create its own being for itself as an actor in and partaker of the world because it desires freedom. This would then be equivalent with the idea of existence preceding essence. However, the very act of being-for-itself attempting to create being-in-itself within and for itself, in its quest for ultimate autonomy, is impossible because this would require something with ‘transcendence’ that goes beyond the bounds of either being-in-itself or being-for-itself. Yet according to Sartre, there is no transcendent being. The consequence of this relationship is that the paradox of a person wanting both being-in-itself and being-for-itself simultaneously (though this would be impossible) means one has to create a conception of God to account for such a desire because such a paradox “can never be resolved in strictly human terms.” However, this created conception of God is self-contradictory because it is created to be perfect in the mind of the one who conceived of it, yet is reliant upon faith to exist for that person and is not actually perfect. This radical freedom of the being-for-itself works to confirm that what is elevated in this process within the person is not God or even the

28 Ibid., 238.
29 ‘Transcendence’ here refers to a reality beyond the temporal world. Both being-for-itself and being-in-itself, according to Sartre, exist only in a temporal reality. To combine the two through an act of the for-itself is not possible in temporality because of the confines of a physical body and the limits of the body on the will. Such a combination can only occur in something that has transcendence.
31 Muller, P. 240. This is evident, says Muller, because “being free is not compatible with acquiring the essence of another person because being free means having no permanent, fixed essence, even as the desire and the need to acquire that essence remain strong.” As such, all human interactions and the satisfaction one gets from those interactions are always limited, and it becomes necessary to create this projection of God because of the limitations of human interaction (240).
32 Ibid., 240-241.
projection of God, but rather the human intellect and reality itself. In this act, a “religion of liberty” is created, acknowledging that liberty must make itself “its own God,” such that at the heart of this action is the notion of God. However, through this action, especially in creating something of perfection through very imperfect means, one enters into bad faith through this contradiction and self-told lie. Even beyond the notion of perfection and imperfection, being-for-itself enters into bad faith through this action because it does not contain its own being-in-itself, yet the specific action is one of creating the in-itself. As such, this discussion will now move to discuss bad faith in a greater and broader context.

Sartre very explicitly states that bad faith necessarily is a rejection of action and who one fundamentally is. It is a “lie to oneself,” though it differs from lying in the general sense, since the one who lies in the general sense has some semblance of the truth when making a statement or claim, yet chooses to lie anyway. As Thomas Flynn notes, it is apparent that bad faith happens voluntarily, regardless of it happening consciously or subconsciously, because it takes place within the same individual consciousness. It is a lie because one hides something unpleasant or protects something pleasant about one’s existence within oneself at the expense of denying reality, creating an ideal self rather than affirming one in one’s reality of existence.

According to Sartre, because this is a lie and this new, idealized being or person does not exist, it is transcendent because it moves from concrete experience to nonexistence, and does not bear upon the consciousness of the one experiencing the thing. To explain this in more detail, Flynn

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34 Ibid., 79.
35 Flynn, 190.
37 Ibid., 87.
38 Flynn, 184.
39 BN, 88-89.
refers to bad faith as a “duality” between knowledge and understanding, stated by Sartre as reflectivity and pre-reflectivity, respectively. Though the two exist naturally in a sequence – one first knows what a thing is by its name, and then gains understanding of its function and meaning – bad faith leads one to choose, in an act of *creative* authority, to understand more than one could know using this sequential duality all in one action at the same time. The result is that the individual simultaneously both knows and does not know something, an inherently indefensible contradiction. It is transcendent because it ceases to apply to a concretely existing thing, but instead exists only in a purely abstract fashion.⁴⁰ Hence, there is a difference between facticity and transcendence – facticity refers to a thing being created with an idea for its function in the mind of the creator, and thus contains being-in-itself; transcendence refers to existence preceding essence and the ability of the individual to create itself anew in its own mold. Bad faith does not combine these two notions, but also does not do away with them in the individual person; rather, it seeks to establish both in a person, whereby one would not have to act at all, but would only need to think and feel without action.⁴¹

To illustrate the point more concretely, Sartre explores the example of a woman being around the man she is dating. The woman chooses to deny the implicit meaning of her partner’s words and suggestions, where he desires to have sexual relations with her, because she refuses to read into the meaning of those words beyond their definitional meaning. When faced with holding the man’s hand after he reaches out to her, however, she must make a choice that carries added weight and meaning, since holding hands with another person is inherently subjective and circumstantial. She chooses to hold his hand, but while doing so conveniently abstracts him away by talking in her mind of his ‘being’ and not of his actual, concrete personhood and existence;

⁴⁰ Flynn, 184-185.
⁴¹ BN, 98.
she separates his person away from his body.\textsuperscript{42} The woman is in bad faith because of this abstraction of her partner. She abstracts him because she refuses to acknowledge the implications of such advances; they disturb her current state of existence and make her uncomfortable. She is also in bad faith because she either rejects or simply does not notice what she is doing with her body and what the actions of her body may signify in a metaphysical or cultural setting, not just within the strict definition of words.\textsuperscript{43}

Sartre discusses the implications of sincerity in this discussion of bad faith as well. Sincerity, he says, is a dangerous reduction of one’s identity to one’s actions alone. It is a “demand,” and is a state of being that not only affects subjective experience, but also happens universally whenever it is invoked.\textsuperscript{44} This invocation demands that “a man be for himself only what he is” and that one defines oneself only by any repeated patterns one commits or acts on in life.\textsuperscript{45} However, this denies a certain sense of freedom of the person because patterns do not dictate and define personhood, which must include the ability to create one’s essence freely, and thus cannot define who or what a person is.\textsuperscript{46} Sartre uses the example of the homosexual and the critic to illustrate this point, arguing that both are in bad faith for different reasons. The homosexual denies being a pederast even though his actions are clearly and repeatedly indicative of pederasty, yet rather than defending himself by saying something like ‘my essence is different than that of a pederast’, he instead argues on an interpretation of the word ‘being’ related more to the in-itself rather than the for-itself – his being, he argues, is not something he has any desire to change.\textsuperscript{47} The critic of the homosexual argues that the homosexual should admit to being a

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 96-97.  
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 97.  
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 100-101.  
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 101.  
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 108-109.  
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 107-108.
pederast, but his argument is for one of sincerity as the gateway to freedom – the homosexual, according to the critic, is a pederast only because of his repeated patterns that are similar to those commonly found in pederasty, and only in admitting this it will allow the homosexual to find help. He, too, is in bad faith because he argues for the homosexual to become an object in order not to become one and to instead become a thing. The critic trivializes and compartmentalizes the person to his actions alone, denying the freedom the homosexual has either to continue or to change.\footnote{Ibid., 108-109.}

Moving on from sincerity, Sartre inevitably argues that because bad faith is faith, it necessarily is a problem of belief versus knowledge. Belief, he says, is inherently uncertain: “Certainty is the intuitive possession of the object,” whereas belief is “the adherence of being to its object when the object is not given or is given indistinctly.”\footnote{Ibid., 112.} This belief, because it is uncertain, does not need much to be convinced of something, and relies heavily upon “non-persuasive evidence” of being and existence when coming to its conclusions.\footnote{Ibid., 113.} Bad faith does not even try to come to truth and certainty, but instead resigns itself immediately to a state of mediocrity and malaise. Sartre uses the example of the friend Pierre to illustrate this point and the difference between belief and knowledge. One believes, in good faith, that Pierre is one’s friend because everything the two do fits into the pattern of friendship – the way each addresses the other, the way each talks to and about the other, the level of care each has for the other, etc. One does not have actual knowledge of the other being his or her friend, though, but only belief, especially because the belief involves the other person: ‘to know’ Pierre and what he believes would mean one has to be Pierre, but this cannot be the case because the only person who can be
Pierre is Pierre— one can imitate him very well, but could not be him— so thus one has good faith that he is their friend.\textsuperscript{51} If one were to claim one knew Pierre was one’s friend without actually being him, and believe it to be the case that one has this knowledge, one would be in bad faith regarding their friendship with him because such knowledge would be impossible.

As a way of concluding this part of the discussion, it is necessary to ask: can one ever escape bad faith? In the concluding footnote to the chapter on bad faith in \textit{Being and Nothingness}, he seems to suggest it is not the case one cannot escape bad faith in life, yet throws doubt upon the possibility of a “self-recovery of being” as something happening universally among all people.\textsuperscript{52} Sartre calls this self-recovery ‘authenticity’, which is a major virtue for him.\textsuperscript{53} He also throws doubt onto whether faith can at all be used as the base for authenticity if faith is inevitably corrupted by being, whether that faith be good or bad.\textsuperscript{54} Thus, there is a claim by some commentators on this point, including Carole Haynes-Curtis, that good faith and bad faith, both being ‘faith’ by nature, cannot be grounds for an authentic life because of the uncertainty of belief.\textsuperscript{55} There is also a suggestion from some others, among them Thomas Flynn, that bad faith is the “original position” of humanity, something that cannot be overcome given the evidence described above.\textsuperscript{56} This leads to a discussion about the nature of humans that goes far beyond the bounds of this paper, but for now, I leave it here to say that bad faith appears to be a significant challenge for the person striving after an ‘authentic’ life, in the Sartrean sense, to surpass, if granted that bad faith is the base starting position of life as Flynn asserts.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 114.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 116.
\textsuperscript{53} By ‘virtue,’ I refer to the technical sense of the word and how it affects human action. I shall explore this point in detail later, but for Sartre, for one to have authenticity is for one to be the ideal existentialist and live within the ideal existential system.
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{BN}, 116.
\textsuperscript{56} Flynn, 188.
Ethical Implications of the Sartrean View

Reflecting upon the concepts of freedom and bad faith, as discussed above, I wish to note certain ethical implications from such a view of humanity and creative faith. A major point of reflection is found in the concept Sartre has in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* that one chooses for humanity at the same time one acts for oneself. Though humanity is utterly and eternally free, as has been discussed already, one is not free to act however and in whatever way they want. This would reject the universality that humans are able to experience as has been described. In the universal *cogito* of human existence, individual people ascertain that other people exist besides him or herself. These other people are also humans, not objects, and as such are afforded great dignity on the part of the individual who ascertains them. As one person acts for oneself, so too do those other people act for themselves. To act contrary to understanding there are others out there in the world would be to act, in a way, against oneself, because “in choosing myself, I choose man.” Inherent in this assertion is the aspect of subjectivism, described above, where one cannot transcend the subjective means of action for something universal or objective, though there is the desire and need to act this way nonetheless; as such, one is choosing for humanity at the same time one is choosing for oneself. Additionally, one is responsible for one’s actions and must always be prepared to answer for them to others. Though others may never be able to understand the subjective view of the other, the effects of that person’s actions are felt by others around them, and in the way that one acts for all humanity, those others can question the actions of the person based on the effects felt. Regarding an ethical system, it is not clear in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* if any type of ethical system is possible – on the one hand, it

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57 EH, 40-41.
58 Ibid., 25.
59 Ibid., 24.
60 Ibid., 24-25.
seems Sartre is attacking the idea of an ethical methodology in deciding how one ought to act, yet on the other, the idea of acting for all seems to include others in some sort of system that in varying degrees could be considered universal in that the concept affects all people. In any event, the point is that when one acts, one is acting in a manner that affects others, and thus those actions are not inconsequential.

Another point of reflection relates to the necessity of authenticity as the chief virtue one must pursue in this sketch of the human person. Thomas Flynn notes that authenticity contains three primary characteristics within itself: “truth to oneself, affirmation of one’s being ‘in-situation,’ and freedom grounded in Nothingness.”\(^{61}\) Regarding being true to oneself, the self is discussed in the sense that self is not a “substantial subject” but rather a “self-presence”; one in authenticity pursues a for-itself that only belongs to itself, not trying to find or explore something outside of or even identical to it.\(^{62}\) The notion of being-in-situation necessarily means situation to include things such as historicity, time, space, and language. It is the recognition that one exists in a particular place in the here-and-now, though the circumstances of that situation are always changing and evolving, and as such, a situation can never be fully defined.\(^{63}\) Freedom in Nothingness is the acceptance that to ‘nihilate’ is for being-for-itself to distance, or ‘other,’ itself from itself, since it does not contain its own source of being. It does this freely on its own, and experiences freedom because it is shackled to, quite literally, ‘nothing,’ which is not even itself.\(^{64}\) With these three concepts in mind, authenticity becomes a moral virtue and carries moral weight for one who pursues it and makes choices while pursuing it. It does not necessarily follow any ethical standard for how it acts, yet it “excludes self-deception” as being acceptable or

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\(^{61}\) Flynn, 166-167.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., 168.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 169.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 172.
permissible for one to follow. One must thus always act with authenticity and in an authentic manner, or else one is in bad faith and is actually being immoral. Thus, one could reasonably conclude that, if authenticity is the goal and the necessary thing for one to live a good life in the Sartrean view, then morality is a necessary thing as well.

Before moving on, it is important to ask one last question: where is God in all of this, authenticity or anything else? Perhaps it is as Flynn notes when he summarizes and discusses the major precepts of Sartre’s argument in *Existentialism Is a Humanism* – that is, God is impossible, because He is the epitome of the impossible dichotomy of perfection found in being-for-itself wanting to contain being-in-itself, thus becoming being-for-itself-in-itself. He is an utterly transcendent source of being that is impossible in a Sartrean worldview. More could and should certainly be said on this subject, but for the purpose of this paper, it is necessary to review the main points so far discussed. For Sartre, human life necessarily means one is forced to act freely to create one’s own essence. One might be uncomfortable with this broad freedom and refuse to act, thus entering into a state of bad faith and denying one’s essence through inaction. The actions one does or does not commit affect other people, and thus one is accountable for one’s actions – though one has the freedom to create oneself in whatever fashion he or she wants, he or she is answerable to others for whatever actions he or she commits.

*Antoine Roquentin – A Case Study of the ‘Ideal’ Sartrean Person*

With the theoretical background of Sartrean faith, freedom, and action in mind, an illustration is necessary to capture Sartre’s image and idea of the ideal existential person living in authenticity as has been discussed. Though this illustration is perhaps more phenomenological

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65 Ibid., 266.
66 Ibid., 237.
than existential, in part because this image comes from a piece of literature rather than a philosophical treatise or dialogue, nevertheless, we shall take a look at the character of Antoine Roquentin from Sartre’s seminal novel *Nausea* to illustrate Sartre’s conception of the authentic person. I will do this by first describing Roquentin’s basic background, followed by a description of the ‘Nausea’ and Roquentin’s encounters with it, next moving to illustrate several life-altering realizations that come about through the influence of the Nausea, and then conclude by exploring the climactic experience of Nausea in the story – the experience of the chestnut root in the garden – and several consequences and implications from that encounter.

Antoine Roquentin is depicted, through a disjointed narrative in the form of diary entries, as a historian living in the port city of Bouville, France. He is there to conduct research about the life of a certain Marquis de Rollebon and to work on a future book about his life, yet as time goes on, Roquentin becomes much more interested in the book he will be writing than the actual person who once lived. As the story progresses, it becomes apparent that Roquentin lives a rather boring and monotonous life, where he frequents local cafes and the library and interacts with several characters, among them a woman named Francoise, who runs his favorite salon and with whom he has a loveless and passionless affair, but most especially the didact, or as Roquentin describes, the ‘Self-Taught Man’ in the library. Randomly one day, Roquentin experiences a bout of nausea, which as Flynn notes, refers not to a metaphor but to the literal sweet-sickly feeling one experiences before vomiting (though, it should be noted from the outset of this discussion, Roquentin never does vomit). Roquentin first experiences this nausea when walking by the sea – as he picks up a stone to throw it into the water, he drops it on the ground.

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68 Ibid., 6-7.
69 Ibid., 21.
70 Flynn, 153.
after feeling an uneasiness and feeling “disgusted” by something, either the stone or the sea itself.71 Interestingly, he notes right after this that, “if I had only known what I was afraid of, I would have made a great step forward” – this theme of unknowing continues until the climax with the root, which will be explored in more detail later.72 He describes the Nausea even further as a type of “illness” and something that was steadily blossoming and growing within him.73 Almost immediately, he tries to rationalize this feeling away as something occurring outside of himself, but realizes, to his utter disdain and discomfort, that the change occurs within himself.74 He experiences the Nausea again fairly soon afterwards, this time at a bar when looking at a beer mug – he refuses to look at the mug, and avoids “looking at it.”75 The it is the essence of the mug and its being: something about the essence of the mug makes him sick and filled with the Nausea. Eventually, it even catches up to him in his favorite café, and he feels oppressed by the Nausea, as though it were in the external things he sees and experiences rather than in the being within himself.76

As time goes on, the Nausea does not leave him despite his best efforts to get away from it and any possible circumstance it could arise in, but rather induces several major self-realizations through its influence. One of these revelations comes regarding adventures Roquentin believed he once experienced. The Self-Taught Man asks Roquentin for information about adventures and travels he once had while researching Rollebon, but as he is discussing these things, the Nausea catches him in a terrible fit.77 He realizes, very suddenly, that he had never had any adventures. Adventures happen in the moment and are spontaneous when one

71 Nausea, 2
72 Ibid., 2
73 Ibid., 4.
74 Ibid., 4.
75 Ibid., 8.
76 Ibid., 18.
77 Ibid., 30.
wills to break free from the bonds of monotony, yet only “make sense when [one is] dead” – all
the travels he had, he realized, made sense to him.\(^78\) Those things had *happened* to him, such that
he was taking part in them almost randomly through chance and not by willing them to happen.
No longer can he claim “I have known great moments” or that “I have had adventures,” but
instead he realizes that “I have suddenly learned, without any apparent reason, that I have been
lying to myself for ten years.”\(^79\) A further result from this is that something that had once given
him some sense of comfort and peace has now been proven to be false, affecting who he thinks
and says he is on a fundamental level. He is not what he wants to think he is, at least in this
aspect of his life. His identity has radically changed as a result of this realization, and this serves
as a key example of Sartrean bad faith – he had been lying to himself about who he was in order
to distract himself from who he is and ought to be.

An even more radical life-altering realization comes when Roquentin realizes the
importance of Rollebon for himself. He realizes that he had been living up to this point with the
sole purpose of doing research on Rollebon, but concludes his own life had been a lie. The lie
was not that he was not researching Rollebon, but rather that he was using Rollebon to escape his
own existence:

M. de Rollebon was my partner; he needed me in order to exist and I needed him so as
not to feel my existence. I furnished the raw material, the material I had to re-sell, which I
didn’t know what to do with: existence, my existence […] I did not notice that I existed
anymore; I no longer existed in myself, but in him […] He was my reason for living, he
had delivered me from myself.\(^80\)

\(^78\) Ibid., 37.
\(^79\) Ibid., 37.
\(^80\) Ibid., 98.
The research Roquentin conducted thus had the double effect of abstracting him away from himself and allowed the phantom of Rollebon to continue to exist, even though he had been dead for quite some time. Resulting from this, Roquentin realizes he exists: “I am the Thing. Existence, liberated, detached, floods over me. I exist. I exist.**”81 This is not necessarily a good thing, but is actually quite unpleasant because everything about Roquentin has to change. On a subjective level, realizing he exists affects his thought process: “My thought is *me*: that’s why I can’t stop. I exist because I think… and I can’t stop myself from thinking. At this very moment – it’s frightful – if I exist, it is because I am horrified at existing.”82 As soon as he realizes this existence in himself, Roquentin does not rejoice, but instead tries to avoid it and the consequences of it: “I am. I am, I exist, I think, therefore I am; I am because I think, why do I think? I don’t want to think anymore… I think that I… because… ugh! I flee.”83

This fleeing from his newly-realized existence is very short, as it leads directly to the climax of the story in the garden. Prior to this experience, however, is a key encounter with the sea. While meeting with the Self-Taught Man and getting into an argument with him in the library, he has a terrible fit of Nausea, the worst yet, that affects him so much that he has to leave the library in an attempt to escape it.84 As he walks along, he comes to the sea near Bouville and looks at it. He makes a distinction between the *true* and *superficial* sea – the superficial sea is the green veneer and outer layer, while the true sea is what lies below the surface. The sea has a double effect related to the existence of God in the world – on the surface, many believe it to be truth that God exists (the encounter comes in the aftermath of him watching a Catholic priest walking by the sea with a Breviary in hand), but when looking into the depth of darkness and

81 Ibid., 98.
82 Ibid., 99-100.
83 Ibid., 100-101.
84 Ibid., 123.
chaos, only he can see that God does not exist at all: “They see only the thin film, which proves the existence of God. I see beneath it! The veneer melts, the shining velvety scales of God’s catch explode everywhere at my look, they split and gape.”\(^{85}\)

This scene importantly serves to set up the fateful encounter with the chestnut root. While sitting on a park bench after running from the sea, still dealing with the violent fit of Nausea he had from earlier in the day, Roquentin stares at the root of chestnut tree beneath him, and has a startling realization – existence is not some abstract notion but is real and concrete, existing for each individual thing and not collectively.\(^{86}\) Prior to this understanding, Roquentin realizes he had understood existence via an allegory rather than concreteness – he describes it as “in the way,” where things exist in the way they stand out as individually existing things.\(^{87}\) Existence is “the very paste of things” such that “this root was kneaded into existence” as he stared at and encountered it.\(^{88}\) Existence is inherently absurd because it is beyond and even defies logical explanation. It “explained nothing: it allowed you to understand generally that it was a root, but not that one at all,” since “the world of explanations and reasons is not the world of existence.”\(^{89}\)

What, then, is the Nausea? It is the fear of contingency. Contingency is the understanding that one does not exist by necessity, but passively and incidentally, in a way of things ‘just happening’ to a person. The things Roquentin encountered that had existence and gave him the Nausea were outside of himself and simply just existed, whereas his own inexistence and bad faith created a great conflict within himself.\(^{90}\) If everything is contingency, then some feel they must create a “causal being” which is necessity and reflects necessity, but this would actually be

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 124.
\(^{86}\) Ibid., 127.
\(^{87}\) Ibid., 128.
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 127.
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 129.
\(^{90}\) Ibid., 129.
bad faith because this being abstracts decisions away from oneself.\textsuperscript{91} Flynn notes that the seeming ‘cure’ for the Nausea, even in the aftermath of the encounter with the root, is a fleeing away from concrete reality to music, art, and aesthetic experience: “The story from beginning to end is plagued with the nauseating experience of contingency and its possible relief, if not cure, by appeal to aesthetic temporality.”\textsuperscript{92} This concept will be explored later in another section, but regardless, this causal being, which many would call God, is the result of a \textit{creative} act for Sartre. Additionally, though the Nausea does not go away, it is not an issue because it becomes a part of Roquentin, something he must embrace in order to effectively negate it.\textsuperscript{93}

After this fateful encounter, as he leaves the garden, Roquentin experiences the garden smiling at him.\textsuperscript{94} One could reasonably ask – is this the smile of God, or the cynical smile of contingency when Roquentin knows he is trapped inside experience? Sartre, through the subsequent actions Roquentin takes in \textit{Nausea}, seems to suggest it is the cynical smile – Roquentin’s next action is to leave Bouville for Paris to meet with his ex-fiancé, Anny, but after a long discussion where he tries to convince her of what he has discovered about existence, she rebuffs him and effectively ends their relationship permanently.\textsuperscript{95} This seems to be the cynical approach because, though one can see and maybe grasp existence, the contingency acts to keep one trapped within it, even if no one else will understand what happens or goes on, either because those people do not want to see it for what it is or are in bad faith without consciously realizing it. Is there an alternative way to view this, though, apart from what Sartre himself said? While some have commented upon this idea in a particular yet different way to the overview so

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{92} Flynn, 143.
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Nausea}, 126.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 135.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 152-154.
far proposed, I find that Soren Kierkegaard would be one to view the smile as an invitation for faith, and as such now move to analyze the Kierkegaardian theory of life.

II. The Theory of Soren Kierkegaard

Throughout his philosophical writings, Kierkegaard posits that there are three stages to human life: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Kierkegaard makes it clear, as will be shown below, that most people live in either of the first two stages, yet it is possible, though quite difficult, to attain the third stage. Each stage relates differently and distinctly to a central point: to choose to live in one stage or other amounts to making an either/or decision. To lay out this argument, I first describe the first two stages, the aesthetic and the ethical, and what the lifestyle and thought-process of each looks like, using Kierkegaard’s work Either/Or. I then move to describe the religious stage, hinted at in Either/Or, but discussed at length in Fear and Trembling. I then move to discuss the concept of despair, a central point of Kierkegaard’s method, by looking at parts of Either/Or and The Sickness unto Death, where he affirms faith’s importance in an existential life. After considering some ethical implications, I then move to reanalyze the Knight of Faith, discussed in Fear and Trembling, in light of the greater method discussed.

96 Carolyn Kerr addresses the claim of contingency by comparing Sartre’s work with the fiction of Flannery O’Connor. Kerr notes that, for each of Sartre’s major themes and topics throughout his work, O’Connor seems to have a character to respond to each different idea that directly contrast against those themes. O’Connor’s theme of violent grace works as a counter to Sartrean contingency, because this grace allows one to encounter God in an unexpected but entirely necessary fashion. This grace works to affirm the idea, as expressed in her famous quote, that “the truth doesn’t change according to our ability to stomach it” (91). The end result, says Kerr, is that “it is possible to count” as an individual (95). See: Kerr, Carolyn. “Stomaching the Truth: Getting to the Roots of Nausea in the Work of Jean Paul Sartre and Flannery O’Connor.”

The Aesthetic and Ethical Stages

The first two stages Kierkegaard discusses at length are the aesthetic and ethical stages. In his work *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard notes in the Preface that the writings of the aesthetic part, Part A, include nothing biographical about the author, yet from the context of the letters and papers, it is apparent the author is a young man; for the ethical part, Part B, the author is an old judge named Vilhelm.\(^{98}\) In the work, the two stages are presented as almost being the opposite of the other. As such, in this section, I first address and outline the aesthetic stage of life, and then will outline the ethical stage of life.

The aesthetic life views the choice of the either/or in what is absolutely immediate to the person. For the aesthetic person, what captures emotion and the character of life is what is absolutely immediate, and the greatest medium for this immediacy is found in music.\(^{99}\) Though music captures things in their immediacy, as the young narrator mentions, there are different stages to this immediate release.\(^{100}\) However, even though there are distinct stages, these stages are cataloged using purely contingent means and methods.\(^{101}\) As an example of this contingency, the young author remarks that all works of art and music referred to as ‘classic’ differ only in subject material, and as such, there is nothing essentially different about them – marking an essential difference between things only by their accidental qualities would be illogical because the difference between them is purely subjective, not objective.\(^{102}\) Rather, a system of marking differences among works and then ranking them in some list or hierarchy must come from a


\(^{99}\) Ibid., 75.

\(^{100}\) Ibid., 71.

\(^{101}\) Ibid., 65. Contingency here carries the same general meaning Sartre put upon it, and should be thought of in the same way when Kierkegaard uses it.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 66.
The system that is “altogether contingent.”\textsuperscript{103} The different forms of music and their classification in this altogether contingent system vary due to different ideas and media. For the aesthetic person, what matters most is how abstract something can become. Media here refers to artforms and forms of expression such as paint or music; the ideas are the subject in the various media. Thus, the subject alone cannot be the deciding factor in determining differences among works of art and music, but can be used when combined with a singular medium to determine differences, according to the method used by the aesthetic narrator.\textsuperscript{104} “The more abstract the idea, the less the probability” of the work of art, in this case music, being repeated by someone or something else; to gain a greater probability of being repeated, conversely, something must gain concreteness, which amounts to “being permeated with the historical.”\textsuperscript{105} The abstract is preferred because its inherent uniqueness keeps one’s focus on living in and experiencing the present moment at all times.

Music becomes the best mode of expression of the erotic, which the aesthetic narrator equates with immediacy because of the fieriness of its passion.\textsuperscript{106} Talking about music and trying to explain it becomes difficult, however, because language, while a greater medium than music, at least generally speaking, requires reflection and thus “kills the immediate.”\textsuperscript{107} Yet, it still becomes necessary to attempt a discussion about the different stages of the immediate, because these stages variously stir the heart and make one giddy with emotion when one thinks about them.\textsuperscript{108} One must simultaneously get over the fear that discussing the immediate in a medium

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 67. \\
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 67. \\
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 68. \\
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 75. \\
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., 80. \\
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 71.
\end{flushright}
that is not inherently immediate will cause music to lose something of its immediacy and eroticism.109

The various stages of the musical erotic occur simultaneously when one experiences music, but nonetheless are distinct from one another. The narrator states that these stages are better thought of as stages that end in the final stage altogether at once, for “the different stages taken together constitute the immediate stage, and this shows that the individual stages are more like disclosures or predicates, so that all the predicates tumble down into the wealth of the last stage, since this is the real stage.”110 The first stage is categorized as being “drunk with love.”111 Desire in a person is present, but not yet awakened to something; as such, this first stage could be characterized as “dreaming.”112 This stage is rather melancholic, and the person in this first immediate stage dreams of what could be there, yet is dissatisfied that nothing of any substance has occurred at all.113 The second stage is described as one of “seeking.”114 The desire within a person fully awakens in this stage, but has no direct aim at any one thing, and instead enters into a multiplicity that aims at anything without discretion.115 The third stage is described as “desiring,” and is found in the character of Don Juan from Mozart’s opera Don Giovanni.116 This final stage is a synthesis of the previous two stages, with an emphasis on the melancholic feeling combined with the almost blind seeking of desire. This synthesis is evident in the character of Don Juan, as he is said to be a seducer through and through because he embodies all three stages in one person – “it [his love] exists only in the moment, but the moment, in terms of its concept,

109 Ibid., 72.
110 Ibid., 84.
111 Ibid., 87.
112 Ibid., 90.
113 Ibid., 87.
114 Ibid., 90.
115 Ibid., 89.
116 Ibid., 90.
is the sum of moments” – and this love of his is said to be “absolutely faithless” to one person or thing because it is completely immediate. The aesthetic stage prioritizes the actions and ideas of the individual as being most important and determinate in life, and does not care at all for what is universal. This is evidenced in the distinction between music and language: while language is said to be higher than music, even by the aesthetic narrator, music is still held be to be more important and necessary for the aesthetic life.

The ethical stage, hinted at when the aesthetic narrator makes the distinction between music and language, deals not with whatever is immediate but rather with what is thought-out and reflective. The ethical narrator, Judge Vilhelm, addresses the young narrator of Part A directly in Part B. For the ethical person, the choice of the either/or decision has more to do with reflection than immediacy. The ethical narrator affirms that any choice “is decisive for a personality’s content” whether one becomes ethical or aesthetic. The reflection involved for the ethicist is not so much about weighing the pros and cons of any given decision as it is about the potential for action: “there is a danger afoot that at the next moment it may not be in my power to make the same choice, that something has already been that must be lived over again.” The actual action of making the choice is in one sense infinitely more difficult for the ethicist than the aesthete because of this very fear and consideration of reliving again a moment which has passed, yet simultaneously in another sense is infinitely easier to make because there are significantly less options to choose from when making the decision. As time goes by, it becomes harder for a decision of any kind to be made, yet this passing of time, and the dilemma

117 Ibid., 100-101.
118 Ibid., 483.
119 Ibid., 482.
120 Ibid., 483.
121 Ibid., 485.
that arises from it in the human soul, is what gives the choice weight and meaning for the ethicist.\textsuperscript{122} Hence, the ethical narrator makes the claim that “the aesthetic choice is no choice” because it takes no consideration of anything but rather is quite random and indifferent to whatever outcomes may arise.\textsuperscript{123}

Rather than focus on immediacy, the ethical person makes decisions in life based on what they desire to become through reflection. This choice is framed in the language of freedom, and the narrator illustrates this through an example of teaching his son a lesson:

Yes, if my little son were at this moment of an age that he could understand me and my last hour had come, I would say to him, ‘I leave you no fortune, no title and honours, but I know where a treasure lies buried which can make you richer than the whole world; and this treasure belongs to you, and you are not even to thank me for it, so no injury is done to your soul through owing a man everything; this treasure is deposited in your own inner being: it is an either/or which makes a man greater than the angels.\textsuperscript{124}

The choice of the ethical person must be an absolute choice, since it is the opposite of the aesthetic, which is wholly indifferent.\textsuperscript{125} Accounting for the ethical stage, which requires and demands reflection throughout the process of deciding the central either/or, it is apparent in this that the ethical response to this either/or is about who one is becoming; this by necessity refers to universal principles rather than to the immediate because of the absolute.\textsuperscript{126}

What is this absolute choice, and what does it amount to? “It is myself in my eternal validity.”\textsuperscript{127} This is contrasted with the choice of the aesthete, which is one of despair because

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 487.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 485.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 490.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 491.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 492.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 516.
the immediacy of it makes it temporary.\textsuperscript{128} The self is “the most abstract thing of all which yet, at the same time, is the most concrete thing of all – it is freedom.”\textsuperscript{129} This freedom is not creative but rather responsive: “I did not create myself, I choose myself.”\textsuperscript{130} The response is to a universal idea and conception, such that the focus is on the universal and not on the individual. The choice in question also carries with it an essential movement, which ultimately is a movement towards God, expressed in the notion of love as repentance before Him.\textsuperscript{131} For the aesthetic person, this movement entails growth, just as the ethical person’s movement entails growth. However, the difference is that the growth of the aesthetic person happens from necessity, like how a plant grows, whereas the growth of the ethical person occurs through a free choice to move and to grow.\textsuperscript{132} What does the choice look like? “The first form the choice takes is a complete isolation. For in choosing myself I sever myself from my relationship to the whole world.”\textsuperscript{133} This is not the end, however – this very distinction hints at the coming of the religious stage, and what is necessary to make this movement towards complete isolation is a leap of faith, which I shall discuss in the next section.

Before moving on, however, it is important to note several noticeable and important differences between the aesthetic person and the ethical person, which are indicative of differences between the two stages. The ethical person “is transparent to himself and does not live ‘out in the blue’” regarding what decisions he or she makes; everything occurs after reflection has taken its course, and therefore is not immediate.\textsuperscript{134} The ethical narrator claims then that the ethical person can say they know themselves, not in a merely abstract manner, but

\textsuperscript{128} This will be discussed in a later section, but this is referred to on 505, 509, and many other instances.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 516.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 517.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 518.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 525.
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 534.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 549.
concretely though the changes one experiences in their consciousness about how to act in the future through experience.\textsuperscript{135} The aesthetic person decides something on a relative basis: “He sees one thing as belonging to him accidentally, another as belonging essentially.”\textsuperscript{136} This distinction for the aesthetic person is made because of the primacy of immediate action, as evidenced and described above, when the aesthetic person focuses on music alone as being necessary and important in life. The ethical person inevitably claims, with good evidence, that the ethical stage is the best stage of life, yet because the ethical stage demands reflection before action, the ethical cannot make quick decisions when the need arises. The two stages, however, do point to a third stage that is only hinted at in the last section of \textit{Either/Or}, and this stage will come to be termed the religious stage. In this last part, one must come to recognize that God is present and that God is always in the right, although recognizing this to be true and actually believing it to be true are different.\textsuperscript{137} Often this coming to belief does not happen through compulsion via evidence, but rather from accepting the love of God; believing that He is in the right must be the response of some compulsion.\textsuperscript{138} Though recognition can be captured in a logical sentiment, belief defies explanation and logic: “If […] on the strength of no precedent recognition you claim, and are convinced, that you are always in the wrong, you are hidden in God. This is your divine worship, your religious devotion, your reverence for God.”\textsuperscript{139} Thus, the ethical stage cannot actually be the final end of life, but there must be another stage of life that transcends these two, and it is the religious stage.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 549.  
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 550.  
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 605.  
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 604.  
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 605.
The Religious Stage

The religious stage is the final, ultimate stage of life in Kierkegaard’s method of action, and it is in this stage that one finds faith. This faith must involve a choice and lead to action. In this section, I first analyze Kierkegaard’s retelling of the story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, next moving to discuss the idea of infinite resignation, and then conclude by showing how faith transcends infinite resignation but necessarily must include it, allowing the individual to transcend the universal to God. In this account, I draw exclusively from Kierkegaard’s work *Fear and Trembling*.140

According to Kierkegaard, faith is fundamentally absurd.141 Recalling the story of Abraham’s sacrifice of his son Isaac, Kierkegaard notes that if Abraham did not have faith when he brought Isaac to be sacrificed before God, he would have either been insane or a murderer. In the case of sacrificing Isaac, who was to be the catalyst for the spreading of his seed throughout the world according to God’s promise, for Abraham to readily give up Isaac is absurd because it defies logic and seemingly contradicts God’s promise.142 “The ethical expression,” writes Kierkegaard, “for what Abraham did is that he was willing to murder Isaac; the religious expression is that he was willing to sacrifice Isaac; but in this contradiction lies the very anguish that can indeed make one sleepless.”143 Further, “Abraham is asked to kill his son, and has to will...
himself to believe in the face of uncertainty.”

Faith is a choice to “hurl [oneself] trustingly into the absurd” to retain what one is sacrificing. However, this is extremely difficult to do, and even Kierkegaard himself admits of not having faith. He distinguishes between knowing God is love and having faith, as faith goes well beyond the consolation or desolation one feels when experiencing thoughts of God’s love. By its very essence, faith is greater than the human psyche and experience: “I am not coward enough to whimper and moan on that account [of not having faith], but neither am I underhand enough to deny that faith is something far higher.” Abraham believed he would get Isaac back on the strength of the absurd, which inevitably meant he had to throw away any use of human logic and understanding in his reasoning when committing to the action: “all human calculation had long since been suspended” by the time he acted.

A key prior step to attaining faith is the movement of infinite resignation. Resignation is often mistaken for faith, but there is a difference between the two ideas. One must reach the “rock-bottom-depths” of one’s being in order to come to this point of infinite resignation, because it is only then one realizes their fragility. Kierkegaard uses the example of falling in love to illustrate this movement of infinite resignation. One falls in love with a princess, and though the person in question understands he cannot possibly win her heart in love, mostly because of class differences and economic differences making interaction between the two quite impossible, everything one does is for her. The man resigns himself to the impossibility of winning her heart, and this resignation means the princess remains young and beautiful to the person in question, even as the princess ages. In fact, nothing about her changes in the heart of

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145 Kierkegaard, Soren. *Fear and Trembling.* P. 63.
146 Ibid., 63.
147 Ibid., 65.
148 Gupta, p. 29.
the person in infinite resignation. The tragic hero in this state is consoled by the resignation if they make the movement of resignation correctly.\footnote{\textit{Fear and Trembling}. P. 70.}

With a knight of faith, however, in this situation he would still act without resigning his joy, believing fully after this resignation to the infinite that he would win her hand upon the absurd. Thus, for faith, there are two actions, one of infinite resignation, and then one of faith. Resignation renounces, while faith receives.\footnote{Ibid., 77.} To get to resignation requires “strength and energy and freedom of spirit,” meaning one can get to this point and commit this act on one’s own strength of will; this is done by the individual and not by anyone else, and if someone does not make this act they are weak.\footnote{Ibid., 76.} To move to faith is possible, but this movement must depend upon “more than human powers.”\footnote{Ibid., 76.} Faith is more than the aesthetic, but is something far higher because it presupposes resignation; it is essentially a question of metaphysics. This action, though, is difficult: “Whenever I want to make this movement I turn giddy, at the same moment I admire it absolutely and yet in that same instant an immense anxiety seizes my soul.”\footnote{Ibid., 76.} This action, because it requires something greater than human strength of will, is described as a leap of faith, where one commits all of oneself into the action of leaping into something unknown.

Faith also synthesizes the individual and the universal. The individual, in making this leap of faith, actually becomes ‘higher’ than the ethical.\footnote{Ibid., 83.} If one were to remain in the ethical while making this decision as the individual, since the decision must be made by an individual, it would be illogical and lead to sin; however, faith is “just this paradox, that the single participant is higher than the universal” and is superior.\footnote{Ibid., 83-84.} Even still, the universal is not done away with
completely, for one can only make this leap to the religious from the ethical stage, and as such, the final movement to the religious and the transcendence of the ethical still retains part of the ethical in its character; it “transfigures” the ethical stage and does not supplant it. The individual is fundamentally alone in this endeavor. Only the individual acts and has this faith: “it is a matter between him and the eternal being who is the object of faith whether he can reach an amicable agreement” regarding whether an individual has faith and unique meaning, or does not. The Knight of Faith is eternally alone, and cannot possibly speak to another person about the movements of faith, because of the level of subjective experience involved with faith. The Knight of Faith can only become the Knight of Faith by himself – no one else can help him. This is contrasted directly with the ethical, where one can walk and talk directly with others, and can also more easily hide from God and him or herself behind someone or something else. In sacrificing Isaac, Abraham has moved beyond human reason and calculation to something far higher, such that “he is quite incapable of making himself understood”; he does not have hatred as his motive for why he acts as he does, yet cannot explain why he acts this way because no one would understand him. The true Knight of Faith seeks not to be a teacher but rather a witness; if others follow, he does not care. His goal is only for himself and his own relationship with God as God’s favored one. Thus, the false knight is one of vanity and pride in this sense, bringing honor and glory to himself; the true Knight is consoled in the pain by the resignation and the faith, and does not need the praise of others to be soothed.

157 Fear and Trembling, 83.
158 Ibid., 99. “Either the single individual becomes a knight of faith himself by putting on the paradox, or he never becomes one.”
159 Ibid., 101.
160 Ibid., 107.
One must inevitably choose to act to have faith, though this action relies on strength well beyond what an individual is capable of. When one acts in faith, one receives everything and is not required to renounce who they are as a person.\footnote{Ibid., 77.} Importantly, in this idea of renunciation, one can keep one’s own identity by acting for oneself and acting for God simultaneously, such that the two actions are not contradictory but rather complementary of one another. When one acts without this proper grounding in God, however, one enters into a dangerous dilemma: despair.

\textit{The Problem of Despair}

Despair, a major concept for Kierkegaard, has a significant impact on how one lives in and is affected by the three stages of life discussed above. Kierkegaard briefly discusses despair in \textit{Either/Or}, but makes it a major focus in his work \textit{The Sickness unto Death}. In this discussion of despair, I first begin by referring back to the ethical Judge Vilhelm of \textit{Either/Or} and his comments about the despair of the aesthetic person. I then analyze the definition of despair given in \textit{The Sickness unto Death}, and then move to show how faith is properly the answer to despair.

According to the ethical Judge Vilhelm, every aesthetic person is in a state of despair. People living in the aesthetic stage in their immediacy are constantly affected by any change in events or scenario because they attach themselves to nonessential things as being essential.\footnote{Either/Or. P. 502} They live only in one moment and are eternally in the present, but the moment is constantly changing, and as a result, so are they:

\begin{quote}
[You] exist in the instant, and in the instant you are of supernatural size; you invest your whole soul in it, even by an effort of will, since in the instant your being is absolutely in
\end{quote}
your power. Someone who sees you only in such an instant is very easily deceived, while someone who waits for the next instant can easily come to crow over you. The act and truth of “giving birth only to yourself,” even from an ethical standpoint, is quite challenging, yet is necessary nonetheless to move through the different stages of life; the aesthete refuses this movement through refusing to act, and thus enters into despair. This action brings the universal into the forefront above the individual when choosing the ethical life, where the individual dissipates into the eternal. The aesthete, in some circumstances, may be conscious of his or her despair, but more often than not the despair is found in the subconsciousness of a person. The despair of the aesthetic person referred to by Judge Vilhelm, the young man of Part A, is described as “a despair in thought.” This young aesthetic person may be able to ignore his despair for a time, argues Vilhelm, but there will come a point where he will have to face a reckoning of it, and at that point he will no longer be able to ignore it.

Given this discussion of despair already seen, what exactly is despair according to Kierkegaard? It is “an uneasiness, an unquiet, a discordance, an anxiety.” More properly, despair is an imbalance between the finite and the infinite in a person. All individuals are composed of a synthesis between the finite and the infinite, “of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity.” The imbalance that leads to despair is not found in the synthesis between the two things, or else it would be the case that despair is a natural occurrence, but

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163 Ibid., 505.
164 Ibid., 509.
165 Ibid., 502.
166 Ibid., 503.
167 Ibid., 505.
169 Ibid., 45-46.
170 Ibid., 43.
rather is found in the relation to the synthesis.\textsuperscript{171} Because it has something to do “with the eternal in a person,” despair is constantly in the present when one experiences and encounters it, and one cannot escape it completely because of this being in the present: this is why it is called the sickness unto death.\textsuperscript{172} Despair occurs when one loses oneself, at least in a certain sense. One always despairs over something in particular, and because it has to do with the synthesis of the finite and infinite, it must relate to the person: hence why it is said that one who despairs “brings it upon himself.”\textsuperscript{173} All people experience and encounter despair: it is evidenced in how every person experiences uneasiness or discomfort when thinking of the future, something one cannot grasp or control.\textsuperscript{174} Additionally, one does not need to be conscious of being in despair to still be in despair, as noted above. This is illustrated in the example of sickness – it is clear that one is sick long before one experiences any symptoms related to it, and in much the same way, one can be in despair long before the symptoms of despair are consciously recognized.\textsuperscript{175}

What does this imbalance look like? The focus of the person is on the self, and if the person does not become a self, or more importantly become \textit{oneself}, then there is despair.\textsuperscript{176} Becoming oneself comes through a proper balance of the self with the finite and the infinite, for to have a proper balance is to move from pure abstraction towards concreteness: “to become oneself is to become concrete.”\textsuperscript{177} One form of despair is where the infinite in a person supersedes the finite, and thus is not bound by possibility in any realistically confining sense.\textsuperscript{178} Another form is where the finite supersedes the infinite, such that there becomes an extreme and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 46.
\item \textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 47. It is the sickness unto death because it “is precisely the inability to die” (48).
\item \textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 47.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 52.
\item \textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 53.
\item \textsuperscript{176} Ibid., 60.
\item \textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 59.
\item \textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 60.
\end{itemize}
suffocating narrowness: “Despairing narrow-mindedness is to lack primitiveness [...] for every human being is primitively organized as a self, characteristically determined to become himself,” and with this constriction, there is possibility of growth and becoming anything.\footnote{Ibid., 63.} Put another way, this dichotomy between the finite and the infinite is between the possible and the necessary, where possibility outrunning necessity takes on the first form of despair, and necessity outrunning possibility takes on the second form.\footnote{Ibid., 66.}

What is the antidote to despair? The antidote is faith, which is where, “in relating to itself and wanting to be itself, the self is grounded transparently in the power that established it.”\footnote{Ibid., 79.} This antidote is also the same formula used for avoiding despair, and directly attacks the aesthetic lifestyle as being inherently incomplete. Immediacy is said to be “dread” because it consists of nothing essential but instead is purely accidental; it provides “illusory security and peace”, yet still “is dread; and, quite consistently therefore, it is most in dread of nothing.”\footnote{Ibid., 55.} Immediacy, and the aesthetic life more generally, prevent people from coming to the essential realization that they are a spirit who exists individually before God; this recognition of God leads one to enter into a direct relationship with Him, which is necessary for transparency.\footnote{Ibid., 57, 59.} The self is tasked with becoming itself, but this can only be done through the relationship one has with God. In this obsession the aesthetic person has with immediacy, the person resists becoming oneself, “or on an even lower level: not wanting in despair to be a self; or lowest of all: wanting in despair to be someone else.”\footnote{Ibid., 83.} Immediacy shakes the aesthetic person to his or her core because every new encounter entirely shifts his or her worldview, as was noted above. Though
the aesthetic person despairs over terms that are earthly and material, the despair he or she endures is a despair of eternal things because of the imbalance he or she suffers through.\textsuperscript{185}

The antidote to this, which is faith, owes its significance primarily to the aspect of possibility, “since for God everything is possible at every moment”; this idea ultimately allows faith to transcend the ethical as well as the aesthetic, as was noted above.\textsuperscript{186} Having faith differs from simply knowing that for God all things are possible: the formula for faith appears exteriorly as though one is going insane, yet this is exactly what the method of faith induces in a person.\textsuperscript{187} Despair is categorized and seen to be a sin against God, since sin is defined as “before God, or with the conception of God, in despair not wanting to be oneself, or wanting in despair to be oneself,” and “thus […] is intensified weakness or intensified defiance” against God.\textsuperscript{188}

Importantly, then, faith, which is the opposite of sin, is \textit{responsive} to God above all else, rather than attempting to create something out of nothing: this creation is what leads to despair in the first place. Related to this notion of \textit{responsiveness} is the fact that every sin lies before God, since God is eternal and sin relates to Him through this same eternity. As such, sin, even when committed in one’s heart and not through any outward actions, occurs when the self deliberately turns against God, since the self knows of and has a conception of God within itself.\textsuperscript{189} In this same vein: “every poet-existence (all aesthetics notwithstanding) is sin, the sin of writing instead of being, the sin of relating oneself in imagination to the good and true instead of being it,” the implication of this being that the desire to act and create does not follow from a proper ordering of things in life, regardless of whether free action is involved or not.\textsuperscript{190} The ethical is transcended

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., 92.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 68.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 109.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 112.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 109.
in this simple ‘being who one is,’ per se, when one understands it is offensive to be a self before God. The Christian understanding of sin is one of offense, where one must seek repentance and make satisfaction for wrongdoings, yet the offense in question comes about in how this satisfaction is made. It comes when one recognizes the truth of the Christian faith that a particular individual is able to stand before the infinite God, and that the sins of the particular individual are of actual concern to God. The ethicist would say this notion of being before God is offensive and a sin because the individual cannot transcend the universal in a purely ethical mindset, yet faith allows this transcendence to occur through absurdity, which has already been discussed above.\textsuperscript{191}

Before moving on to discuss the example of the Knight of Faith, it is necessary to very briefly discuss some ethical implications arising from the Kierkegaardian view. Kierkegaard himself is very critical of Christian sects and denominations that do away with the offensive aspect of faith, arguing that this offense is what gives Christianity weight and significance; thus, doing away with such offense has the effect of making Christianity extremely weak.\textsuperscript{192} Additionally, Kierkegaard notes that with faith, one attains a level of authenticity associated with the individual, and when one attains this, they realize they are capable of nothing apart from God: “truth, for Kierkegaard, is to have faith in God.”\textsuperscript{193} In this regard, the actions one does on one’s own and of one’s own power are actually done in the presence of God, such that it is true God is always there with the person in question. Thus, faith is a lonely endeavor in human terms, yet in faith there is eternal consolation and joy from and with God.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 115.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid., 117-118.
\textsuperscript{193} Gupta, p. 31-32.
The Knight of Faith – A Case Study

With the entire Kierkegaardian scheme in mind, it is now necessary to offer a closer, more detailed examination of the Knight of Faith as the phenomenological example of the ideal person in Kierkegaard’s system. As such, I draw from Fear and Trembling to glean the idea of the Knight of Faith, and using ideas found from Either/Or and The Sickness unto Death, can paint a better picture of this ideal person.

The Knight of Faith is eternally alone, yet able to face despair head-on. Kierkegaard in Sickness claims that one must experience and encounter despair before one can be picked up and set on the path to faith by God, precisely because one is most capable of making the leap from the lowest of points.\(^{194}\) The Knight of Faith exists initially in the ethical stage, as we have seen. He does not view the immediate things around him as necessary or tantalizing, but rather focuses on universal principles around himself. He sees himself initially not as one, but as part of the whole of existence. Seeing the immediate around him, he is not enticed by the effects it has, but seeks something higher and greater. There comes a moment when he has a great encounter with someone or something, and must make the movement to resign himself infinitely to that thing. To use the example Kierkegaard uses, he encounters a beautiful woman who is a princess, whom he could never marry or pursue because of social factors such as class and wealth. The Knight would enact this resignation by acknowledging the love could not exist or be enacted between the two of them, and he believes this assertion with all of his being. He, as the individual, resigns this individual love and allows it to be subsumed into the universal. He thus makes a preliminary leap from the aesthetic to the ethical in regard to his love. While in the ethical stage, though, he goes one step further beyond resignation – he allows himself to be drawn higher than the

\(^{194}\) The Sickness unto Death. P. 57.
universality of the ethical to come face-to-face, as an individual, before God; he makes a leap of faith into the religious stage. This action, a free choice of the Knight, comes through his reliance upon the strength of the absurd – to transcend the universal goes beyond the bounds of logic and explanation. In the analogy, it is absurd for him to truly believe that he could get the girl, yet, due to God’s omnipotence meaning for Him all things are possible and that anything can indeed happen for the Knight, the Knight of Faith still believes with his whole self and with a fervent expectation that he would get her.

Because it is absurd to view it, he is eternally alone and cannot discuss faith with anyone, but this does not bother him because his goal is to be close to God through this action and expectation, and he has earned it through this this faith of his. He is utterly transparent and grounded in God when making the decision to take this second, more profound leap of faith from the ethical to the religious, and this is because he has put his trust in the absurd. Importantly, the Knight is joyful when making this decision and when choosing to enact this leap before God. He is contrasted with the person who only makes the movement of resignation, where they are consoled in the pain by the resignation but do not have a joyful presence or state of mind. His actions offend the ethicists of the world, but the Knight does not care about this at all: he has become closer to God than ever before, and this is all he cares about. He is not in a state of sin or despair because he has reached a perfect balance between the finite and the infinite. Never in the process of making the leap did he endure an imbalance, yet only from experiencing the imbalance of the initial leap is he able to reach this final, perfect balance. If he had tried to create

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195 As Zeb Kaylique notes, “faith is a double movement” (294) and ultimately informs the existential person, who recognizes that “what it means to be human is to be a decision-maker” (295). See: Kaylique, Zeb. “Kierkegaard on Abraham’s Movement To the ‘Knight of Faith’ and Its Possible Understanding in Existential Therapy.” Existential Analysis. Vol. 29, No. 2 (July 2018). Pp. 291-300.

196 Fear and Trembling. P. 70.
something, he either would have raised the finite above the infinite, or the infinite above the
finite; yet he did neither of these things. If anything, he became the most perfect version of
himself simply through responding to God’s call for him to become who He wanted him to
become. Thus, the Knight of Faith serves as the key example of the ideal Kierkegaardian person.

III. An Aesthetic Argument for the Kierkegaardian View

After having analyzed both the Sartrean method and the Kierkegaardian method, and
having both in our minds, a question could be raised as to the relative strength of each case. One
wishes to know and validate which view holds greater strength, and as I stated in my
introduction, I believe Kierkegaard to hold and offer a stronger view of faith. I acknowledge,
though, that the strength of this opinion is not necessarily evident when looking at the two views
simultaneously. At first glance, for the person who has faith, the Kierkegaardian view appears to
be more attractive. For one who is not a believer, though, even if the Kierkegaardian view
appears to be more attractive, the Sartrean view is seen nonetheless to be the true and correct
method. Acknowledging this to be the case, nonetheless I move to proceed beyond this dilemma
to propose a test validating the relative strength of each.

In the Sartrean view, knowledge is the certainty that Sartre looks for in authenticity of
each individual self and, while inherently scientific, is thus the chief criterion the Sartrean looks
for in a human life. Belief, on the other hand, is not knowledge but is transitory and fleeting, and
properly belongs to faith. As such, faith cannot be the means of grounding an authentic person,
as was described above in great detail. Kierkegaard himself would agree that knowledge is
necessary for an authentic life, but perhaps would not go so far as to deny the importance of
belief in creating knowledge. Kierkegaard wrote often in his journal entries about his complaints of a life lacking knowledge as something inhuman. In a passage dated to August 1, 1835, he writes of the desire to have meaningful knowledge in life, and how this cannot be found in the aesthetic or even moral life, but in a life still deeper and more meaningful than these, which must then be the life of faith:

> What use would it be if truth were to stand there before me, cold and naked, not caring whether I acknowledged it or not, and inducing an anxious shudder rather than trusting devotion? Certainly I won’t deny that I still accept an imperative of knowledge, and that one can also be influenced by it, but *then it must be taken up alive in me* [...] That is what I lack, and this is why I am like a man who has collected furniture and rented rooms but still hasn’t found the beloved with whom to share life’s ups and downs. But to find that idea, or more properly to find myself, it is no use my plunging still further into the world.\(^{197}\)

Carole Haynes-Curtis, moving from this point in Kierkegaard, posits that a possible way of getting around the Sartrean notion of belief regarding faith is for one to make “just one act of the will” so confidently and completely that it moves beyond the status of belief and makes it knowledge; this one act can only be completed with the whole person thrown into the choice they make.\(^{198}\) She quotes this final, complete act of belief as Kierkegaard’s leap of faith, and acknowledges that while the leap of faith would not be Sartre’s own answer to the issue he has written about, she posits that Kierkegaard’s leap would be compatible with the Sartrean view. I agree with Haynes-Curtis’ assertion that the Kierkegaardian leap allows belief to become


knowledge – if the whole person and his or her soul were not involved in making this leap, then
the issue would be one of an internal multiplicity, and would thus put the person in bad faith
because of a self-contradiction; but as it were, the whole self makes the choice. I wish, though, to
take this assertion one step further: though Haynes-Curtis argues this concept of the leap of faith
fits into a Sartrean conception, I argue that the leap of faith makes the Kierkegaardian view
inherently superior to the Sartrean view. To defend this assertion, I propose here to analyze how
the two characters discussed before as case studies of the two respective views, Sartre’s Antoine
Roquentin and Kierkegaard’s Knight of Faith, view beauty in life, given what we have described
above of the existential conception of each method.

Before beginning this hypothetical test, I wish to make several propositions clear from
the outset. Firstly, I have chosen beauty particularly because beauty, while a subjective
experience, is something that all people encounter throughout life, and how one reacts to beauty
is indicative of one’s worldview. As Edward Farley notes, differing opinions and thoughts in the
Western canon of literature and philosophy have led to several different points about what beauty
itself is. These points, summarized by Farley as the “Great Theory of Beauty,”199 include the idea
that “since all forms and actualities are never sheer chaos but instead are instances of
particularity, content, continuity, differentiation and pattern, to be – either as abstract form or
actual entity or event – is to be beautiful.”200 Another point is that primary beauty, that central

200 Ibid., P. 118. Farley analyzes in-depth the different approaches taken by ancient Hellenic sources, namely Plato,
and how these sources were appropriated by medieval Christian thinkers in preceding chapters of his book. Aquinas
especially takes the predominant views of Plato, and later Plotinus, into a uniquely Christian worldview: beauty
occurs in the human life through the senses, and whatever is through the senses is truly pleasurable because the
senses point at the innate desire of human life for what is real and good. Though this may not be as elevated an
experience as intellectual knowledge and stimulation, nonetheless it is still very good and natural (22). Though
modernity has largely denied this existence of beauty as such, as Farley outlines in his first chapter (see pp. 1-12), he
notes that Alfred North Whitehead has chosen to adopt an optimistic view of beauty in a metaphysics radically
different from that of Aquinas. The process philosophy of Whitehead views experience as inherently beautiful
because it points to the order of life and that nothing is an eclectic gathering of biological parts and experiences, but
beauty to which all things point towards, is an ethical “self-transcendence,” complemented by the fact that “all beauty evokes a transcendence towards the beautiful.”\textsuperscript{201} Given these two points, Farley argues that faith is beautiful, apart from simply just existing, because of its emphasis on redemption, found as the basic assumption and position of all Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{202} This redemptive act presupposes that humanity must be remade and is capable of this remaking of self, and additionally it can only come about if a “primordial beauty” makes and “describes” humanity as being capable of this redemption.\textsuperscript{203} This redemption takes on the characteristic of pointing back to the primary beauty, which is God (as He is said and understood to be the epitome of beauty, among other things), through its reliance upon the primordial beauty to exist. Though this view of faith and beauty is not without its detractors,\textsuperscript{204} I find that its basis in Western thought and history gives it authority to be used and considered in this argument. Using this argument, one can analyze the characters of Antoine Roquentin and the Knight of Faith and how their responses to beauty witness to their respective view of God and his possible existence. The reactions are the fruit of this belief, such that while one cannot positively claim to ‘know’

\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 118.

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 119.

\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 119. This stems from the idea of the human person as the \textit{imago Dei}, or image of God. In the abstract, the \textit{imago Dei} is beautiful because it contains freedom, both in the formal sense of the word as a possibility of action, but also because God himself is a compassionate choice, ready to “share and procure good for what is other than God.” In an interhuman sense, the \textit{imago Dei} is beautiful because it “calls forth a human way of being together – an ethical mutuality,” which is found most closely when looking at the negative effects of sin: one person’s sins affect others, and as such, all people involved must encounter this ethical mutuality of God to seek forgiveness, which is beautiful (89).

\textsuperscript{204} In a different view to Farley, Johann Moser says this of faith: “Faith is the trust to be able to bear up under the most frightful obligations. Faith is when one’s whole being cries out to heaven, viscerally. ‘Remove this cup from me’ and then taking drinking of that cup […] Faith, in its most serious moments, is not pretty, nor beautiful, nor sweet, nor edifying. Faith is Damian of Molokai, living among abject poverty and disease and the most heart rending ugliness…” (101). Yet, this view itself does not necessarily contradict either of Farley’s points mentioned before, as faith, even in the midst of ugly moments, inevitably points towards trusting in God, who is still understood to be the epitome of beauty, and thus faith still contains characteristics of beauty within itself even in these moments.

how each character might react, one can use the methodologies behind each character’s outlook on life, as detailed above, to hypothesize how each would view beauty, and through its connection to faith, God. This activity does not seek to definitively prove the existence of God, but rather seeks to analyze the strength of the two proposed views. Though these two views are based in inherently subjective qualities of experience, one can estimate how each would respond given what has been said about the Sartrean and Kierkegaardian methods. With this in mind, one asks – how would each character view beauty in life?

Antoine Roquentin would say that the world is not beautiful, but is instead quite ugly. Everything in the world for Roquentin is contingency and has no essential reason for existing as it does. As such, any beauty in the world would be entirely subjective, but for one who ‘sees beyond’ like Roquentin does, life does not point to anything inherently beautiful. Adventures or experiences that seem unique to a person in his or her life are not actually unique because one does not will them into being, but instead simply experiences them as they occur. Things like art or music would carry no weight or meaning beyond any immediate reactions they evoke, but one could never claim to remember a song or piece of art and say, ‘That was beautiful,’ because that work of art or piece of music was not essentially unique. Arguably, the being of a thing is what makes something beautiful, because being is combined with essence to allow something to exist, yet, as seen multiple times in his account, Roquentin actively avoids the being of things outside himself, and this aversion to being would really be tantamount to an aversion of beauty. More directly, Roquentin would deny that beauty consists of the ‘paste’ or concreteness of a thing because beauty is inherently abstract. Beauty then would be a distraction from finding the true reality and existence of something. Much like the sea being a thin veil, or sheen, of the surface of reality, beauty in this view is a thin veil of contingent being and its inherent ugliness. There is no
possibility of jumping from this stage of viewing the world to some sort of ‘religious stage’
because Roquentin’s view of the world interprets the conception of God similarly as a thin veil
covering contingency. Importantly, too, Roquentin would not see \textit{himself} as beautiful or capable
of holding or containing beauty because of this contingency, and as he denies that the smile of
the garden in \textit{Nausea} is from God, he would deny the idea of God has anything to do with
beauty, especially within himself.

The Knight of Faith would see the world as incredibly beautiful, in fact so beautiful that
it would be absurd to try and use words to describe it. The beauty the Knight experiences would
not be the beauty of immediacy or even of pursuing the ethical life, but rather would be the
beauty of beholding the Creator, acknowledging that a ‘self’ is inherently spiritual and that a
person is fundamentally a self. Everything before the Knight would be seen as beautiful – the
small, the large, the finite, and the infinite: all of it would be beautiful. Certain things would be
more beautiful than others – God, for example, would be more beautiful than immediate things –
yet the Knight would still acknowledge the beauty of those immediate things as pointing towards
the beauty of God as creator. The Knight has already made the leap of faith away and apart from
resignation, and would thus be filled with a sincere sense of joy and wonder. Being present
before God, it would occur to him that all of the beauty in the world pointed back to the divine
creator. Importantly, he would see \textit{himself} as beautiful, but only because he has made the leap –
otherwise he would have doubts about this beauty in himself from either of the other two stages:
the aesthetic stage would bring about doubts that the immediate desires he has mean he is
beautiful as a created thing, while the ethical downplays his individuality as a self to the point
where what \textit{he} thinks and believes would not matter compared to the universal. Given this truth
of his own beauty, and thus acknowledging beauty does exist in the world, he would not be able
to say anything about it to anyone else, much like the faith he holds, but in a similar fashion, this would not bother him at all. He would be content to experience beauty with just himself and God present, where God would be the only thing able to understand and comprehend what he was experiencing, since it came from Him. This beauty, since it comes from being before God, would be the choice of responding to the leap of faith, and this responsiveness allows him to see and experience true beauty in the world.

Based upon the analysis and hypothetical views expressed above about how each would see beauty in the world, it becomes evident that the Kierkegaardian view provides a strong, even superior, alternative view to the ultimately nihilistic idea of Sartre though an appeal to ultimate meaning in life via beauty. The Knight of Faith, in the same way that he would be able to see beauty as present in all created things and pointing back to the infinite – thus allowing greater conversation and dialogue to move forward to a transcendent worldview – would be able to discuss a whole range of topics and ideas, and confirms the notion that there is something greater out there for humanity than just the earthly life. Roquentin, however, would not be able to move past the relativity of contingency, and would thus deny a transcendent worldview. One would not be able to speak of objectives with the Sartrean view, whereas for Kierkegaard, life is inherently directed at objectives through acknowledging God’s existence.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Having discussed and analyzed the two competing views of faith and action proposed by Jean Paul Sartre and Soren Kierkegaard, I wish now to draw out some possible conclusions in
the studies of theology and ethics, proposing several consequences of such a study as has been presented here.

Firstly, this discussion has important ramifications for any study of theology that asks about the nature of faith. Whether faith is inextricably tied to God is a matter of debate that this study touches upon. Sartre’s claim and notion of faith as being grounded in belief and inherently antithetical to an authentic life still affirms the existence of faith, as negative a connotation as it may hold. Kierkegaard’s conception of faith affirms traditional orthodox Christian teaching, yet transcends such teaching through its emphasis on the transcendence of the individual to the eternal. Such a dichotomy offers new questions and insights for theologians wishing to discuss the role of the individual person in matters of faith. If the Kierkegaardian method is superior, as I assert it is, new questions also arise as to the nature of objective experience – the Knight of Faith encounters the objective through something inherently subjective. Can there be a claim to any objective experience or encounter beyond the medium of subjective experience? These are questions that ought to be answered in the course of further study.

Secondly, important questions are raised about the ethical merits of either view. For the Sartrean system, ethical methodologies are cast aside in favor of action in individual circumstances. In the Kierkegaardian scheme, the ethical stage is transcended, yet is not completely discarded. This analysis also offers new insight for ethicists debating the role of the individual in acting for right or for wrong, and asks, too, about the ultimate nature of right and wrong. Is the difference between right and wrong ultimately a contingent distinction? Or does the choice between the two base itself in an utterly transcendent being? These, too, are questions that ought to be addressed in further study. What is imperative, though, is understanding that the method of Kierkegaard offers more room to answer these questions than the method of Sartre.
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