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By Richard F. Hamm III

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It's All Uphill from Here: Finding the Concept of Joy in Existential Philosophy and Literature

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Is approved by the final examining committee:

William McBride
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Sandor Goodhart

Victor Raskin

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IT'S ALL UPHILL FROM HERE: FINDING THE CONCEPT OF JOY IN EXISTENTIAL PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Richard F. Hamm III

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

Purdue University

West Lafayette, Indiana

For Kate

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ABSTRACT

Hamm III, Richard F. Ph.D., Purdue University, May 2015. It's All Uphill From Here: Finding the Concept of Joy in Existential Philosophy and Literature. Major Professor: William McBride.

Current readings of existentialism are overly negative. It is not without reason that existentialism has a reputation of pessimism preceding it, to the point that the uninitiated cannot help but picture beatnik poets chain-smoking by the first syllable of the name "Sartre." Existentialism, while a movement over one hundred and fifty years old, is often characterized in the light of the media popularity it was given in the decade following the Second World War—although much of the spirit of what is supposedly existentialism came more as a response to the First. The Great War brought with it devastation across Europe that it instilled a sense of malaise in an entire generation of survivors. In the face of such violence, one of the common responses was to wonder if there could truly be any sense of meaning or purpose to life. This movement, philosophically, was existentialism.

Existentialism as a movement is not a denial of meaning. That is the role of nihilism. Existentialism simply says there is no sense of predetermined meaning, and that, in a particular formation, we are verbs before nouns: "to be" rather than a being thing in any real sense. Of course, there is an obvious pessimistic reading of any text that bases its thought on the foundation that humans are existent before their essence—if there

is no predetermined meaning in the world, there certainly is a possibility that there does not have to be meaning in the world at all.

The future of the study of existential philosophy in part depends on its continuing attractiveness to a new generation of scholars. One of the things holding existentialism back is the alienating effect it can have on people—in large part because of its perceived concurrence with negativity. The aforementioned lack of a predetermined essence can cause anxiety, angst or anguish depending on whether you ask Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger or Jean-Paul Sartre.

Sartre explains anguish as the realization of the possibility of our own negation. If we imagine ourselves on the brink of a cliff or precipice, we can look down into the depth below and realize that, at that moment, there is nothing to prevent us from throwing ourselves over the precipice to our death. Freedom from meaning also implies there is a sense in which we do not have to live by any prescribed rules, or even at all. It can be intimidating.

A positive reading could bring stability to an otherwise dizzying discipline. Existential philosophy and literature both would benefit from a reimaging of certain thinkers' approaches. What is needed is not a new reading to replace the old, but to supplement the accepted framework of understanding with serious alternative possibilities. In this prospectus, I intend to expand the traditional reading of existentialism.

I will offer differing interpretations of familiar texts in an effort to breathe new life into the texts themselves along with the discipline more generally. Existentialism can be freed from its trappings of negativity and pessimism. It is with this goal of liberation

in mind that I seek to offer a new interpretation of the existential movement. If existentialism is liberated from negativity, that does not mean that more traditional interpretations are not possible, but rather that these common readings of a complex system of thought cannot define it.

My reading will be an attempt at *an existential reading of existentialism*. At its heart, this is an existential idea. Labeling, along with the idea that a past interpretation dictates a present or future condition, is inherently essentialist. Existentialism has been, in effect, "playing at" existentialism for too long, to use a Sartrean formulation. There is a sense in which the prevailing interpretations of the prominent texts are so ingrained in the public consciousness that any new scholarship takes them for granted.

My existential reading will try to be consistent and liberating. Because much of existentialism is a philosophy of freedom, it only makes sense that providing alternative readings and interpretations is good. In fact, this may be the only way to prevent essentialism from overtaking existentialism and unfairly making it something it was never intended to be.

After explaining the roots of joy in Camus and Nietzsche, I will seek to find this same idea in other existentialist writers and show how this concept can be used to varying degrees in Sartre and Kierkegaard. Both of these authors, through their texts and styles, allow for the possibility of joy as Camus or Nietzsche do.

Despite these differences, there is an essential similarity amongst these authors that both qualifies them to be considered "existentialist" and preserves the possibility of joy. This similarity is the emphasis all of them place on freedom. The same freedom that characterized the post-war malaise as a freedom-from—freedom from meaning—can also

be a freedom-to—freedom to act. That action, moreover, is entirely determined by the self, independent of the constraint of essence. While freedom can be terrifying, it can also be uplifting.

Joy is a fundamental part of the existential writings of several authors in the tradition. Careful analysis yields this possibility not as an obscure reading with an overly specific application and weak critical support, but as a legitimate option in the face of existential anguish. It is in this sense that existentialism offers a possibility of joy, not as a needle in a haystack, but rather as a diamond in the rough. More than that, there is a sense in which joy is at least as evident in these texts as despair. The reminder of my project will look at Sartre and Kierkegaard in turn to see to what extent the ripples in the pond, both those that Camus makes with *The Myth of Sisyphus* as well as Nietzsche with *The Gay* Science, can be traced to thinkers more similar to each of their particular brands of existentialism.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Existential Malaise and the Possibility for a New Reading

Current readings of existentialism are overly negative. It is not without reason that existentialism has a reputation of pessimism preceding it, to the point that the uninitiated cannot help but picture beatnik poets chain-smoking by the first syllable of the name "Sartre." Existentialism, while a movement over one hundred and fifty years old, is often characterized in the light of the media popularity it was given in the decade following the Second World War—although much of the spirit of what is supposedly such existentialism came more as a response to the First. The Great War brought with it such devastation across Europe that it instilled a sense of malaise in an entire generation of survivors. In the face of such violence, one of the common responses was to wonder if there could truly be any sense of meaning or purpose to life. This movement, philosophically, was existentialism.[1]

Unfortunately, the sense of malcontent that was often accompanying existentialism in its popular heyday has not gone anywhere. The popular media are known for their sound-byte culture and for mischaracterizing complex issues, at times necessarily, for easy consumption by their target audience. The public, in the war and post-war months,

[1] Of course, existential philosophy did not begin in the 1920s; its roots are in Kierkegaard's writings of the 1830s. The movement became more popular in this post-war period, though, because of the pervading sentiment in Europe.

had read and misunderstood Jean Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and had appointed him as the cultural representative of the movement. As such things often happen, existentialism became more and more distorted every subsequent retelling, from primary to secondary and tertiary sources until finally there grew a general acceptance that existentialism meant what everyone thought it meant.

In the preface to the 1996 French edition of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism*, his adopted daughter, Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre characterized the misrepresentation as the direct result of the publicity the movement had gained in the 1940s:

> The controversies surrounding Sartre's assertions were intensified and muddled by what we would call today a media circus—hype and misunderstanding met by open or latent hostility and priggishness. The result of it all was a quasi-mutual invasion: of writer by a notoriety that dumbfounded him, and of the public by existentialism (Sartre *Existentialism is a Humanism* viii).

She goes on to claim that the philosophers who levied similar criticisms were responding before they had the chance to read *Being and Nothingness*; seventy years later, this is no longer a viable excuse (Sartre *Existentialism is a Humanism* ix).

When existentialism left the purview of most media outlets and became a discussion point primarily for philosophers, one would hope this kind of oversimplification would cease. Philosophers know better. Philosophers, through their careful analysis of actual texts, "know better" than to call Friedrich Nietzsche a Nazi (though Heidegger is another story). A not uncommon sentiment was expressed by Lou

Marinoff in his *Philosophical Practice* when he said, "[e]xistentialism fared much better than most attempts at resuscitating secular morality, although in the main it is a philosophy that can depress normal people to the brink of despair."[2] No author or group of authors should be pigeonholed in this way; existentialism, particularly, is only as depressing as we let it be. It does strip away the false constructions of meaning that plague modern society, but it does not demand those gaps remain vacant. More important than this, is that this meaning was never intended by the original authors of the texts of the existentialist movement.

Existentialism as a movement is not a denial of meaning. That is the role of nihilism. Existentialism simply says there is no sense of predetermined meaning, and that, in a particular formation, we are verbs before nouns: "to be" rather than a being thing in any real sense. Of course, there is an obvious pessimistic reading of any text that bases its thought on the foundation that humans are existent before their essence—if there is no predetermined meaning in the world, there certainly is a possibility that there does not have to be meaning in the world at all. However, this remains a freedom amongst so many other freedoms that existentialism puts forward and upholds. There is not any predetermination in this world with the exception of this freedom, which can be applied by individuals as they see fit.

The future of the study of existential philosophy in part depends on its continuing attractiveness to a new generation of scholars. One of the things holding existentialism back is the alienating effect it can have on people—in large part because of its perceived

[2] Marinoff does not explain who these "normal people" are, and whether he or the readers of his work should be counted amongst them.

concurrence with negativity. The aforementioned lack of a predetermined essence can cause anxiety, angst or anguish depending on whether you ask Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger or Jean-Paul Sartre.

Sartre explains anguish as the realization of the possibility of our own negation. If we imagine ourselves on the brink of a cliff or precipice, we can look down into the depth below and realize that, at that moment, there is nothing to prevent us from throwing ourselves over the precipice to our death. Freedom from meaning also implies there is a sense in which we do not have to live by any prescribed rules, or even at all. It can be intimidating.

A positive reading could bring stability to an otherwise dizzying discipline. Existential philosophy and literature both would benefit from a reimaging of certain thinkers' approaches. What is needed is not a new reading to replace the old, but to supplement the accepted framework of understanding with serious alternative possibilities. In this essay, I intend to expand the traditional reading of existentialism. I will offer differing interpretations of familiar texts in an effort to breathe new life into the texts themselves along with the discipline more generally. Existentialism can be freed from its trappings of negativity and pessimism. It is with this goal of liberation in mind that I seek to offer a new interpretation of the existential movement. If existentialism is liberated from negativity, that does not mean that more traditional interpretations are not possible, but rather that these common readings of a complex system of thought cannot define it.

My reading will be an attempt at *an existential reading of existentialism*. At its heart, this is an existential idea. Labeling, along with the idea that a past interpretation

dictates a present or future condition, is inherently essentialist. Existentialism has been, in effect, "playing at" existentialism for too long, to use a Sartrean formulation. There is a sense in which the prevailing interpretations of the prominent texts are so ingrained in the public consciousness that any new scholarship takes them for granted. Positive readings, then, are not given the kind of credence they ought be. As long as a reading is consistent with the text, existentialism should be in no hurry to dismiss it.

1.2 Comparing Spinoza's Joy to the Existential Tradition

One of the clearest previous elucidations in the philosophy of joy comes from Benedict de Spinoza in Book III of his *Ethics*. His philosophy, though, is entirely antithetical to an existential understanding of freedom. For Spinoza, the feelings or passions are external forces that seek to draw the lives of all people off course from their true purpose of knowing and loving God. In this way, even the supposedly desirable emotions are things that should only be accepted with caution, lest they provide too much of a distraction in their own right. There is a certain stoicism inherent in this way of thinking.

With specific regard to joy, Spinoza writes in book three of his *Ethics,* "by *joy*, therefore, in what follows, I shall understand the passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection" (Book III, proposition XI). Of course, implying that there are certain ways a person should and should not act, and more directly that there are greater and lesser states of perfection of human existence implies that human existence is of a certain kind, and has a particular goal or end to it that the existentialist cannot stomach.

In some ways, this disagreement is unfortunate. It would be much easier, in some ways, to find a blueprint for joy if there were a blueprint for humanity generally. Every action could then be compared to the ultimate goal for all people, and so long as it advances an individual toward that goal, it could be said to propagate joy.

My existential reading will try to be consistent and liberating. Because much of existentialism is a philosophy of freedom, it only makes sense that providing alternative readings and interpretations is good. In fact, this may be the only way to prevent essentialism from overtaking existentialism and unfairly making it something it was never intended to be. This is a reading that will not try to say that others are wrong, that this is the only reading possible from these texts. That kind of oppositional language really is not something existentialism calls for. Instead, existentialism is a philosophy of freedom and choices, and that means the freedom to make bad choices as well.

After explaining the roots of joy in Camus and Nietzsche[3], I will seek to find this same idea in other existentialist writers and show how this concept can be used to varying degrees in Sartre and Kierkegaard. Both of these authors, through their texts and styles, allow for the possibility of joy as Camus or Nietzsche do.

Despite these differences, there is an essential similarity amongst these authors that both qualifies them to be considered "existentialist" and preserves the possibility of joy. This similarity is the emphasis each of them places on freedom. The same freedom that characterized the post-war malaise as a freedom-from—freedom from meaning—can also be a freedom-to—freedom to act. That action, moreover, is entirely determined by the

[3] This is not meant to represent a historical origin, but rather an ontological one. Camus and Nietzsche provide the clearest examples of joy in their texts, even though they both wrote well after Kierkegaard. I will seek to relate their explicitly stated conceptions of joy to thinkers where it is not made explicit: Sartre and Kierkegaard.

self, independent of the constraint of essence. While freedom can be terrifying, it can also be uplifting.

Joy is a fundamental part of the existential writings of several authors in the existential tradition as well, though not as apparent as in Spinoza. Careful analysis yields this possibility not as an obscure reading with an overly specific application and weak critical support, but as a legitimate option in the face of existential anguish. It is in this sense that existentialism offers a possibility of joy, not as a needle in a haystack, but rather as a diamond in the rough. More than that, there is a sense in which joy is at least as evident in these texts as despair. The remainder of my project will look at Sartre and Kierkegaard in turn to see to what extent the ripples in the pond, both those that Camus makes with *The Myth of Sisyphus* as well as Nietzsche with *The Gay* Science, can be traced to thinkers more similar to each of their particular brands of existentialism.[4]

[4] While the claim that Camus' existential philosophy is "similar" to Sartre's may not be as controversial as the one that says that Kierkegaard's is similar to Nietzsche's, I am going to spend time in each of my chapters defending the pairing I have chosen to make.

CHAPTER 2. SISYPHUS' SILVER LINING

2.1 Camus and Joy in the Face of the Absurd

Albert Camus's importance to the existential movement cannot be overstated. Not only were his works philosophically taught, but his short stories and novels provided an accessible starting place for so many young people of the 1940s and 1950s to really engage with existentialism. It could be, in a way, Camus' "fault" that existentialism has the reputation that it does, as the focus on "the absurd" and suicide certainly seems pessimistic. In this chapter, I will make the case that his philosophy, when properly understood, is actually one that permits joy, rather than mandating sadness. I will look first and primarily at Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, as this essay provides a thorough examination of the terms and concepts necessary to piece together Camus' fuller philosophy. His novels, though, and particularly *The Stranger* and *A Happy Death*, fill in some of the gaps in *Myth*, but more than that show this philosophy of reaction to the absurd in practice. Finally, I will treat one of his shorter essays in *The Rebel* as evidence of the kind of limited joy his philosophy ultimately allows.

By all accounts, Camus did not have a biographical reason to be a cheerful person. His father died shortly after his birth, and his half-deaf mother was left to raise him and his brother with little money in Algiers, which was still a French colony at this point. As a young intellectual, Camus joined the Communist party, in part as a statement against

the inequality that he had seen first-hand in the colonial territory. Despite this, his European rather than African ancestry put Camus in a difficult situation with regard to the question of Algerian independence. During the Second World War, he resisted the German occupation in France.

It is no wonder that the historical situation in which he lived caused Camus' primary philosophical investigation to be an investigation of meaning; so much around him seemed not only to defy meaning, but to defy opposition. The political circumstances of the 1930s and 40s were much like a strong tide. They could be resisted, but not changed. How could one live a happy life in light of negative circumstances? How could one focus on one's own well being when the fate of millions of people rested on decisions made behind closed doors?

In this setting, Camus wrote his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. It was in the midst of the war and the German occupation in 1942, and while Camus lived in Bordeaux, he was no stranger to the conditions of occupied Paris. Bordeaux, too, would be occupied by the year's end. It is not a stretch for him to imagine individual effort against historical circumstance to be an unwinnable fight. Any attempt at searching for overarching meaning would be met at the gates with historical circumstances scarcely imaginable to those who did not live through this period. Just as existentialism took root in Europe much as a response to the meaninglessness the First World War drove into people's hearts, the Second World War only reinforced this sense of powerlessness, and the meaninglessness of existence. After all, what could one person do? The allegorical Greek myth of Sisyphus is therefore an apt descriptor for the necessary human condition of absurdity in life.

Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* is an essay that lays out his philosophy fairly concisely. Unlike many other authors, he relies on little jargon and few neologisms to describe how he sees the world and how we ought to interact with it. The aforementioned approach is in many ways phenomenological; thus, the experiential aspects of his thought cannot be overlooked and must not be underplayed. Camus describes his absurd condition through an examination of life, rather than a rationalist reflection upon core principles of some sort.

The absurd condition, for Camus, is simply the fact of existence without prescribed meaning. As an existentialist writer and philosopher, it is no wonder that he imagines a world where humans are left without reliance on some Platonic form, essence or religious dictum governing their actions and lives. If something has meaning and purpose, it has direction; if something does not, it is "absurd." Because human life on the whole does not have a direction,[5] the human condition is the absurd condition.

Camus initially describes our lives as a reaction to the fruitless search for meaning that we each inevitably attempt. Growing older and more rational means growing cynical of the sense of meaning seemingly forced upon us by family, friends or society as a whole. These disparate meanings could come in the guise of any essentialist claim on our freedom, whether a religion that is meant to dictate our purpose or a nationalism that seeks to force our actions toward a common goal. We come to realize that these meanings—each a meaning we could choose to accept—are not truly ours, but rather borrowed. Often these meanings contradict each other, despite the "pretentious centuries and [are] over the heads of so many eloquent and persuasive men" (*The Myth of Sisyphus*

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[5] Individual lives can have individual directions, but more on that later.

21). There cannot be one meaning that is the undoubted truth of our lives, according to Camus. If there is no one meaning to life, we call it absurd.

Sisyphus had offended the Greek pantheon, so the story goes, and was therefore sentenced to an afterlife of eternal hard labor as his punishment. His actual offense differs from source to source, but rather than obscuring the tale, this ambiguity helps to make Sisyphus' tale more relatable to Camus' readership; for Camus, we all face similar burdens to Sisyphus, even if we have done nothing wrong.

Sisyphus' specific task was to roll a massive boulder up a mountain. At a point, though, he would lose his grip on the boulder and it would go rolling down to the bottom of the hill where he must begin his task anew. This task was not meant to be finished. No matter how many times Sisyphus tried, he would never be able to roll the boulder far enough or long enough. It is not made clear whether Sisyphus knew about the impossibility of his task, or whether he was allowed to hope that each time he rolled the stone, that time would be enough to complete his forever incomplete task. All that is known is that Sisyphus does not give up. Every time his boulder rolls to the bottom of the hill, he goes down after it to begin again.

This is where Camus meets the story of Sisyphus and fits it into his philosophy of the absurd. For Camus, that there is no prescribed meaning in the world is evidence that existence is absurd. There is neither any single answer nor any grand design toward which a person can look to know with certainty what is good or what is true. Sisyphus' situation is the absurd made manifest. The only difference between Sisyphus and humanity at large is that the absurdity of Sisyphus' condition is evident to all of us because it is physical.

Sisyphus exemplifies the absurd for Camus, as the reality of his situation mirrors the unacknowledged reality each individual should be able to see in the world: no matter how hard we look for meaning outside of ourselves, we will never find it. At first glance, and frankly at the second and third as well, this can be a disheartening worldview. For instance, it seems to mandate a kind of meaninglessness in the lives of all people, whether they are aware of their true state or not. Those who believe they have found meaning are misguided.

If Camus did not seek to redeem Sisyphus, there would be no purpose to existence for anyone. While he does leave Sisyphus to his task, he leaves him there happy, so he believes. It is clear, therefore that Camus allows for the possibility of joy in the face of hardship. When he implores, “one must imagine Sisyphus happy,” though, he is not mandating joy instead of pain, suffering or the inevitability of fate, but, rather, it is within this inevitability that joy is able to flourish (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 122).

Put another way, happiness and inescapable absurdity are, for Camus, two sides of a coin—you cannot have one without the other. At first glance this seems counter-intuitive. Happiness, or joy as I call it elsewhere, would seem at first glance to be the sort of thing that can come from overcoming fate. Camus’ archetypal absurd hero, Sisyphus, though, has no chance of overcoming his fate. To the extent then, that Sisyphus is an exemplar, neither can we. His punishment from the gods of Greek mythology is unceasing. However, Camus avers, “one must imagine Sisyphus happy;” there must be a reason for this.

Camus is able to conclude his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* with this story because of the framework he has set up until this point of the absurd condition, the absurd man,

and the possibility of escape. Ultimately, while the absurd condition is not escapable, it still allows for an individual flexibility within it that may serve as a possibility for a much-needed respite from its otherwise seeming futility.

The absurd condition for an individual may seem uninhabitable. A life without purpose is akin to a ship at sea seemingly becalmed. Without a current or a wind to take it from its place it will stay where it is until it sinks. No matter how hard the sailors of this ship look to the outside for help it will never come. Trying to adopt meaning from a source external to ourselves, and to somehow say that now that we have the one answer and that everything will be in line with our true purpose is at best delusional, for Camus.

Adopting such a meaning is to blind ourselves to the circumstances of the creation of that meaning, and namely their ultimately human origin. It is one of those things that cannot be unseen; the cat cannot be returned to its proverbial bag. Once you realize that the meanings offered to us are not real, and that life is without definite, prescribed meaning, this cannot be forgotten for the sake of convenience. Life seems, therefore, for our sailors as well as for all people, monotony without guidance. It is absurd.

When left in an absurd situation there seem to be two obvious choices presented, and the decision one makes between them is the most important choice, according to Camus, he or she will ever make. This choice is the same choice humans have been forced to make will before a certain Danish prince tersely put it, “to be or not to be.” While Shakespeare’s Hamlet chooses life in large part because of the threat of eternal punishment that awaits those who commit suicide, Camus, being not of similar religious conviction, must approach the question differently.

The inescapability of the absurd condition seemingly offers suicide as a plausible escape, but Camus asserts this escape is in fact not so. For Camus, the question of whether life is worth living is the primary philosophical question; before any real inquiry it must be sorted out. In a tongue-in-cheek way, he adds that the question is the only one on which people regularly stake their lives.

If one wished to escape the absurd through death, however, Camus is the bearer of more bad news: death does not offer an escape. In order for there to be meaning after death, there would first have to be some form of life after death; Camus was an atheist who did not include a life after death in his philosophy. Hamlet uses the afterlife as a reason not to commit suicide; Camus uses the lack of an afterlife to come to the same conclusion.

While life is necessarily absurd for Camus, in that it lacks prescribed meaning—and this is an important distinction from saying that it lack all meaning—to look to suicide as a way out would require there to be some meaning in death. Obviously there is not, for Camus, and so, as above, death only proves as absurd as life. This does not entail an indifference between life and death, though, as the meaninglessness in death is guaranteed, while the meaninglessness in life is only guaranteed so long as you look for it elsewhere to be determined for you. If you determine your own meaning, Camus would say, then "life" remains absurd, but *your life* does not.

However, choosing life is choosing a life therefore choosing to live within the absurd condition—a life without prescribed meaning. Moreover, the very realization that the absurd exists is enough for someone to be utterly trapped by it. The acceptance of this world as fact is enough to entrap someone within it. As with any truth or belief

system, "once he has admitted [the existence of the absurd], he cannot free himself from [it]" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 32). For Camus, any kind of ethos creates a limitation in the lives of those who adopt it, even if that limitation is existential freedom. Acknowledge the absurd and you necessarily live it.

While the existentialist rightly abstains from any sort of physical suicide, the existential philosophy is a kind of mental suicide for Camus. Choosing this ethos means choosing negation and nothingness as the cornerstones of one's philosophy, and moreover, supporting the process of self-negation and the possibility of transcendence through negation (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 41). Already, Camus is managing expectations for the kind of results existential philosophy can yield in the realm of joy. It cannot hope to be a purely positive force if so much of its strength comes from negation.

Camus goes farther than this, though, when he affirms meaninglessness, or the absurd, as desirable. He even goes as far as to say that one's life "will be lived all the better if it has no meaning" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 53). For Camus, because a life lived "*without appeal*" to some higher sense of meaning is a life free to make one's own choices and decisions; it is this framework of the absurd that allows us to live our lives unencumbered (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 60). Living without appeal is similar to that moment in every young person's life when she leaves her parent's home for the first time to step out on her own into the world. This means she will not have access to free room and board (and presumably these things were appealing); however, only after this point can she consider herself truly her own free person.

The existentialist is therefore left in a peculiar position. On the one hand this is one of the few people who are not delusional about the condition of the world. It is the

existentialist who sees the false prophets of meaning for what they are; the existentialist does not delude himself with essentialist constructions of meaning in the world. Instead, the existentialist knows that there is nothing in the world that can determine meaning, and the world itself is therefore absurd. On the other hand, the necessary negations of existential philosophy not only seek to negate the self, but these are also a kind of philosophical trapping that would act as a deterministic foil for the practitioner; the only thing guaranteed is that nothing can be guaranteed.

It is important to mention that this does not mean a life without meaning by necessity, but simply that any sense of meaning cannot be assumed. It is not, for Camus, that life is meaningless—a common misreading by the not-so-philosophically-inclined—but that we are left to make our own meaning. The becalmed sailors need to grab their oars and start rowing toward where they want to be. The only thing preventing them from meaning is their own apathy in the face of the arduous task of self-motivation. To be sure, life with a purpose, a self-defined purpose, is at the very heart of much of existentialism. As I discuss further below, Sartre called this idea the "existential project" that each person must decide upon for himself—it cannot be socially determined—as the goal toward which he ought direct his efforts and his motivations.

In this way, meaning and happiness are related. The freedom that we have to make our own choices is the control we have over our own happiness. A life living according to purpose is, in a sense, happy. Of course, when this purpose is revealed to be false, that is, created in people by institutions, rather than a natural product of human existence, these same purposes cannot continue to create happiness as they did before. Therefore a

liberated person must make his own happiness, by creating for himself a sense of purpose towards which his actions can tend.

This is also, unsurprisingly, where the Greek gods have left Sisyphus: not without meaning, but left to make his own. It is not that Sisyphus' condition is hopeless, but that, with what choices he has, he must take control of his life and determine what meaning he can. To be sure, his choices are limited. He has been tasked in rolling a rock up a hill forever. He can never leave or stop. However, Camus brings to light some of the freedoms Sisyphus can find in his seemingly hopeless condition.

Sisyphus's primary triumph in his ongoing "struggle…towards the heights" and something greater "is enough to fill [his] heart" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 122). This does not mean he is able to escape the absurd, but rather that the absurd condition itself is bifurcated; it allows for such a struggle and a personal joy, all the while acknowledging that Sisyphus must return to his task, as "one always finds one's burden again" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 122).

While Camus asserts Sisyphus' struggle is enough to fill his heart, this does not mean that Sisyphus is necessarily happy in the traditional sense. These moments of the clarity regarding the joy that can come from the struggle are necessarily interspersed with moments contemplating the futility of the task. To be sure there is a level of control Sisyphus has with regard to how he rolls his rock up his hill. Camus claims that Sisyphus would be able to anticipate familiar formations in his rock as different bumps and grooves glide under his hands, and that he might even develop emotional attachments to them. Sisyphus also has the rest from when the boulder slips from his grasp and he is free to walk unencumbered down the hill to fetch it again.

These fleeting moments, though, are just that. He must return to his work. Likewise while it is possible for individuals to see outside of the absurd condition insofar as there is joy in the struggle against the absurd, the fight itself is unwinnable. Any sight of a light at the end of the proverbial tunnel is at best a kind of regulative idea that can guide human action. It can encourage the individual in its struggle, as it must, because without this struggle life is utterly without meaning. Inevitably existence returns to the absurd, just as a light must cast a shadow on an object it hits.

Even while happiness is possible (and in some cases inevitable) for Camus, this kind of happiness is not in any way freedom from what is bad. In fact, it is important to have both sides of the absurd condition, triumphant happiness and crushing despair, in tandem; “there is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night” (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 122). The struggler knows her struggle is necessarily in vain; this is the nature of the known absurd. It is known, but it is known to be inescapable. Nonetheless, the struggle continues: the light with the dark.

This struggle, moreover, “implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest)” (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 31). Put another way, the fight against the absurd is unwinnable, but that in no way diminishes the importance of that fight. If nothing else, this struggle does serve to remind us that we are human. There is a sense of free will, but only insofar as we use that will in the service of beliefs that, once adopted, serve to imprison us and limit our freedoms. Even existentialism, Camus points out, has the effect of limiting our freedom; if we accept existentialism to be true there are countless other essentialist or determinist

philosophies precluded to us on this basis. Of course, the paradox is that this creates a determinist condition for us based on our desire to support a philosophy, ostensibly, of freedom.

The practitioner of this kind of absurdist existential philosophy is not left with options but with the deterministic certainty of returning to his burdens. It is this kind of essentialism that existentialism ought eschew. This kind of happiness is resignation, even while Camus avers that it is not. Surely Sisyphus would in part acknowledge the futility of his condition; if every person has his own boulder to push up a hill, his own absurd and inescapable circumstance, every struggle would be without hope of accomplishing its goal, and every moment of optimism is more accurately a moment of self-deception and naivety. Happiness, in this estimation, is little more than resignation.

Instead, it is about taking charge of the moments that you can and trying to make these smaller victories the basis for a joyful existence. To be sure, there is nothing wrong with looking for a cloud's silver lining—the world would likely be a better place if more people did this—but this kind of happiness forces us to admit that in large part we are slaves to circumstance. This is the kind of thinking behind Rousseau's famous "man is born free, but he is everywhere in chains."

The difference between this kind of acceptance of circumstances and true happiness can perhaps best be shown by the James Cabell's trite declaration that "the optimist believes this is the best possible world; the pessimist fears this is true." We are doomed to this pessimism if we accept our condition as outside of our control. If this is the joy existentialism offers, it is a dire study indeed, and those critics who expect morose

beatniks would be vindicated. If my project can carry existential joy simply to this threshold, then I have failed.

For a writer such as Camus, whose philosophical essays are few, short, and overshadowed in the public consciousness by his contributions to literature, we can learn as much, if not more, about his philosophy from the characters and situations in his novels. For my purposes here, I am going to examine two of Camus' works: *The Stranger, A Happy Death*, and follow that with a short essay, *The Rebel*. Each of these texts highlights and expands upon some of the philosophy I have mentioned above; more than that, together these texts make conclusions that a single text could not.

In order for any of the following analysis to hold water, it first must be shown that Camus' philosophy is accurately and adequately represented through his literature. This is no easy task, as Camus' narrators are more than normally unreliable. More than that, because this reading of Camus does not come from one single work, but rather through both his philosophical and literary writings, this task must span both texts and disciplines. Fortunately, this task is far less daunting for Camus that it would be for someone like Kierkegaard, because each of the works in Camus presents the same information, but in a different way. There is no reason to pit the works against each other to search for the author's true voice—his voice shows through each. Moreover, with regard to his literary contributions, Camus' own biography regarding *A Happy Death* and *The Stranger* lends credence to an overall theme in his writings[6].

[6] As discussed below, Camus wrote *A Happy Death*, and then put it aside for years until he rewrote it and released it as *The Stranger*. This shows not only that the themes in the two works ought be the same, but also that Camus was presenting ideas in the books that developed much as his own ideas developed; these ideas are truly his, rather than incidentally in his characters.

At the least, there is a case to be made that the importance of Sisyphus can extend past the authorial intent, and that even without proving the consistency between Camus' many works, the example of the tortured soul living in absurdity can still find joy in the face of that absurdity.

2.2 On *The Stranger* and *A Happy Death*

Camus does not pretend that the struggle itself is enough to provide most people with any real sense of happiness, in the traditional sense, as evidenced by his novel *The Stranger*. Like Sartre, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, Camus wrote both fiction and non-fiction, and the two were very well intertwined. It is not therefore, uncommon to go looking for Camus' philosophy and end up in his literature. In some ways, his approach demands it.

In many ways, the protagonist of *The Stranger*, Meursault, is Camus' Sisyphus in the modern era. His seeming rejection of the absurdity in life comes with relatively little happiness, and ultimately his death. He certainly struggles in the face of great odds and dictums handed down by the powers that be. His fight, though, is more internal than external; when he offers no legal defense of his actions aside from the "sun," and no justification for himself, it is clear that he does not care whether he is free. Meursault shows this same resignation as a kind of indifference in his personal relationships, his responses to events that would leave others with profound emotional reactions and finally his own fate.

Readers first meet Meursault at his mother's funeral. Camus sets the stage with this interaction so emotionlessly that it galls the well-adjusted readership. From what few

cues Camus gives us, the relationship between Meursault and his mother was not strained to the point that her death caused a mixed emotion in him. He just does not care[7]. He cannot even recall how old she was. He put his "maman" into a home because he could no longer care for her financially, but also because they had nothing to talk about. His decision was inspired, in part, by a kind of ennui. She bored him.

This kind of apathy is not reserved for the dead, as even Meursault's supposed "friends" are not really worth his interest. Meursault's interactions with his friend, Marie, who eventually becomes his girlfriend and then his fiancée, are even more telling of his character. He is interested in her, at least physically, and even says he "misses" her during his time in jail, but Meursault cannot bring himself to say that he loves her; he even agrees to marry her without this traditional intermediate condition, which, according to him "doesn't mean anything" (*The Stranger* 35). He is resigning himself to a future with this woman, not because he wants it or because he feels a deep attachment to her, but rather simply because it is what is done. When Marie asks him whether he would have accepted the same proposal from a different girl, Meursault casually retorts, "sure" (*The Stranger* 42).

With his other friends, only Raymond seems to get any interest from Meursault, and even this can hardly be considered more than fleeting. Emmanuel and Salamano are brushed off with the characteristically brusque response readers have come to expect from the protagonist of *The Stranger*. After a humorous interaction trying to hop a ride

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[7] An alternate reading to *The Stranger* is that Meursault is so devastated by his mother's death that the rest of the text shows his interactions through the lens of certain presentations of a traumatic condition, and the resulting catatonic emotional state. He never grieves for her, and is in a sort of denial of his own existence for the rest of the text. While academically interesting, this reading is not consistent with Camus' other works, particularly *A Happy Death*.

on a passing truck, Emmanuel is laughing so hard he cannot catch his breath, while Meursault doesn't respond (*The Stranger* 26). Salamano loses his dog, and Meursault "told old Salamano he could get another," showing no empathy (*The Stranger* 44). Raymond, though, calls Meursault his "pal" and Meursault "didn't mind" (*The Stranger* 33). This is not the strong endorsement that perhaps Raymond expected.

More than a failure to connect to other people, Meursault displays a failure to respond appropriately to emotionally charged situations, even when they directly involve him. An old man loses his dog, his one friend in the world after his wife passed away, and Meursault yawns in his face. His mother dies, and he gets more worked up over the state of reusable towels in the bathroom of his workplace than anything about her. The major conflict of the novel, the killing of Raymond's lover's brother and the subsequent trial of Meursault for murder are noteworthy in how removed the accused is from the proceedings.

The real connection between *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, though, is revealed in the last five pages of the novel, when a confessor approaches Meursault in his jail cell as he awaits execution. After having been sent away several times, the holy man is finally able to get in and say his piece. Aside from his attested atheism, Meursault also discusses with the prison chaplain, in response to the chaplain's assertion that God can help someone in Meursault's position, and that "every man" the chaplain knew "in [Meursault's] position has turned to Him;" this last minute piety was certainly their right, but Meursault "didn't want anybody's help, and [he] just didn't have the time to interest [himself] in what didn't interest [him]" (*The Stranger* 117). It wasn't even that Meursault was atheist in the sense that he cared about the debate. Days before his

execution, this man legitimately did not care about what would happen to him in death. It is one thing to firmly believe in the transience of physical existence, but the only cost to Pascal's wager seemed to be the time that this death row inmate could not spare. He felt his time could be better used cataloging the rocks of his cell wall.

In Meursault's response to the chaplain on page 117, though, he does belie the existentialist, rather than simply nihilist, undertones in Camus. When he says that it is the right of every condemned to react to death however he or she chooses, he is affirming the importance of the individual in the reaction to the absurd, and that each person can choose and need not react in the same way. To be clear, this is not saying that there is no possible reaction or relief. The nihilist would latch onto Sisyphus much as Camus does, but she would not see Sisyphus as happy. The mandated misery of eternal punishment, and the corresponding assumptions of helplessness and hopelessness are not existential. Instead, these would make up an essentialist trapping no different from religion[8].

The nihilist takes existentialism full circle back to essentialism. Whereas the essentialist puts his faith in things outside of himself, and uses these constructions to claim that there is some kind of given meaning to his own existence, the nihilist, ironically does much the same thing. In rejecting external constructions, and by saying moreover, that there can never be any kind of truth to the world, he is creating a belief system that informs his freedom. The existentialist is left to make his own meaning; the

[8] This nihilism has plagued existentialism since at least Nietzsche became popular in the late nineteenth century. The truth is, though, that there is no reason that existentialism must be nihilistic, even as there is no reason it cannot be. This aporetic construction is perhaps the basis of the confusion in commentators and popular culture. If existentialism is a philosophy of freedom, does that freedom include the freedom to enslave oneself to an ideology or to a lack of one? The common PHIL 101 question "is the statement 'there are no absolute truths' absolutely true?" comes to mind in this kind of recursion. Of course, disputes of this kind center on equivocation of terms and word games to try to trip up first year undergraduates. In reality, there is no inconsistency in a philosophy that claims there is no absolute truth, just as there is no problem with one that says there is a freedom to do anything—including not being free.

nihilist denies this task is possible, just as the essentialist does. It is in this sense that nihilism does not offer a meaningful alternative to essentialism, but rather falls into the same traps that the existentialists have been pointing out about human civilization for centuries. The denying of meaning is only the first step of an existential life, and not even the most important.

While much of existentialism and existentialists are atheist, it is almost more honest to compare existentialism to a kind of agnosticism, in between the essentialist constructions of faith in God (essentialism) and faith in God's absence (nihilism). Either of these is still an unjustified appeal to faith that goes beyond that with which existentialism should be comfortable. Rather, what is more honest and consistent with existential principles, is Dostoevsky's construction "if there is no God, everything is permitted." It leaves there to be an ambiguity about the existence of the divine, and acknowledges the role of freedom this allows. It is important, moreover, for us to keep a second "f" away from the above "if." Reading this statement as "if and only if" would play into the aforementioned essentialism. There is freedom if there is no God; there is freedom if there is God.

It is crucial for existentialism to remain faithful to its own principles in this way, and not to discount essentialism out of hand. Just as the socially tolerant must, at some level, accept the beliefs of intolerant, so, too, must a truly honest existentialism acknowledge the freedom that people have to make decisions based on ideology and

other constructions[9]. As a school of thought, existentialism stands as an alternative to essentialism; it is correct but not mandatory.

Returning to Sisyphus, as he struggles against the gods, he must first acknowledge them. Of course, this is easy for Sisyphus who is a character in a society in which the gods take human form. Allegorically, though, if these gods represent the societal factors that doom humanity to an inescapable absurdity, certainly one option is the path Meursault choses—apathy. There is no doubt that Meursault acknowledges the power that institutions have on his life. We can almost imagine Meursault with his boulder and his hill in the afterlife adopting a Bartleby-the-Scrivener stand against the eternal punishment, simply saying in response, "I would prefer not to."

The message of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, though, is that Sisyphus can curse the gods, but he can also find some joy in the factors within his control. Just as Sisyphus can control certain aspects of his punishment, so, too does Meursault exercise some degree of autonomy regarding his situation. While emotionless, he maintains a degree of desire towards Marie, if only a physical desire, rather than the emotional support she clearly asks for. Meursault seems at least pleased with his friendship with Raymond and thoroughly enjoys his time at the seaside, before the encounter with his eventual victim.

It is informative to juxtapose this later work of Camus with his less acclaimed *A Happy Death*, in that the latter text, generally accepted as an early draft of *The Stranger*,

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[9] To be sure, this kind of "tolerance" can be in the sense that some say, with regard to freedom of speech "I don't respect what you say, but I respect your right to say it." Accepting existentialism does not demand a condoning of hate speech, or any kind of violent act, but simply recognizes that the rational agents who made their choices to act in such a way are at least as free as I am to not make such choices.

can shed some light on meanings that the author obscured in the later work[10]. Unlike *The Stranger*, in *A Happy Death*, Camus reveals the narrator's character as more of a human than the purely animalistic instincts of Meursault[11]. In giving Mersault feelings like angst, desire beyond the purely physical or sexual and regret, he feels more real, in a way. In another way, though, in making Mersault more relatable, Camus runs the risk of making him *too* relatable, and the reader is left wondering why the protagonist is not just named "Jean Everyman" or "Jean Q. Existentialist." Certainly every person makes decisions he regrets, and tries to run away from problems. In a way, it was Meursault's acerbic personality that gave him depth as a character. While not as literarily nuanced, perhaps, as the later Meursault, the former sketch in broad strokes gives us insight into Camus' philosophy at the time of his writing, even if both the character and the philosophy he is meant to embody evolved and changed with time.

The Mersault in *A Happy Death,* unlike the nearly stoic protagonist of *The Stranger*, cannot come to terms with his own freedom. He fears it, particularly early in the novel, and seeks the comfort of a world determined by things outside of his control. This is made most evident during the impromptu European getaway where Mersault complains, "living in his own presence, time took on its most extreme dimensions, and each hour seemed to contain a world" (*A Happy Death* 65). To compound this, while in Prague, and confronted with his own freedom, he is often nauseated (by the smell of vinegar

[10] *A Happy Death* was never published during Camus' life, but rather was found amongst his papers. The identical narrator names, similar circumstances and plot lead many to conclude this was an early draft of the more famous *The Stranger*. The Time Magazine book review contemporaneous with its publication even says the text "may be read as a preamble to *The Stranger*."

[11] The protagonist in *A Happy Death* is named Mersault; in *The Stranger*, this was changed to Meursault. I hope this distinction in spelling is enough to identify each without constant reference to their works of origin.

cucumbers ostensibly, among other things). This construction of being nauseated by freedom is not dissimilar to other existential writers[12]. Mersault is forced to reconcile the conditions of his existence, and they sicken him, quite literally.

The novel, moreover, begins with the killing of an innocent, rather than ending with it. In this way, the event haunts the rest of the text, always tainting any seeming freedom Mersault has. To be sure, he makes choices in his life, some of these meant to exemplify his freedom such as his impromptu vacation. The fact remains, though, that no matter how far Mersault's train takes him, readers know that he has already found himself in Zagreus' bedroom with his gun[13]. How similar this is to a Sisyphus, who cannot know for certain that his punishment is eternal! Readers given an omniscient perspective know that Mersault runs away in futility, absurdity even. He must always end up in that room, because he has already been there. There is a sense in which the novel is inverted, particularly in contrast to the more popular *The Stranger.* While the later, more famous text puts the act of violence as the culmination of so many other points in the plot, here Camus introduces Mersault as a killer. Perhaps that is the curse of the protagonist introduced *in medias res*: he can never be free for readers of the text[14]. It would have been just as well if the murder had happened later in the plot; its early

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[12] Kierkegaard calls this reaction to one's freedom "anxiety." In Nietzsche, the realization of the freedom one has in one's life can be met with the gnashing of teeth. Heidegger calls this same idea, more or less, angst. Sartre uses the word "anguish," as well as "nausea" itself to refer to the effect.

[13] As in Sartre, below, there is a sense in which this text shows the inescapability of one's past. Sartre calls the past, and the individual's actions in the past a kind of in-itself being that can be escaped from only in bad faith.

[14] Obviously literary characters' freedom as predetermined by their respective appearances in unchanging narratives is a ridiculous standard to demand. Literature as a non-living medium implies a determinism of sorts on it, just as, try though I might, I will not see a different ending to the film "Star Wars" on my next viewing. Still, it is illustrative of my point that Camus makes sure that even the first time reader knows Mersault's fate when the rest of the story is told. This stands in contrast to my first reading of *The Stranger* when I was caught off-guard by the killing at the beach.

introduction shaped the character in much the same way. Just as a novelistic inevitability necessarily follows from certain literary plot constructions such as taking up the story in the midst of its climax, so does existential philosophy demand that a person's past actions are, to an extent, among the things that determine their present circumstances. I will discuss more of this important balance between the inescapability of the past and the importance of freedom more below when discussing Sartre. In brief, there is a freedom alongside an absence of freedom—determined freedom. Sisyphus, too, can exercise whatever freedoms he wishes, so long as at the end of the day, he returns to his burden. This is inevitable, for Camus.

Mersault believes he does find happiness, eventually, though this happiness may be realized only in his death. He kills Zagreus to take his money and with that to bypass the years of struggle the ordinary person must go through before he can be happy. Mersault gets this idea from Zagreus who opines, "don't think I'm saying money makes happiness. I only mean for a certain class of beings, happiness is possible, provided they have time, and that having money is a way of being free of money" (*A Happy Death* 46). Mersault hopes, that with the material considerations taken care of, he can be free to live his life. Jean Sarocchi's afterword claims that the rest of the novel details the ways that Mersault tries to capture this happiness: travel, hedonism and solitude (*A Happy Death* 156).

He ultimately is happy, the book claims. Just as *The Myth of Sisyphus* tells us we must imagine Sisyphus happy, in *A Happy Death* we leave Mersault in happiness: "And stone among the stones, he returned in the joy of his heart to the truth of the motionless worlds" (*A Happy Death* 151). Here at least, in death, Mersault finds a kind of happiness that he was not able to through his life, his travelling or his loves.

Sarocchi goes on to claim that, by the end of the novel, Mersault has in fact "conquered happiness" by the time of his death, but this implies that happiness is in fact something to be conquered or overcome. *The Myth of Sisyphus* certainly disagrees with that reading, as do I. To say that joy is something to be overcome, something to go beyond, conquer or evolve past is to trivialize Sisyphus' struggle and to render his condition hopeless. Happiness is the point of it all, for Camus; the only alternative is complete absurdity.

Moreover, a salient feature of *A Happy Death* is that Mersault does not find the same kind of happiness that Zagreus does. There is not only one path to happiness or joy, and for each person this path can differ. To be sure, there is a kind of kinship forged in the act of murder that Mersault commits; and the happiness of the victim is only fully understood by Mersault at the moments just before his own death (*A Happy Death* 148). Zagreus tried to live a life, before he lost the use of his legs, "everything for happiness" (*A Happy Death* 148). While Camus never makes it clear whether this plan of Zagreus' worked, whether Zagreus in his youth was truly happy, what is clear is that this same formula does not work for Mersault. With the dead man's money, Mersault is not able to find happiness. There are many reasons for this, but one is certainly that the act of killing Zagreus did haunt Mersault in a way[15].

Even without this literary device of revealing the death initially, it is clear that Camus meant to present Mersault as feeling trapped in his condition, even while attempting to escape it. Of course, what really traps Mersault is the realization of the

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[15] This kind of "haunting" is one of the important differences that separate Mersault in *A Happy Death* from the Meursault of *The Stranger*. While Mersault does not say that he explicitly regrets his actions, that Zagreus continued to have an effect on his life, particularly when Mersault himself was facing death, is instructive of the differences in character Camus made between the two novels.

absurdity of his own existence, and therefore, his attempt to escape is really a kind of suicide, at least in the allegorical sense. Because for Camus, the primary philosophical question, the one which must be answered before all others is the question whether to commit suicide, what better imagery to convey this message than a man who is fleeing from his life? Mersault does not flee forever, though; he cannot. Just as Camus says that to escape absurdity in life through death is to jump from the frying pan to the fire, so, too can Mersault never escape his circumstances[16]. Neither can Sisyphus.

This does not mean that Mersault cannot still find joy in what options he has available to him. Like Sisyphus, who finds joy within the confines on the freedoms that remain to him, Mersault finally finds joy in the moments before his death, when he has the least physical freedom, and is instead confined to his bed in his illness. The confinement, therefore, is physical more than mental. For Sisyphus, too, his punishment is in the removal of his physical freedoms; mentally, he remains at liberty to curse the gods who have punished him—one of the few freedoms he maintains.

Mersault, just like Meursault and Sisyphus, can find fulfillment in life so long as it is on his own terms. Appealing to outside forces, as Mersault tries initially, proves fruitless for him, as do all essentialist constructions of the possibility of joy. Joy, in Camus, is not itself a certainty; we can surely imagine a Sisyphus who despairs in his circumstances at every moment. The way the Sisyphus story is usually told, the eternal

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[16] While life is necessarily absurd for Camus, in that it lacks *prescribed* meaning—and this is an important distinction from saying that it lacks all meaning, to look to suicide as a way out would require there to be some meaning in death. Obviously there is not, for Camus, and so, as above, death only proves as absurd as life. This does not entail an indifference between life and death, though, as the meaninglessness in death is guaranteed, while the meaninglessness in life is only guaranteed so long as you look for it elsewhere to be determined for you. If you determine your own meaning, Camus would say, then "life" remains absurd, but *your life* does not.

punishment that awaits him is meant to be in the land of the dead—akin to what some faith traditions would call "Hell." It is therefore expected for him to be miserable. So it must, as many of these stories in mythology are meant as moralistic at least in part. Sisyphus was punished because of his pride, or his impiety; therefore do not be proud or impious yourself lest you share his fate. In order for the deterrent effect of the story to be sufficient, the condition of Sisyphus' punishment must be decidedly dire. However, Camus claims that this despair is not the only option for Sisyphus, and that joy is possible for him despite his eternal torments sentences to him from above.

If it is unfair to say, that despair is the only option for someone in the unenviable conditions of Sisyphus, it is also unjustly assertive for me to claim that joy must be Sisyphus' reaction. Existentialism is in large part about the choices that individuals can make, and just as Sisyphus can choose happiness, he does not have to do so. He can live in denial, bad faith, or simply ignorance if he chooses to do so. Existentialism is in large part about freedom, and that includes the freedom to make choices that an outside observer would say are bad ones[17].

Mersault and Meursault are confronted with this same sort of options as well. So far as they are characters in a novel, they have few real freedoms, but we can imagine them taking different paths, making different choices. In fact, we must do this to prevent them from being as a table or inkwell, as solely in-itself beings. The choices they could have made at any moment in the text could have ensured their happiness, or could have

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[17] This kind of subjectivity is one of the reasons that creating an existentialist ethic is such a daunting proposition. Just as with Sartre's take on existential psychoanalysis in *Being and Nothingness*, the best result, the most consistent result, that can be realistically yielded is something along the lines of "to each his own." Insofar as there is a prescriptive nature to ethics, or a comprehensive theory of right conduct of what is right and wrong, or a theory of value of what is good or bad, existentialism historically has yielded few determinate results.

worked against it. It is important to reiterate here that not everyone has the same path to happiness as everyone else. It is not only the case that what makes some people happy might not similarly make others so, but it is also true that the actions that one person can take in service of his or her own happiness are options foreclosed to another for whatever reason. Mersault and Zagreus must approach happiness differently, and so must we be careful of essentializing the path to happiness, and therefore running counter to the very philosophy we are seeking here to uphold.

Insofar as we are all individuals capable of making choices about our own lives, these same questions inevitably come to us as well. We can act in ways that will promote our happiness, or in ways that will not[18]. Along with them are the promises of the false idols of the essentialists. Camus' claim is that we, just as Sisyphus could resign himself to his life of suffering, can also "resign" ourselves to the belief that there are things outside of ourselves that are wholly responsible for our actions and happiness—but we do not have to. We, too, can curse the proverbial gods and exercise what few freedoms we may have, as Sisyphus does. In order to understand more about the possibility of joy for Sisyphus, it is indispensible to consider Camus' essay *The Rebel*, for what are the protestations of Sisyphus as he lifts his rock if not the maximum rebellion possible, given his condition? I will be focusing on his chapter "Metaphysical Rebellion" below.

[18] More often than not, we will not know which actions will cause our happiness at the time. Like Mersault, we will try many different things with the same goal in mind, and by trial and error come to know ourselves better. There is a kind of psychological egoism inherent in this way of thinking, but certainly not a strong form that would require that all actions be based on our self-interest; that information is not available to us as we act.

2.3 Joy in Resignation

The joy that Sisyphus illustrates is not the sort of unbridled enthusiasm the term typically conjures up. Rather, this kind of joy is always a reaction to futility. Just as Sisyphus can find some amount of freedom in the grooves of his rock, he can never shed the rock entirely and be totally free of his burdens. He retains freedom of consciousness, and little else. Obviously, the sociopolitical situation of many mirrors Sisyphus, and for many others, it is a closer facsimile than they would care to admit. This kind of joy is therefore to an extent a kind of resignation to one's circumstances; it is not a working against those circumstances as much as it is a downplaying of their importance. Sisyphus may think to himself "yes I may have to push this rock up this hill every day, but at least I don't have to enjoy it!" It is in this sense that Camus present joy as a joy in resignation, as there must be an acknowledgement of the futility of the situation inherent in the acknowledgement of which freedoms truly remain. There is freedom there, but there are also many ways in which Sisyphus is not free.

Joy in resignation requires a denial of meaning of the factors limiting freedom. If it is the case that there can be joy found in the face of external conditions that would seem to undermine freedom, then those conditions must first be overcome. This can sound like a kind of rhetorical sour grapes: "It doesn't matter that I am not physically free because…" or the even stronger "I wouldn't actually want to be physically free because…" seem little more sophisticated than Tom Sawyer trying to convince his friends that he is so fortunate to be able to paint the fence white that they should pay him for the privilege if

they want to help. Without a doubt, it is better to be free than not[19]. However, if enslavement is inevitable, better then to focus on the freedoms you do have, and to resign yourself, as best as possible, to those freedoms that are forever past your reach.

Camus would not agree with this reading of his work. He does not see this kind of joy as a resignation, or a denial of meaning of the other sources of freedom. In fact, he believes that his work is meant to find meaning and to stand against nihilism. In *The Rebel*, he puts his philosophy in life-affirming terms and believes that he stands in contrast with traditional philosophical nihilists—particularly Friedrich Nietzsche[20].

Camus wrote on Nietzsche with some admiration, but still had problems with his process: “Nietzsche bangs his head against the wall” (*The Rebel* 62). In *The Rebel*, Camus sought to distance his own philosophy of “affirmation” with nihilism, for which he thought Nietzsche the greatest champion. Nietzsche is no more nihilist than Camus, of course, and this way of thinking about him has not been critically accepted for many years. Still, it is fruitful to look at how Camus treats Nietzsche in *The Rebel* to see against what Camus builds his philosophy.

Camus frames Nietzsche’s philosophy as nihilist, Socialist and anti-Christianity, though only the last of these is true[21]. He makes the important point in *The Rebel* that “a nihilist is not one who believes in nothing, but one who does not believe in what exists” (*The Rebel* 69). It is foolish to believe that social institutions like Christianity do not

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[19] This is the kind of essentializing that existentialism must allow. Inherent in the philosophy must be the desire for freedom rather than its opposite. This is not to say that individuals cannot choose some kind of enslavement, but simply that this cannot be consistent with the framework that an existentialist holds. Whether consistency with this framework is itself desirable is not to be taken up here.

[20] I will be discussing Nietzsche more at length below in a dedicated chapter, but it is still important here to bring up for the first time one of the major contrasts between Nietzsche and Camus.

[21] More commonly, Nietzsche is criticized for his hierarchies and classism than any sense of Socialism. Camus’ argument is that, as a nihilist, Nietzsche does not put stock in rank and separation; Socialism is the inevitable result. I argue that Nietzsche is not nihilist, and so is not Socialist either.

exist, but to see them as a false prescribed meaning and instead not put any faith in them is the kind of nihilism that Camus identifies in Nietzsche. Though, this is precisely what Camus himself advocates in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Sisyphus is never to believe that he is truly free from his circumstances, instead, he is to find what freedoms he can and curse the gods as best he can. He can acknowledge the existence of his limitations while trying to put as little stock in them as possible. Sisyphus is resigned to his fate, but he can still find joy in that resignation.

As far as *The Myth of Sisyphus* presents the titular character and his ordeals as an allegory, Camus is saying that every individual can likewise see the futility of their condition. Rather than commit suicide, as there is no escape from the absurd in death, each person is free to instead find what joy she can in the realization of her own freedoms. This is a kind of resignation, rather than affirmation. It is the roar of a wounded lion—possibly more dangerous, but certainly reactionary[22]. It is a joy that is immediately tempered by the possibility of negation.

Camus' joy is always in the face of despair. Just as Sisyphus can only find his freedom in the circumstances available to him, and cannot, for instance, decide to stop rolling his rock up the hill, so is Camus' idea of freedom a freedom *within already existing conditions*. The unchangeable circumstances of an individual's existence are prominent elsewhere in existential philosophy as well; Martin Heidegger calls this notion *thrownness*, and for Sartre, the *facticity* of existence is similarly inescapable.

[22] This characteristic of Camus' joy is itself counter-Nietzsche, as I discuss below in the dedicated Nietzsche chapter.

Joy then, is in the details. If the system cannot be changed, if the entirety of one's existence cannot be rewritten, then what is left is in rebellion. Standing up against the structures of systems set up to limit and control individuals. Camus, calls this rebellion is an affirmation, but by virtue of its necessarily contrasting construction, "affirmation" hardly seems appropriate. This is the true limitation of Sisyphean joy—it relies on oppression to rebel against. It is negating rather than affirming. If those things that stood against a person were benevolent and supportive, rebellion would not be called for in the name of joy; but it is still, of course, mandated in the name of freedom—reliance on social constructions can bring a kind of happiness but never existential joy, only a kind of blissful ignorance. There is always cause for rebellion from those who are in a position of knowledge of their circumstances, so long as any institution tries to enforce meaning.

As a thought experiment, imagine a world where there actually were no meaning-enforcing institutions. Without such institutions, there would not need to be any need for rebellion, and without rebellion, there is no joy for Camus[23]. This kind of joy "in the face of" or "in spite of" the conditions of existence, must acknowledge the importance of these conditions: namely the institutions that seek to prescribe meaning. This is, similarly, how Jean-Paul Sartre presents the world. There is freedom, to be sure, but this freedom is always in the face of circumstances.

The next chapter highlights one good use of this framework gleaned from Camus, and brings Sisyphus into Sartre's works, his vocabulary and the implications of how to live one's life with the possibility of joy.

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[23] To be fair, there could be the possibility of joy for Camus in such a situation, but this is not a possibility he ever takes up, ostensibly because he believes more in a phenomenological method which must account for the actual conditions of existence rather than obscure hypotheticals.

CHAPTER 3. SARTRE'S LESSONS FROM CAMUS

3.1 Finding the Possibility for Joy in Sartre's Anguish and Counter-Anguish

Jean-Paul Sartre has always occupied a privileged place in the existentialism, in that he not only became popular within his life, but also tried to communicate his philosophy to the public. In the wake of his monumental *Being and Nothingness*, he felt that the public had some grasp of his philosophy, but also harbored a number of misconceptions about what existentialism was, and what implications the philosophy held. This is why, in 1945, Sartre gave a lecture to a packed room that was later published under the name *Existentialism is a Humanism*. This lecture takes up the charges brought to his philosophy from all corners, from the Communists to the Christians, and ultimately seeks to position existentialism as affirming life and creating meaning, rather than the contrary—negative or pessimistic.

There is little doubt that Sartre saw his philosophy as positive; interviews he gave on the subject make this abundantly clear. However, granting authorial intent any kind of ground with regard to understanding the original texts would itself be the kind of essentializing this project needs to avoid. What is more informative is whether his major texts belie this purported optimism.

This chapter will treat primarily *Being and Nothingness* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, as it is with these two works that Sartre's constructions of self are most obvious.

These constructions of the self, as I will argue below, are the key to understanding where joy fits within Sartre's broader philosophy.

3.2 On *Being and Nothingness*

In *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre presents a fairly comprehensive phenomenological ontology. To fully understand the place for happiness or joy within the philosophy, it is important to present the distinctions of in-itself and for-itself being, bad faith, freedom and responsibility, and anguish and counter-anguish. I will first posit a case for joy in Sartre independent of any connection with Camus. I believe this assessment is possible, philosophically interesting, but pragmatically irrelevant without the influence of the Sisyphus account. From that, any similarities between this text and Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* that would allow for the transitivity of joy can better be gleaned[24]. I will look at the importance of temporality in Sartre, bringing in some of the newer concepts and language of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, as it is here that decision-making allows for the possibility of joy.

In contrast to Camus, whose narrative works are almost a required elucidation of otherwise incomplete philosophical constructions from his essays, Sartre's plays provide

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[24] Of course, any comparison between Sartre and Camus must address the biographical connection between the two Frenchmen; as opposed to the later duo I discuss below of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, these two actually knew each other quite well. As writers in post-World War II France for the progressive *Les Temps Modernes*, both Sartre and Camus came from a similar ideological place. Socially, they had many of the same friends and acquaintances and ran in the same circles. However, intellectual tensions obscured their friendship.

more of a way to double-check and confirm his commitment to concepts that his philosophy already posited fairly clearly. They will not be discussed at length here.

3.3 The Case for Joy Without *Sisyphus*

Sartre may have claims to a joyful philosophy in his own right. In this section I examine that possibility, while also presenting much of the relevant Sartrean terminology that will be essential to the later comparison with Camus.

It seems comical that a philosophy that calls a conscious being as existing "for-itself" is often interpreted as a pessimistic account of the state of the world. Of course, this is just one reading. It is very easy to see in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* a sense of optimism, and even joy, about the lives these for-itselfs lead. Sartre's idea of anguish and his idea of bad faith, despite their somewhat dreary names, and his conception of freedom against the backdrop of responsibility can give the for-itself joy if paired with a reasonable amount of inner optimism. It is, in fact, from this lack of optimism, and the cynicism that so trendily takes its place, that the pessimistic readings of existentialism get their foothold.

For Sartre, our conscious being is different from the being that things in the world have, or at least it ought to be. As a sentient creature, humans are inherently different from tables or inkwells. This difference, though, more than any basis in biology or history, is primarily due to our ability, to, as a species, reflect upon ourselves. In fact, it is through this act of self-reflection that we separate from ourselves, and divide being into the categories Sartre calls "in-itself" and "for-itself". Being reflects upon itself and bifurcates into reflector and reflected upon.

The ontological possibilities of the for-itself—any possible action—take precedence over the predictive likelihoods of its possible states. To value the predictive instead would signal overdependence on the past to anticipate the present. In opening this door, Sartre also personalizes these possibilities by applying them to the individual's consciousness, and therefore creates anguish "when consciousness sees itself cut from its essence by nothingness or separated from the future by its very freedom" (*Being and Nothingness* 73). The past and the future do not ontologically impact the decision of the present, and the subsequent "nihilating nothing removes [one] from all excuse" to let an individual's decisions get the best of oneself in the present, because that past is now an in-itself, never able to be changed (*Being and Nothingness* 73)[25].

Sartre discusses the creation of nothingness with respect to the past when he considers the mental process of nihilation. For a person to nihilate something, he must first acknowledge a thing in his mind, and then must recognize it as not—either as not being present, or as not existing at all. This two-step process, though, establishes another nothingness, as it "creates a cleavage between the immediate psychic past and the present. This cleavage is precisely nothingness" (*Being and Nothingness* 63). The past, too, can never be changed, for Sartre. It is an in-itself, lacking the dynamism of the present with all of its ontological possibilities (*Being and Nothingness* 110). Between this for-itself and this in-itself there must be a nothingness to distinguish them from each other.

The creation of a nothingness between past and present absolves the present for-itself from the actions of the past in-itself, as that in-itself is separated from this for-itself by the nothingness it created. Regardless of whether a person were a murderer or a saint

[25] This foundation will prove crucial to the discussion of temporality below.

in her life up until the present moment, the realm of ontological possibilities for her as an actor in the present runs the gamut from ethical to unethical, from life-ending to life-enhancing. The past is always considered as in-itself for Sartre; it can never be changed, only reinterpreted. As a past, it does not define the individual, but the individual can likewise never escape it because it happened. A person could "escape" it in that she does not have to take the same sort of action in this present as she took in the past. The past can only be changed insofar as the future an individual considers is separate from that past, and that individual seeks a future precisely to distance himself from that past. However, this connection between the intention of the present and the actual carrying out of such an action in the future is fraught with peril, as the future, as the past was, is similarly separated from the present.

The nothingness that consciousness thrusts between past and present, consciousness also creates between present and future. Rather than the liberating effect of distancing consciousness from its past, the separation between present and future creates a sense of uncertainty about the future and causes what consciousness "project[s] as [its] future being [to be] always nihilated and reduced to the rank of simple possibility" (*Being and Nothingness* 73). It is from this uncertainty that Sartre derives the emotive response anguish; it is not just that the uncertainty of a particular for-itself in a future manifestation will be as intended, but rather whether the for-itself will exist at all.

In *Being and Nothingness*, the ultimate anguish stems not through the unpredictability of the future, but from the possibility, in the ontological sense, of its complete non-existence for a particular for-itself. If at every moment the range of ontological possibilities lies before a consciousness, then the possibility of ending one's

life, too, has to be seen as just as real as the possibility of not ending one's life. As Sartre notes: "if *nothing* compels me to save my life, *nothing* prevents me from precipitating myself into the abyss" (*Being and Nothingness* 69). Whether to throw oneself from the precipice at any given instant is an ontological possibility, and therefore the subsequent nihilation of the for-itself is also a possibility (*Being and Nothingness* 67). In realizing this, consciousness also realizes the nothingness between itself and its future expectation of itself, rendering meaningless the act where consciousness makes "an appointment with [itself] on the other side of that hour, of that day, or of that month" (*Being and Nothingness* 73). However, it is not an entirely one-sided relationship.

Anguish necessarily pairs with counter-anguish; as a reaction to one's anguish it "generally puts an end to anguish by transmuting it into indecision" (*Being and Nothingness* 69). Consequently, rather than throwing oneself over the cliff, instead consciousness engages in a mental exercise and stresses itself out a little bit "play[ing] with…possibilities" (*Being and Nothingness* 69). Naturally, not every human action consists of the interplay between anguish and counter anguish—or no action would be taken by a for-itself in any circumstance.

Sartre aggressively claims, "there is nothing in us which resembles an inner *debate* as if we had to weigh motives and incentives before deciding," (*Being and Nothingness* 69). Instead, possibilities of action are already within the individual's mind. When making a difficult choice he "turns toward" the more favorable outcome, "as if to ask for help" (*Being and Nothingness* 69). If any mental process, though, were required to be completed at every instant, such as the decision to kill oneself, no action would be possible as long as that decision took up the entirety of consciousness during the making

of the choice. Even at the moment of stepping back from the precipice, if that moment of taking the action were separated by the moment of deciding to take the action, then that moment should be one in which a brand new decision to take one's life has to be considered. If the moment of making a decision and the moment of taking action are separate for Sartre, the moment an individual takes action, he is in bad faith, as he is relying on the past in which he made the decision to make the action to determine his present of taking the action. Sartre's position on what constitutes a moment, though, is not made entirely clear in *Being and Nothingness*.

Clearly, individuals take action in the world. Decisions are not being made, at least consciously at every second over whether to sustain or end one's life. People go to work or school, eat food, fall in love and pick out outfits of what to wear for the day. This sort of immediate, practical decision often supersedes the existential questioning of the self. Even if the moments in which an individual is pondering over the conditions of existence are comparably few, Sartre's concepts of anguish and counter anguish are meant to illustrate the possible conditions into which consciousness could enter. If a person were to be free from bad faith, he would be in a place to experience anguish and the subsequent realization of being and freedom more frequently. This condition of consciousness, though, would seem to leave little room for joy. This is why no one can be in this condition of good faith at all times; to get things done, sometimes you have to accept the conditions of your existence, even if only for a moment.

This necessary tension between anguish and counter-anguish in the moments of existential reflection mirrors the tension of rebellion for Camus. In order for there to be counter-anguish that ultimately wins out, there must first be anguish. Counter-anguish

requires first that there must be the moment of realization of the possibility of negation. Even the selection of vocabulary implies the necessity of anguish before counter-anguish. Likewise, Camus' joy based in rebellion must first have something to rebel *against*. Camus asserts that this relationship between the rebel and the thing she rebels against reminds her that she is a free, conscious being. She can take joy in that moment of reflection upon the circumstances of her entrapment within the institutions that seek to prescribe meaning in her life, no matter how inescapable the institutional prison in which she finds herself. Previously, I asserted that any joy stemming from rebellion is limited in that an institution against which the individual can rebel is necessary. While there is a clear connection between this way of thinking and Sartre's ideas of anguish and counter anguish, it remains to be seen whether there is the possibility for an independent joy in *Being and Nothingness*, one that must not also be paired with anguish.

Sartre's example of the addicted gambler who wishes to give up gambling helps add a concrete example to this theoretical framework. He posits an individual who resolves to give up his habit and never to gamble again. However, anguish is inherent in the gambler "because [gambling] is [his] possibility, [he] is aware that *nothing* can compel [him] to adopt that [resolution]" (*Being and Nothingness* 68). The gambler could look at himself and realize, that no matter what he says or believes at the moment of his resolution, he still has the ontological possibility of breaking it. This anguish becomes more real for the gambler "when he approaches the gaming table [and] suddenly sees all his resolutions melt away" (*Being and Nothingness* 69). Of course, the counter anguish in this example would be the realization the gambler may have that just as nothing prevents him from gambling, nothing compels him to do so either. Were he to avoid

acting in bad faith, he would see these dueling possibilities, realize he has a freedom and "abruptly put [himself] at a distance from the edge of the precipice and resume [his] way" (*Being and Nothingness* 69). This is the indecision that anguish and counter-anguish bring about in a person—an indecision that is more a freedom than a befuddlement.

However, if the gambler were to extricate himself from his pattern of bad faith, he would acknowledge the control he truly has over his life and would realize that he has the possibility—not just to gamble or not gamble—but ultimately to end his life. Most of the time, Sartre claims, individuals "flee anguish in bad faith" (*Being and Nothingness* 711). For Sartre, the desire to escape the inevitability of an uncertain future drives people deeper into their ingrained patterns of conduct. The possibility of freedom is terrifying to the point of not being worth the benefit of a self-authored life. That does not mean that an individual escapes responsibility by fleeing into bad faith; he is responsible as long as he is a for-itself participating in the world, cognizant of his surroundings (*Being and Nothingness* 709). Those fleeing anguish believe they find absolution in giving up responsibility for their actions to habits or predilections. Even value structures transmitted through religion or morality are false origins for conduct that originate from the self, Sartre believes (*Being and Nothingness* 796). Even bad faith cannot allow the escape from anguish.

Opposing the example of the precipice with that of the gambler, Sartre distinguishes between "anguish in the face of the future" and "anguish in the face of the past" (*Being and Nothingness* 69). However, in both of these there is room for joy rather than despair. To find joy in an uncertain future, one can indeed look to the past, and to find joy in the face of the past, one need only look to the future. Either glance has an

individual passing through the present, so to speak, and realizing the freedom that she has in that instant. Every new moment is one in which can a person can make new ontological choices; one can take her life in an entirely new direction. Both anguish in the face of the future and anguish in the face of the past involve the for-itself being witness to an ontological possibility outside of its current choice for action. The reformed gambler is in anguish precisely because seeing the gaming table reminds him of his freedom to once again gamble, of the fallibility of his resolution to abstain. Both of these anguishes occur when an individual is forcibly thrust out of her position of bad faith and is instead compelled to look at her ontological possibilities for a particular action.

To illustrate how happiness can be taken from anguish in the face of the future, one need only look at the scoreboard. If, as Sartre claims, there is an ontological possibility of suicide at any point of one's existence, then there are a nearly infinite series of previous examples one can draw on to a happy end. The fact of a for-itself's present existence implies a one billion-and-zero record against the urge to kill oneself. These victories, while not ontologically indicative of the choice an individual has to make at this and every subsequent present moment, at least serve as a constant reminder that death is never the only choice. Rather than the often-charged pessimism, it would seem that one cannot help but glean a sense of optimism from the reminder that in every single second of life prior to the present one, life has triumphed over death. It is still not the past that determines the future, but it can't hurt to remember that at every moment, just as one can choose death, one can choose life!

Of course, not all anguish in the face of the future refers to the potential for death. The lesson above can be applied to any particular case of anguish in the face of the future.

In the example of the gambler, before he came to the gaming table, he had the possibility of anguish in the face of the future, realizing his resolution was not infallible prior to the present reminder of that gaming table. Even if there were no previous instance of a victory over temptation from which the gambler could extrapolate predictive odds—and as a gambler, he would of course try—his very acknowledgment of the possibility, rather than the inevitability, of backsliding indicates there is just as real an ontological possibility he will not. It is then his choice how to view these diametrically opposed possibilities: with the dread that he can never be free of his gambling, or with the joy that his gambling urge can never determine his actions, and thus that he will always have a degree of ontological control.

Anguish in the face of the past can be overcome by reminding oneself of the nothingness between the past and the present as well as the nothingness between the present and the future. Not only is there a distinction between the present and the past such that the slate is, at least ontologically, wiped clean every second of every day, but there is also a nothingness that separates the present from the future. The past is therefore two negations away from the future, although it would be foolish to try to compound nothingness by counting the various nothingnesses between two things. It is safe to say, however, that the actions of the past do not generally affect the ontological possibilities of the present, and the actions of the present do not usually affect the ontological possibilities of the state of the future.

In some circumstances, however, it must be acknowledged these possibilities are in fact restricted by decisions of the past. Certain decisions can limit when they result in imprisonment or when they take away the chance for certain possibilities: if an individual

cuts off his left hand, he can never do that again. These exceptions, though, do not make the rule less valid for the majority of actions a for-itself can make in the present moment, especially the life-ending actions about which anguish most often presents itself. There must remain a separation between the actions of the past and the actions of the present in order for freedom to remain; if an individual's present choices are determined by past actions, then there is no true freedom. Every present would have a past determining it, and every past self is separated by nothingness from that present. It would be as though someone other than yourself at every moment made decisions that impinged upon your freedom.

This is not to say there cannot be some extent to which that hypothetical is true. For instance, if I want to be an astronaut, there are certain things I would have had to complete in the past in order to make that a present possibility for me. Likewise, if I broke the law in the past, and was caught for it, my present range of possibilities is seriously limited. Though any single possibility can be foreclosed to an individual, it is important to remember the difference between ontological freedom and these more political or social freedoms. Ontologically, an individual is always free and this can never be taken from him, so long as he retains his mind. It is in this sense that Sisyphus maintains his freedom—he is ontologically free within the range of limited possibilities still open to him. Even in his direst slavery, he still has a freedom of consciousness[26].

[26] Freedom of consciousness, though, is not always sacred. This is why such films as "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" or to an extent the original "Planet of the Apes" have lobotomy as possible punishments. While not much is known about the state of an individual's mind after such a gruesome procedure, it is certainly possible that in these cases, that individual would in fact lose ontological freedom, and personhood with it.

Sartre's anguish offers hope through consciousness's ability to see the ontological good as well as the ontological bad. Nothingness separates the present from the past. The past cannot, therefore, be changed through present action, although it can always be reinterpreted. To make what happened in the past as immanent for the future is to live in what Sartre calls bad faith, so instead one's only option is to live in the now as an undefined for-itself. To be sure, an individual can still have predilections, tendencies and a history that could point him in a particular direction, but none of these things makes for ontological certainty. This free present despite a clouded past easily breathes optimism into a life otherwise filled with bad choices and regret. Sartre encourages his readers to make every day the first day of the rest of their respective lives, realizing past as in-itself: relevant, yet not deterministic.

The perpetual avoidance of bad faith, inexorably tied to Sartre's idea of nothingness separating the present and the past, is another way he advocates leading a happy life. When an individual fails to adequately realize the nothingness between present and past or present and future and therefore uses in-itselfs to determine her for-itself present, "the transcendences of past and future appear in the temporal being of human reality" and she experiences bad faith (*Being and Nothingness* 85).

On a more visible level, bad faith is a for-itself resigning itself to the collection of its past actions as sole indicators of its ontological possibilities: "I am a gambler, so I gamble now and will gamble tomorrow, not because I choose to gamble, but because it is who I am."

Sartre explains the proper way to look at the present with relation to the past in his example of a paederast who rationalizes to himself an answer to the question "Am I a paederast?":

> To the extent that a pattern of conduct is defined as the conduct of a paederast and to the extent that I have adopted this conduct, I am a paederast. But to the extent that human reality can not be finally defined by patterns of conduct, I am not one. (*Being and Nothingness* 108)

This individual realizes both the danger of allying himself with pure immanence and with pure transcendence[27]. Were he purely transcendent, this man would have failed to recognize the importance of his past actions. These actions, while not ontologically limiting, certainly play a part in defining this person as someone who did the things he did. The nothingness between present and past makes every action forever recorded as an indelible part of that person's in-itself being. Actions, once performed, can never be changed. The past *was*; only things that are or will be can be changed. These actions in the past lend themselves to patterns of conduct already within a person, as in the example of the man who wonders whether he is a paederast. Regardless of whether the label applies to him, he certainly practiced pederasty, and this part of his history can never be changed, no matter what sort of life transformation he has in the future. He is not his past, but his past is a part of his being: the in-itself aspect of him, and perhaps how others know him.

[27] The distinction between immanence and transcendence will be a major difference between the joy found in Nietzsche, and the contentment of Kierkegaard. I posit, below, that a mix of immanence and transcendence is necessary for a sustainable joy.

While someone can practice bad faith either regarding negative histories, such as the gambler or the paederast, or positive histories, as in a student who doesn't think she needs to study for a test because she passed the last one without studying, escaping either is more likely to lead to joy. The freeing of oneself from being trapped by a negative past seems more obvious in its liberating implications. An individual can, though, remain in bad faith and even "*live* in bad faith, which does not mean that he does not have abrupt awakenings to cynicism or to good faith, but which implies a constant and particular style of life" (*Being and Nothingness* 90). It is when an individual consciously acknowledges his bad faith, such as when the gambler realizes he no longer has to gamble or the pederast realizes he is making a new ontological decision every time he practices pederasty, that each can see a change possible in his life. Regardless of whether he chooses to act on this possibility for reform at any point, the realization of the very possibility for change has to be seen as more likely to induce that change than if either individual believes himself trapped by his pattern of conduct in an unfulfilling and morally corrupt life. Either of these individuals need only realize, "I am never any one of my attitudes, any one of my actions" (*Being and Nothingness* 103). Sartre is saying here that an individual is neither any one of his actions, but more importantly, neither is that individual the sum of his actions, good or bad. There is always the present for-itself that is at the center of an individual's identity. This for-itself is not subject to the actions of the past.

Also important in these examples of bad faith is the effect that bad faith has on these individuals even if they never decide to change their actions. From their individual perspectives, they at least have a more real idea of who they are. As the paederast

affirms to himself in the above quotation, his actions do define him, in the sense that his past is unchangeable and separated from his present by nothingness; it would be foolish to take the idea of the present as ontologically separate to mean that an individual is fully absolved from his past with every new opportunity for action. In a courtroom, Sartre says, "we require of [a defendant] that he recognize himself as *being* this guilty one" even though this defendant is not committing the crime while in front of the judge and jury (*Being and Nothingness* 107). Rather than either becoming mired in society's judgment that an individual is what he was, or becoming wrapped up in the transcendent attitude that only the "now" defines a person, Sartre's idea of bad faith puts a person in the present in charge of herself, but keeps with her the responsibilities for her past, not as a burden, but more as an example by which she can decide how to take action in that present moment. Past actions cannot be a burden because they do not limit her ontologically in the present. They should only be seen as burdensome if their effects spill over into the present. For instance, the gambler cannot forget about his gambling debts just because he gives up his habit, but he can reinterpret his past to see these debts as a small price to free himself from this painful addiction.

It might seem harder to find a sense of joy from Sartre's assertion that each person needs to be tied to his past, and that no matter what he does, it is an inescapable aspect of his being. However, one simply need look at the past as a series of lessons to see that having the present separated from the past can create joy in two ways. First, an individual who realizes that her mistakes are in her past will not worry about trying to take action in the present to change them, as they relate to her self-concept. This is not to say that if an individual throws wine on the carpet, it should not be cleaned up, and she

should simply look at the wine spilled as an example of what not to do next time. She should grab a towel and clean it up, and Sartre would agree. Sartre does not mean to excuse a person from her obligations in the world by the nothingness between past and present. To the contrary, he proffers an explanation of responsibility for the world each for-itself creates. Each person comes into the world as responsible for the entirety of that world, as the for-itself-ness of each person created the world in the way it is (*Being and Nothingness* 708). Therefore, each person is responsible for the world's present condition at any given point. And at any given point, there are actions a person can take to address the present while simultaneously realizing the past cannot be changed; it is in-itself. So if there is presently wine on the carpet, while Sartre will not say the spiller should clean it up, as he is hesitant to supply a concrete ethic in *Being and Nothingness*, he would say that the consequences in the present supply the first chance the spiller has to take a new course of action, something that might distance herself (in the eyes of others) from the spill in the past.

Because, in the present, there is still wine soaking into the carpet, the individual who spilled the wine still has the opportunity to make a good decision in the present. What Sartre is trying to say is that no amount of club soda and scrubbing can make that girl who threw the wine into a girl who did not throw the wine. She may be forgiven by everyone there, and the carpet may not show a stain, but the event itself is still a part of the in-itself of her being, her history, and, as the story is remembered by each person at the party, so is the spilling incident a part of their in-itself beings.

If everyone were to forget the incident, and if she, too, were to forget it, Sartre says this past would be nihilated, forgotten, nothing. It would be as if she had never thrown

the wine on the carpet that day. The only way for this possibility to occur, though, is if she discontinues throwing wine on carpets at future social gatherings.

The second way joy comes from this separation between past and present self, is in learning from mistakes as a possible change to the future. In the above example, it is possible the wine spiller may realize that she cannot do anything to change her past, but that her act of throwing wine at the party does not mean that she will throw the wine at the next party she goes to, and, inasmuch as the throwing of the wine on the carpet was under her control, she can ontologically choose not to do it at that next party, if she is invited elsewhere. She is a person who throws wine on carpets only as long as she continues to make that choice; that she is a person who *threw* wine on a carpet is an undeniable part of her history. Every new instance gives her a new chance to make a different choice, and while she cannot escape from her past, and nor should she try to deny it, she does not need to let it define her.

The distinction, moreover, of whether an action is under the control of the individual is critical to Sartre's concept of anguish. To be wary of a circumstance outside of the control of a for-itself is to experience fear; to be wary of a circumstance within that for-itself's control is to experience anguish. So if the wine thrower had no control over the throwing of her wine, or what might be called "spilling" more accurately in that case, she might experience fear over whether she would repeat this faux pas at another party. However, if she had done the action intentionally, she could experience anguish over the possibility that she could throw the wine again, as this was a part of her now-unchangeable in-itself past.

Even the person who is suffering from a more positive delusion of self from the bad faith perspective, such as the student who doesn't believe she needs to study, benefits more from realizing she is living in bad faith than she does in her state of ignorant bliss. However, it is not the goal of this paper to show she will benefit; it is the goal to show joy from Sartre's philosophy, and showing joy from the removal of bliss can only be achieved by illustrating the difference between long-term and short-term happiness. To live in ignorant bliss is, at best, a short-term happiness. True long-term happiness, or joy, comes from the for-itself's realization of its own freedom as an unchangeable aspect of individuation. The student who thinks she doesn't have to study will most likely be proven wrong eventually. Individuals living in a bad faith in which they think they are better than they are, are bound to be disappointed at some point. And while the consequences of being proven wrong might not seem catastrophic, let us take a more drastic example.

If the gambling addict mentioned before were to realize that he had the ontological choice to quit gambling and did so, that would not be living in bad faith. After years of abstaining from the table, if he were to think himself immune to its seduction that previously controlled his life, he would be in bad faith again, although in seemingly opposite circumstances from his previous bad faith. This new bad faith, while the gambler may be living a better life free from his habit, threatens to thrust him right back into addiction at any time. For the gambler to be forever free of his habit, he has to realize that he can never be forever free of it—that every time he is confronted with the possibility to gamble, he needs to make the same choice he made to give it up the first time. There will always be an ontological possibility for him to gamble; he cannot escape

that. The best he can do is to compile as his in-itself past, to the extent he can, a collection of moments in which he resists temptation.

Long-term happiness is better achieved through living a life without avoidable disappointment. Bad things happen, but when bad things happen due to personal carelessness or denials, once these things are recognized as the causes, they sting all the more. Better to live a life where one doesn't feel any guilt for the way one acts, because she knows she is not acting in bad faith than one where her happiness is artificially inflated by delusions about herself.

Joy, as distinct from misery, does not come from past actions. To be in bad faith with regard to a troubled past is to be in misery. To be in bad faith regarding a series of good events, habits or decisions is not to be in joy, but to be in delusion. The freedom to act in the now, knowing that the past cannot be changed, is joy. This joy occurs alongside anguish, to be sure, but its conspicuous absence in *Being and Nothingness* gives readers the wrong idea. The conflicting feelings within an individual are not just anguish and counter-anguish, a purely negative response to the anguish, but also joy as a positive formation in reaction to the freedom the for-itself has in the "now" moment. This kind of positive response, while not discussed in Sartre, is still limited as it is ultimately a reaction to anguish. It is counter-anguish amplified.

While it may seem that Sartre's admonition against living in bad faith leaves individuals in a state of neutrality, eschewing both the positive and negative aspects of bad faith, it still leaves a person with freedom. It is freedom, and the responsibility that pairs with it, that is unavoidable in the world, according to Sartre (*Being and Nothingness* 710 - 11). Responsibility, though, does not mean the sort of responsibility that an

individual can control. For Sartre, an individual is born into responsibility as a condition of his being a for-itself. As a for-itself consciousness in the world, Sartre claims we help author the world and therefore have this responsibility as an author; as long as we are in the world, we are responsible for it (*Being and Nothingness* 709). However, these two seemingly conflicting states of freedom and responsibility do not cancel each other out. Freedom extends beyond the reaches of responsibility, as Sartre says "for lack of getting out of the world, [one has] chosen it" (*Being and Nothingness* 708). So there is always the option not to choose it. Of course, here Sartre is talking about suicide.

Without advocating suicide, it is still important to recognize its existence as an option: the sole option that renders responsibility powerless to choice. It implies one can even take solace in the fact that there is always a level of control one has over one's life without necessarily having to exercise that option. For Camus, suicide was put forward more as a possible escape from the absurd, though it does not offer real escape. The presence of suicide within the ontological range of possibilities can be seen as something that allows for joy, rather than as something that brings despair. It is this possibility of suicide that normally creates anguish for Sartre, but anguish is just the experience of being (*Being and Nothingness* 69). So to know that at any point there is an ontological possibility of suicide does not tell a person simply that he has the chance to kill himself. It tells him he has the *choice* to kill himself. From this realization of the choice, an individual can truly know he is alive.

Perhaps here the tinge of Pollyannaish optimism has tainted the reality of the situation. Sartre clearly asserts that to be aware of suicide is to be aware one's person might no longer exist; it is to come to grips with mortality and the nothingness that death

offers (*Being and Nothingness* 73). At least this means, though realizing an eventual mortality, there is a here and now in which that person can act realizing she is truly alive. To escape bad faith is to escape a world in which a person "makes himself such that he is *waited for* by all the tasks placed along his way" (*Being and Nothingness* 796). He instead realizes he has a past, but keeps it in his past, and instead acts within the freedom he realizes he has—a sense of joy in his heart. Every moment of every day, he can realize he is not the person he was yesterday, and can make today a better one than the one before, looking back on his failures as things to avoid and his successes as things to emulate, but always freely living in the present. Joy can hardly be called an inevitability given this construction; it may be thought of as little more than an ontological possibility. Nonetheless in order for any kind of probabilistic account, more must be done than this.

Joy in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* is only as unattainable as freedom is realizable. That is not to say joy is inevitable, as bad faith is the default position for many for-itselfs in the world today. Joy is not even likely for a majority of these people. But, just as Sartre would say each individual living in bad faith has the opportunity to awaken from this pattern of action, so, too should he say that anyone has the ontological possibility of realizing his freedom, and the joy that can come from that realization. Just realizing the chance to escape responsibility is to recognize freedom as superior to it. To live recognizing this freedom at every point may be tiring, but with this inevitable fatigue, responsibility and anguish comes eventual joy, making everything worth it.

3.4 Sartre through the lens of *Sisyphus*

Leaving joy in terms of ontological possibility rather than predictive likelihood does little to advance it beyond David Hume's famous arguments that the sun might not rise the next morning. It is a possible state of existence, and an interesting philosophical exercise, but not a reason to short-sell stocks in solar power. That Camus' *Sisyphus* shows existentialism as a philosophy of more than ontological possibility, but provides a specific example of how a life can be lived in joy in the face of the highest absurdities is among the text's greatest strengths. In this section, I will look at how the concepts in Sartre applied above more abstractly, when discussing an ontological possibility of joy, can be more concretely developed within Sartre's early philosophy with the help of Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*.

While Sartre has a penchant for explaining his concepts through examples and anecdotes, no doubt a part of the phenomenological process, he does not address the Sisyphus myth particularly[28]. Had he brought Sisyphus under his purview, he might have seen interesting implications for his discussions of bad faith, being-for-itself and freedom.

If a waiter is in bad faith when playing as a waiter, or a gambler in bad faith when he believes his past cannot have sway on the actions of the present or future, where in between these is Sisyphus? We could imagine Sisyphus in three conditions: Sisyphus in bad faith in the face of the past, in bad faith in the face of the future or in genuine good faith. To be sure, the paederast who claims that his past and his "essence" as one who prays on children defines him in such a way that he cannot control his actions is in bad faith with regard to the freedom he actually may have in breaking from his past.

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[28] Sartre does take a Greek mythological subject in *The Flies*, his take on the commonly told Electra story.

In this vein, it could be that Sisyphus, when confronted with his future prospects of rolling the boulder up the hill could react to that future much as does the paederast: in bad faith. He could say that his job is to roll the boulder up the hill, and he will do it, just as he has done it before because it was something he has done before—that he is but a roller of boulders and so lacks any responsibility for his actions; it is outside of his control. This Sisyphus allows his mind to be empty, and would not blame the gods for his condition. He could acknowledge that the gods where the ones who set up his eternal torment, but there would be a sense in which he adopted and internalized their decree. Even as he rolled the stone forever, he could not adopt the position of rebellion that Camus asserts is essential for any chance at happiness. There would be no defiance, no spark in his eye nor fire in his belly.

Sisyphus would undoubtedly prefer the outlook of the gambler here, and adopt another kind of bad faith: one that is based on an overestimation of the freedoms that an individual has. Just as a gambler believes that his past does not define him and that has a mentality that this time at the tables will be different—either he will abstain from gambling altogether, he believes, or will be able to act in moderation where before he did not—so, too, could Sisyphus be in this kind of bad faith[29].

For Sisyphus, this could manifest in a number of ways, but the most likely is an unjustified optimism where he says to himself and genuinely believes that, after countless times of his boulder falling down the hill the particular attempt will be *different*, that *this* time the boulder will not slip, and he will be able to push it to the top. This is not to say

[29] This kind of bad faith would resemble what is called in popular culture "living in denial," and is usually recognized by those around the individual as an impediment to change. Consider here the cliché "the first step is admitting you have a problem."

that there is nothing to be said for optimism, especially in the face of dire circumstances. The problem, though, is that Sisyphus' strength does not come from his denial of his condition, in Camus, but rather stems from the acknowledgement of his condition, and those who put him there—through rebellion.

Those responsible for Sisyphus's punishment are two-fold: the gods, undoubtedly, but also himself. It would be a kind of bad faith as well to push the responsibility for his torture entirely onto those who imprisoned him, for, even though different mythological accounts tell the story differently, there is consensus that Sisyphus must have done something to be so punished. While cursing the gods, then, Sisyphus must also curse himself, the past self whose in-itself history cannot be changed, but must not be relied upon for the future. When Sisyphus considers his past, he does so in order to determine what he will do, or what he will be. This split is inherent to the distinction in bad faith between the present circumstances of agent of action and the unalterable past. Moreover, it is here that our analysis must for the first time delve into some of Sartre's later work in the first volume of *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

3.5 Temporality, *Critique* and *Sisyphus*

Sartre famously ends *Being and Nothingness* with a promise of an ethical text to come. Almost as famously, this text was never delivered. While Sartre does sketch out an idea of ethics in his notebooks, any systematic conception is left for future scholars to interpret or extrapolate from his metaphysical and political works. Perhaps the ethics never emerged because values themselves are not objective in Sartre's existential philosophy. However, a statement like this cannot ever be entirely true. Trite though it

may be, "there are no absolutes" is itself an absolute and "tolerance" cannot permit "intolerance." Therefore, Sartre does have a value system insofar as there is a value that supports his claim that values are not objective. This value is likely some form of freedom of consciousness, as it is this freedom of consciousness that is essential for a for-itself to reflect back on the conditions of its own existence.

Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is often thought a break from the strong metaphysical foundation he laid in *Being and Nothingness*. In his earlier text, Sartre gives a coherent understanding of the world that is, more important, consistent with itself through his ideas of Bad Faith, the Other and negation. In *Critique,* on the other hand, Sartre's emphasis is on the political, and therefore this later work does not use much of the language Sartre coined in the earlier essay. Sartre very rarely in *Critique* utilizes his existing ontological structures forged in *Being and Nothingness*; instead, he merely reapplies his terms—loosely—to a new political formation:

> For those who have read *Being and Nothingness*, I can describe the foundation of necessity as practice: it is the For-itself, as agent, revealing itself initially as inert or, at best, as practico-inert, in the milieu of the In-itself. Fundamental alienation does not derive, as *Being and Nothingness* might mislead one into supposing, from some prenatal choice: it derives from the univocal relation of interiority which unites man as a practical organism with his environment. (Sartre *Critique of Dialectical Reason* 227-28 n. 68)

One thing Sartre fails to fully reconcile between *Being and Nothingness* and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is his notion of temporality, or how the present interacts

dynamically with both past and future while still being separated from them by nothingness. He does discuss temporality, but a fundamentally different, reciprocal temporality in *Critique*. Ironically, in this section Sartre says, "the importance of temporality cannot be overemphasized" (*Critique of Dialectical Reason*). I could not agree more, but for the examination of bad faith within the individual, Sartre's notion of temporality in *Being and Nothingness* will prove more fruitful than that in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*.

While Sartre devotes an entire chapter of his metaphysical corpus to temporality, the notion of future as possibility is actually addressed before this when he claims, "the For-itself cannot appear without being haunted by the value and projected towards its own possibilities" (*Being and Nothingness* 147). To be sure, the For-itself is never truly situated within the present, for then it "would become an In-itself" (*Being and Nothingness* 147). The For-itself's position in the future is one of discerning its possibilities for existence.

For Sisyphus, these possibilities are remarkably few, but this is all the more reason that the choices he does have are so important. For every moment of Sisyphus' existence there is a tripartite division of him. There is the past in which Sisyphus spurned the gods in some way to earn, whether fairly or unfairly, his punishment, along with the more recent past of every past time he attempted to roll his boulder up the hill with it inevitably crashing down again. There is the present moment of consideration. There is the future, where possibilities, however few, fan out before him, and Sisyphus will choose one of these to realize, letting the others slip into what never was. What is key here is that

Sisyphus does have a choice. For Camus, this choice is the mindset Sisyphus can have at every moment. He can curse the gods, or he can remain complacent.

This separation of future from present has implications on how individuals make decisions in the present. In any conscious action, an actor must decide to take an action before actually doing so. This decision is always preceded by consideration, and the acknowledgement of an alternative, which must be negated. Because, for Sartre, existence is wholly present—a person is never his past, nor can he be his future—making a decision is more than simply choosing between the status of the In-itselfs in the world (normally the direct objects of the actions of choice); it is instead the creation of one future person, insofar as the present is separate from the future, at the expense of all of the other possible persons who could exist. To live either in the past or the future without placing emphasis primarily on the present opens one up to the bad faith I mention above with the paederast or the gambler. In the language of *Being and Nothingness*, the present For-itself is forced to consider the possibilities of future For-itselfs—some never to be realized, some simply not yet realized. However, none of these For-itselfs exist in the present moment. Sartre explains it in this way:

> In this sense the [present] For-itself has to be its future because it can be the foundation of what is only before itself and beyond being…this future is not *realized*. What is realized is a For-itself which is *designated*….I am my future in the constant perspective of the possibility of not being it. (*Being and Nothingness* 185 – 86)

So it would seem that a present For-itself, being radically separated from the future For-itself which the consequences of the present For-itself's actions would truly affect,

could never act in a way consistent with its own preservation or freedom. On the other hand, individuals can and do act. This is because simply being separated from the future by nothingness is not enough to convince the For-itself into doubting its future existence. Even as the specter of nothingness hangs over the future, there is never a question for the present For-itself of whether this threat of non-existence is in fact hanging over it or over some unrelated future For-itself. It is always at risk of negation. The present recognizes itself in the future, and acts to effect the best possible future For-itself that it can.

There is no question what Sisyphus' physical future will be; he will roll his rock, just as he has rolled it countless times in the past. However, he has the possibility of making decisions in the present that will, in the future bring him joy. If he decides that one particular groove in his rock as it passes under his hands is his favorite, he is setting up a future where he will feel some small happiness at each subsequent revolution of his burden. If he decides to look forward to the rock's slipping as a relief of the weight against him, rather than dread it as a symbol of the futility of his task, he will have built into his labor a kind of respite however brief.

In this respite, in the moments between his torment, he can find joy if he chooses. As always, it is not guaranteed to him. The only thing that is guaranteed about his future is that that future is not guaranteed. This does not mean that Sisyphus' rock may simply disappear. The facts of his punishment remain as a part of the facticity of his current existence. What choice he does have, though, is the choice of how to react to the indelible facts of his existence for all time. He must choose how to act, given his circumstances, in the way that he believes best for himself at that moment. However, this is different from self-interest.

In *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre is very meticulous in claiming that there is no self-interest, primarily because there is no self. No concrete notion of the identity of a person follows from past into present into future. Sartre readily acknowledges that actions we may take in the present become a part of our past; they are unchangeable, and a part of us. While I may leave my status, my past and my old decisions in that past, there is still the canvas upon which each of these was previously drawn. Put another way, in the past, I have acted with my future in mind to effect my present circumstances. There has been a continuous something of me that has to have existed for that to be possible. Likewise, I will not shoot myself in the foot as if the For-itself that will exist in the future will not be bleeding. As a For-itself existing at this moment, I may realize that there is a nothingness separating my past from my present and my future, but this does still mean that these are *my* past, present and future. This Sartre affirms in *Being and Nothingness* when he appropriates the Cartesian *cogito* in explaining For-itself existence (*Being and Nothingness* 158).

We, like Sisyphus, make decisions in a way for our future, rather than our present selves. In doing so, one of the first things we must do is to realize that, in order for our future selves to be well off, we must first act to preserve those selves. It is in this way that Sartre's discussion of temporality does open up a possible argument against his earlier assertion that there is nothing preventing us from throwing ourselves over the precipice. Ourselves themselves are the primary preventer of self-nihilation—not our present, wholly free selves, but instead the future that we wish to create for our future for-itself consciousness to live in and thrive.

It is not, therefore a kind of self-interest, but rather an interest in the stake of an individual that comes from us. It is almost more of a parenting instinct than anything else. Each of us makes the best future for someone who is the closest to ourselves in the future.

The being of a For-itself at any moment is radically divorced from the one before by the nothingness separating a past For-itself from its inevitability of present: it is radically free. Therefore, when deciding how to act, that actor must choose between contingent possibilities of For-itself. The possibilities of self are, as Sartre defines possibilities in *Being and Nothingness,* "new aspect[s] of the nihilation of the In-itself in For-itself" (Sartre *Being and Nothingness* 152). When making a decision, a For-itself is adequately self-reflective to predict future possibilities at a level stronger than mere ontological possibility into probability. This is how it escapes from the anguish of potential negation. Of course, when doing so, the actor weighs the consequences of the actions (or, more accurately, the future created by potential choices of actions) and takes the one that creates what the actor considers to be a best outcome.

More specifically, it is likely that this calculus is most often a kind of utility calculus, in so far as decisions would create more optimal For-itself conditions[30]. In the very act of choosing, though, that actor must condemn the other projections of the For-itself to non-existence. Only one future For-itself will exist; the others must be cast aside. From the first action the truly self-reflective conscience takes, it must sentence to death,

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[30] English mathematician and theologian Thomas Bayes is popularly credited with the creation of probability decisions made under conditions of uncertainty. Expected utility outcomes of a considered action are multiplied by their relative probabilities of occurrence. If the sum of these actions' utility multiplied by their probabilities is positive, then the action is considered to have an overall positive expected utility outcome and the action is worth taking. Of course, neither a numerical utility value for a particular outcome nor an exact probability of an outcome's occurrence is readily available for most decisions, so guesswork is often entailed.

or worse, to non-being, every potential self it does not actualize through choice. The For-itself is only able to do this because of the nothingness that exists between the present For-itself and any possible future For-itselfs. From the claim that the For-itself must negate its potentiality in order to propagate through time comes naturally the complementary idea that over time, the For-itself becomes habituated to the negation of existence it causes in possible For-itselfs.

The seeming unaccountability of the present For-itself to the potential manifestations of For-itselfs in the future is checked back by the regret the present For-itself wished to avoid. In this sense, regret functions much as does Sartre's notion of anguish functions with regard to non-existence. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre posits that an individual For-itself is never ontologically certain of its continued existence. Any action could be its last; every action could be the cause of its destruction. To the extent that an individual avoids taking actions in response to this ontological uncertainty, that individual is in anguish. In the same way that the possibility of a future of non-existence can have an effect on the present For-itself, so can the possibility of a sub-optimal future mediate the present and the future.

It is no wonder, then, that the joy that Camus says Sisyphus can find is the kind of joy that is entirely based in the individual moment. Sisyphus curses the gods, and in doing so feels a sense of relief, or vindication at that moment. He does not do anything that will bring long term joy, or respite from his task—perhaps these are not options for him. This is a way in which Camus' joy is fundamentally limited; it is wholly an

immanent joy[31]. Actions taken with only the immanent considerations of the present manifestations of an individual "self" are often the basis of more long-term disappointments.

Regret is the future self's censure of the present self (when future has become present, and present has shifted to past). The fear of regret limits the present self as a kind of anguish; any future For-itself has no real check on the present For-itself's actions, but the threat of regret, like the threat of negation, can limit freedom and cause the present self to act out of fear for the future. In many cases, the possibility of future regret is enough to affect present judgment. Having one more drink at the bar, buying a sports car on impulse, or storming into your boss's office in a fit of rage are all things that perhaps a person would like to do in the present moment, but, when looking to the future, the shadow cast back through time to the present is palpable. We can imagine, for instance, if in cursing the gods, Sisyphus were to be given a slightly heavier stone as a further punishment.

The present always serves the future because the future will soon become present and prioritized as For-itself. The past is always both cast aside and retained for Sartre; what a person was in the past, he was, and this cannot be changed. However, this never dictates what he must do in the present, nor what he must become in the future. The future, as always becoming present, owes to the present its existence, but as soon as the present becomes past and the future becomes present, this gratitude is replaced with an idea of obsolescence. The oath between present and future is unidirectional, just as is the

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[31] In my chapter on Kierkegaard I spend more time discussing the difference between immanent and transcendent joy. I argue there that it is Kierkegaard who captures any kind of lasting joy more reliably that either Nietzsche or certainly Camus.

oath from members of a group to the group itself in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. There is no recourse for the individual For-itself if the group fails to represent its interests but to leave the group. This is not an option the present For-itself has with regard to its future possibilities except possibly through suicide, and therefore in a sense, leaving itself. In this same sense, the present is subservient to the future, except of course, when it is not; then the future censures the present as best as it can.

If we instead bring the ontological possibility of Sisyphus' choice into the realm of predictive likelihood here, it is likely that for Sisyphus joy in the face of the absurd is not just one choice among many (or few, depending on perspective); it is instead the optimal choice, the best choice, and therefore becomes the likely choice for a present for-itself to glean what joy he can from the absurd situation of existence[32]. His choices are so few within the constraints of his punishment that it becomes easier to analyze and compare them with each other to find the one that would likely maximize Sisyphus' happiness.

This is a joy through rebellion, and is the same joy that is available in Sartre's philosophy. Without a doubt, *Being and Nothingness* emphasizes freedom, but the political realities Sartre discusses in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* make it equally clear that this is not a physical freedom available to all people—the world is not fundamentally oriented towards fairness. What remains, then, is the very freedom of consciousness that allows Sisyphus his rebellion and the subsequent joy that can come from it.

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[32] To prevent essentializing this kind of response to one's condition in the world, it is important to bear in mind that joy remains an option among many possible interactions to the world. The key here is the freedom that every conscious individual has in choosing how she or he will interact with the world that, for Camus, is always absurd, and for Sartre, offers little to prevent self-nihilation. Of course, for Camus suicide itself is absurd, and so here he, without prescribing the action of self-preservation, at least goes much farther than Sartre in advocating life.

CHAPTER 4. THE ALTERNATIVE TO THE GNASHING OF TEETH

4.1 Nietzsche's Eternal Return of the Same and Infinite Possibility for Joy

Of all of the existential philosophers, without a doubt Friedrich Nietzsche leaves the most explicit room for joy in his philosophy. Besides that, in his texts the word is used expressly; complementary ideas of laughter and gayness (happiness) abound. In this chapter, I examine the way Nietzsche discusses laughter and joy, and analyze the way these terms are used as opposed to how these same ideas, if not the terms themselves, have above shown themselves in Sartre and Camus.

For Nietzsche, there are two different kinds of joy that he brings into his texts. There is the kind of joy that can be discussed in terms of light-heartedness, triviality or a general nonchalance, and there is the joy which comes from the very opposite: the realization of eternity. The first is obvious joy, but is meaningless; the second is obvious meaning, but will require some work, and ultimately the help of Kierkegaard to suss out as true joy.

Nietzsche claims "life ought to be loved," though he claims that those who have tried to give a reason for this, the teachers of ethics, are ultimately vanquished by laughter (*Genealogy of Morals* I:1). This laughter is meant to be the counter to traditional philosophy. This, in a sense, means that it is itself philosophical, though not in the traditional sense. If laughter is seen as a counterpoint rather than a dismissal of

argument, then it gains a kind of meaning within the scope of the philosophy it is rebutting. A closer reading of *The Gay Science* shows Nietzsche's thought on the issue: it is not that laughter and philosophy are mutually exclusive, but rather that the future of philosophy lies with laughter.

4.2 Laughing at the Darkness in *The Gay Science*

Nietzsche writes *The Gay Science* from a place of laughter. Besides the title, in the first section of the text, Nietzsche believes that "perhaps laughter has a future," so long as philosophical inquiry is pursued and it "forms an alliance with wisdom" (I:1). History had been characterized by the Hegelian historical movement between laughter and wisdom—a pendulum swinging back and forth between extremes, but yet unable to meet in synthesis. Before Nietzsche, one seemed to preclude the other; the popularity of wisdom would grow more and more totalizing until more people were laughing at it than understanding it. This kind of laughter, as it is normally conceived, is not any kind of intellectual endeavor. Though Nietzsche might reject the Biblical comparison, "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity." Ecclesiastes 7:6 (KJV). He makes a similar claim: "in Germany, higher men lack one great means of education: the laughter of higher men; for in Germany, these do not laugh" (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* III:177). The kind of laughter that is both foolish and plentiful is not a kind of joy, but rather a putting down of knowledge. A philosophy that contains within it a kind of laughter, would in a sense preempt this natural reaction of derisive dismissal by a skeptical majority.

There is a significant difference between the kind of laughter that Nietzsche discusses here and any kind of laughter that could be said to stand in for, or at least be concurrent with joy. Laughing at something, in the way presented in the text, is the tactic of a schoolyard bully or the fox that says the grapes he cannot have must be sour in any case. This kind of laughter, the laughter of fools, is neither desirable nor joyful; it is all too common in Nietzsche's time as well as throughout history both before and after his life. Moreover, it is not just the laughter of humanity that puts great ideas down, but also the laughter of nature itself.

The truth of certain conditions of the human experience reveals itself with time. Time, too, has often eroded the edifices of scientific theory and philosophic truths. This kind of laughter from nature is reflected in the Yiddish proverb: "man plans and God laughs." It is the idea that no matter how sure humanity is about something, that alone is not a guarantee of the future[33].

To an extent, though, laughing at the human condition is not unlike the kind of rebellion that Camus mentions as the reaction to the absurd. Just as Camus says that joy can be found in rebellion and rejection of the situation one finds oneself in, so does the laughter of the fools in Nietzsche come as a response—one choice amongst many—to the truth of the human condition. There remains an important distinction. For Nietzsche, this laughter is not always conscious the way rebellion is in Camus. Rebellion must be knowledgeable about its subject; laughter does not have to be. It is conceivable that the

[33] The popular panic over the supposed computer issue "Y2K" comes to mind here. Many people thought, and this fear was spun into a kind of panic thanks to the popular media, that because the shift to the year 2000 was not planned for in computer date systems that only had 2 variables for the date (i.e. 19XX instead of XXXX) that systems would break down with the turning of the year. This neglected to happen on any large scale. More recently, the end of the Mayan calendar in December of 2012 had some thinking the world would end with it, yet here we are.

laughter of the fool is so called specifically because the fool is ignorant of that at which he or she is laughing. It is from someone who laughs at the idea of philosophy, rather than at a particular philosophy itself.

The laughter that is meant to replace the laughter of the fool, on the other hand, is much more compatible with Camus. Nietzsche asserts that a philosophy that incorporates laughter can bridge the historical divide. Laughter, for the most part needs an object—something that makes the subject laugh. If we are to abandon the fool laughing at an act of learning, little is left except to laugh at the knowledge that the learning reveals. The new laughter would therefore be at the conditions of existence, of what Camus would characterize as the absurdity of that existence. This is not to say that there was understanding in the works of these authors. Camus openly rejected Nietzsche, and Nietzsche, while his earlier life did not afford him the opportunity to respond directly to Camus, did levy criticism at Camus' way of doing philosophy (*The Rebel*, 71*)*.

Camus did not extend this courtesy to his understanding of Nietzsche's work. He calls this rejection of both the traditional laughter as well as the traditional learning as a kind of nihilism—that nothing can have meaning in the face of these two options foreclosed. Nietzsche would object to Camus' interpretation of his philosophy as nihilistic. More than that, there is a real sense in which the way Camus constructs his philosophy would be distasteful to Nietzsche, as the latter presents these differences in method in *Genealogy of Morals*.

While *Genealogy* is primarily the account of Nietzsche's philological theory regarding the rise in popularity of the Christian religion in ancient Rome, there is a common thread in Camus' account of joy in *Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*. Nietzsche

believed that Christianity, a religion based in the reversal of the traditional virtue ethics of the age, grew in popularity amongst the slave classes of the Roman Empire precisely because of the value it placed on characteristics the classes already had by virtue of their condition:

> The revolt of the slaves in morals begins in the very principle of *resentment* becoming creative and giving birth to values—a resentment experienced by creatures who, deprived as they are of the proper outlet of action, are forced to find their compensation in an imaginary revenge (*Genealogy of Morals* I:10).

This resentment is of the slaves for their masters, but it also captures the kind of resentment Camus shows in Sisyphus towards the gods. Because *Sisyphus* is meant to be archetypal, it follows that this kind of resentment is more widespread, and representative of something essential to the human condition. The rebellion that Camus talks about in *Sisyphus* and elsewhere comes from this kind of resentment of what Sartre would call the facticity of human experience—the unchangeable overpowering institutions that limit human freedom. If our joy is to come from spurning these, then in a sense we are Nietzsche's slaves, creating a morality out of the hatred we feel for those more powerful than we are. Moreover, in Nietzsche, this kind of hatred is ultimately unproductive; it does not try to change the system that oppresses.

Nietzsche adds, in *Genealogy*, that any morality that comes out of resentment or that comes from an already existing condition and the "cauldron of unsatisfied hatred," rather than arising organically, is lesser for it (*The Gay Science* I:1). The weaker is

dependent on the stronger to have someone to hate. Any ethos based on reaction is always subservient to that which is stronger and more permanent.

Nietzsche's laughter is not the same as this kind of laughter he sees playing out historically according to the Hegelian historical path of dialectic that Nietzsche proposes at the beginning of *The Gay Science*. He does not laugh at wisdom, but rather sees wisdom itself as a kind of laughter. It is joyful in and of itself, and not, therefore requiring of an object in the way that Camus' rebellion is. It maintains an object, as it must in the transitive sense, even if that object is ultimately itself[34]. This kind of laughter that does not have derision as its cause is therefore open to a cause in a more positive mental state—possibly even a state of joy. Though the common laughter of most people who are not reflecting on the conditions of their existence is the kind of laughter that is a laughing at something or someone, the drive to laugh at the realization of people's own existence through knowledge is both ingrained and not undesirable[35].

Nonetheless, Nietzsche does not say that humanity should stop trying to account for the world around them, and about their own existence. In fact, it is a peculiarity of the human condition that "man must from time to time believe he knows *why* he exists" (*The Gay Science* I:1). Of course, for Nietzsche, as well as for the other existentialists, this question invites a kind of essentialist framing that would not yield an acceptable answer. Rather, the answer to this question is personal, and the search for meaning is the purpose

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[34] There is a parallel between this kind of self-referential laughter and the reflecting for-itself consciousness of Sartre: both cause a kind of separation between the reflecting and the reflected upon. For Nietzsche, existence itself causes this laughter that is laughter at that same existence, but in its existence it must bifurcate what seemed a unified conception.

[35] This is a further connection to Sartre, this time with his idea of bad faith. Just as an individual can choose to live in bad faith and resign himself to—even if temporarily—a kind of in-itself existence, so, too does Nietzsche believe that most people are laughing at other things in the world than themselves. They make others the object of their affection and derision so as not to have to turn that focus inward and confront themselves.

for each of our lives. Moreover, noteworthy in Nietzsche's construction is that there must be times when it is not the case that man must believe he knows why he exists. There is room for ignorance. While it was previously the case that laughter and wisdom traded off prominence, it could be said here, too, that the periods that do not demand knowledge are instead the joyful times—or at least those prone to this kind of ignorant laughter he discusses earlier. However, just as laughter must again give way to wisdom, so must ignorance make way for knowledge. The cycle repeats itself as long as laughter and wisdom are distinct, that is, until Nietzsche.

As a philologist, it is no wonder that the idea of reiteration plays a prominent role in his thought, as much of the classical understanding of the world was seasonal. This kind of cyclicality, though, is not itself reserved for the grand historical scale of intellectual or cultural movements. One of Nietzsche's most remembered contributions to philosophy lies in a kind of repetitive movement on the smaller scale: what is sometimes called the eternal return of the same, or the eternal recurrence; there is joy to be had here, as well. This is particularly important to the current project, as the eternal recurrence is more personal that the sweeping sociological observations of what "people" generally do. It is in the reaction to the realization of eternal recurrence that Nietzsche asserts individuals can find a lasting, authentic joy. First, of course, the eternal recurrence must be understood, and this is on its own no easy task.

4.3 Eternal Recurrence in Nietzsche

If one thing can be unarguably asserted about Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence with respect to the last forty years of critical scholarship, it is that there

are as many different interpretations of this principle as there are books about it. With that in mind, any new work done on the eternal recurrence inevitably invites the question, "which one?"[36] Are we discussing the cosmological reading in Arthur Danto or Georg Simmel? Perhaps we are viewing eternal recurrence normatively alongside Gilles Deleuze, or symbolically in company with Stambaugh or Gooding-Williams[37]. In Lawrence Hatab's *Nietzsche's Life Sentence: Coming to Terms with Eternal Recurrence*, he presents these categories of readings alongside Heidegger's ontological and the championed-by-many existential readings of Nietzsche[38]. Without a doubt, the consensus must be that there is no consensus. How, therefore, can we, as I intend to do in the next chapter, compare the idea of "Nietzsche's eternal recurrence" with Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard's idea of repetition, when the former so lacks the clarity of critical consensus?

Rather than agreeing with one particular existing notion of the eternal recurrence, in this paper I will try to forge my own idea of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, drawing on the primary texts where it is presented and relying on some of the secondary literature for support. As my goal in the short term is to compare this concept with Kierkegaard's repetition, the existential reading will be the closest to my own formulation, as it is within this construction of freedom that the possibility for joy is most consistent with what has

[36] An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to Lawrence Hatab's *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*, specifically chapter six, in which he supplies a fairly comprehensive review of the literature on the eternal recurrence that had been published in between the date of publication for this volume (2006) and his previous work on the eternal recurrence *Nietzsche and Eternal Recurrence* (1978).

[37] Stambaugh's account of eternal recurrence will be later analyzed at greater length in this essay. Her notion of temporality in Nietzsche and the implications of eternal recurrence on time are particularly illuminating, and I draw on them later, as well.

[38] Notably, none of these five categories is home to Hatab's own interpretation of the eternal recurrence as they all "seem united by the conviction that Nietzsche could not or should not have meant what he wrote" whereas he purports a more literal view of eternal recurrence (Hatab, *Nietzsche's Life Sentence*, 125).

been earlier posited. I will spend the next chapter discussing that comparison in more detail and focusing specifically on two areas of contention: the responsibility or agency an individual has for creating repetition or the eternal recurrence and the transcendence of the ego as a precondition to repetition or the eternal recurrence. Most important, I argue that Kierkegaard's repetition allows for a kind of transcendence that Nietzsche's recurrence does not. The joy found in each is fundamentally different, and the propensity for one to continue and one not to is itself a reason to try to combine the two accounts.

While the most famous presentation of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence opens part three of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche outlines the possibility of the concept in *The Gay Science* at the close of the fourth book. This first appearance of the idea is shorter and in some ways more difficult to understand. Notably, it is hard to place within Nietzsche's thought as a whole because of the conditional way it is presented. Before the section on eternal recurrence in *Zarathustra* can be fully understood, some clarifications must be made regarding this treatment in *The Gay Science*.

Nietzsche's aphorisms are not known for their consistency. In "The heaviest weight," though, Nietzsche's departure in style from statement to query raises for his readers the question of inevitability (*The Gay Science* IV:341). Rather than simply proclaiming that we are destined to live our decisions over and over again, Nietzsche asks the reader: "what if some day or night a demon were to…say 'This life…you will have to live once again'?" Of course, the question "what if a demon…?" allows for the response "well, what if a demon doesn't?" Nietzsche's choice to present this aphorism in the subjunctive mood allows for this question to arise. On more careful consideration, though, Nietzsche never says the eternal recurrence is optional or avoidable, even when

presented in this way. The only thing in question, in this aphorism, is whether Nietzsche's "you," in this case the reader, is privy to the knowledge of his condition. Nowhere in this text does Nietzsche say the demon changes anything but your awareness. Therefore, the eternal recurrence can still be seen as inevitable and unavoidable as the demon paints it. Conditionality is not a valid conclusion to draw from this presentation. Of course, Nietzsche neglects to positively assert the truth of the eternal recurrence either. Hatab highlights this expression as well, calling it "evaluative rather than factual" (*Nietzsche's Life Sentence*, 66)[39]. Adrian Del Caro, in the opening chapter of *Grounding the Nietzsche Rhetoric of Earth*, calls to the fore the rhetorical effect of just such a move when he notes, "[Nietzsche] uses the subjunctive mood for setting up the encounter with the demon as 'hypothetical'…[he] clearly wants [this formulation] to have an effect on his readers" (9). In fact, the more troubling situation would be the opposite of this hypothetical: what if you were left to live your life without knowing that your existence must repeat itself indefinitely?

In a way the visit from the demon is meant as a kindness. Nothing about the visit changes the facts of existence of human experience. On the contrary, the revelatory nature of the demon simply confirms that which is already happening. Just as Sartre says that we can live in bad faith, and that some people will spend the entirety of their life in this kind of denial about the truth of existence, we have to consider in Nietzsche the countless other lives not visited by the demon that night who would simply be left to live

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[39] Perhaps Nietzsche formulates the aphorism in this way to hedge against his critics, or to test the waters. He may not have been ready to defend this notion in its fullest form at the time he wrote *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche never really shied away from controversial statements, though, so it may be a solely artistic choice for Nietzsche to have presented it the way he did. Still, as a thinker, Nietzsche would not have had the same influence on the history of philosophy if he had asked the saint in *Zarathustra* "what if God were dead?"

their lives as they see fit—ignorant of the truth of the eternal recurrence. The problem with the formulation in the subjunctive in *Gay Science* is that it leaves this ambiguous: what precisely is the "if?" Is the "if" meant to mean that it could be the case that the demon tells you something, or is it meant to mean that life could be structured this way, but might not be? Fortunately, he answers this ambiguity in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.*

Zarathustra more directly answers the question of the inevitability of the eternal recurrence in "The Vision and the Riddle" in part three of the book. The way Nietzsche formulates eternal recurrence is again open to interpretation as to the necessity of the condition. First of all, Zarathustra's interaction with the dwarf is in a dream he has. Second, even the way he speaks to the dwarf is mostly in questions—somewhat out of character for a figure who, elsewhere in the book, is not afraid to make claims without seeking approval or agreement from his audience. Still, the language Zarathustra uses reveals much when he asks the dwarf, "must not all of us have been here before…must we not return eternally?" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*). What separates this kind of question from the questions in *Gay Science* is that these later questions are meant as rhetorical. What is crucial to single out is the word "must" Zarathustra uses twice here, and several more times in the preceding analysis that brings him to this conclusion. The word "must" makes the strength of the truth necessary rather than contingent; this effectively removes the doubt that may still linger after the formulation in *The Gay Science*. At the end of this section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, there is no longer any question over whether eternal recurrence happens to be the case, could be the case or must be the case. Nietzsche vehemently advocates the latter when he says "the eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!" (Nietzsche, *The*

Gay Science, IV:341). We can imagine here the countless other "specks of dust" as people who are not aware of the recurring nature of the universe, yet are doomed to live in it. The existence of the eternal recurrence is not an individual construct, or in any way dependent on the subject. It requires a specific concept of time to allow for the recurrence of every moment eternally, or at least a specific concept of "the moment." The subjunctive mood has been formalized into indicative.

4.4 Temporality and Eternal Recurrence

It is not simply that time repeats. In fact, Nietzsche dismisses this in *Zarathustra,* and insists instead that there is a more complicated understanding of cyclicality to consider:

> "All that is straight lies," murmured the dwarf contemptuously. "All truth is crooked, time itself is a circle."
>
> "You spirit of gravity!" I said, angrily. "Do not make it too easy on yourself!"
>
> (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 3 "On the Vision and the Riddle" 2).

Inexorably tied to Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence is a notion of temporality or the nature of time. Obviously, if the eternal recurrence is to be believed, then time cannot be a linear progression of one event to the next without concern for pattern. In answering the question of repetition of time in Nietzsche, what we are really attempting to answer is how much time must recur. Does eternal recurrence call for a kind of daily reiteration as in the movie "Groundhog Day", or a more classically Greek notion of the repetition of the seasons year after year? Either of these, or any other

concept of the true repetition of a period of time over and over, becomes paradoxical in the face of free will. If time is truly cyclical, then choice gives way to total determinism; the only issue that would remain would be the scale to which the repetition conforms. The question posed by the demon in *The Gay Science* of whether you would jubilate or despair in the face of the prospect of the eternal recurrence is able to be answered by the way you reacted *the last time the demon came and revealed that knowledge*. If time is cyclical, and history in every case repeats itself literally, then we are doomed to live a life that may have been chosen once but is now set in the furrows worn into the ground of time by endless prior reiterations[40].

Nietzsche presents this dilemma in *Zarathustra* when he has Zarathustra ask his dwarven tormentor "and if everything has already been here before…must this gateway [moment] too not already—have been here?" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 3 "On the Vision and the Riddle" 2). Nietzsche does not have the dwarf provide a satisfactory answer to this question. If the recurrence of time is a literal, material recurrence, then every moment that is has been already, and there is no choice possible. This conception of time as circular, though, is rejected by Zarathustra when he cries out, "Do not make it [the understanding of time] too easy on yourself!" as well as by Hatab and Del Caro in the secondary literature, when the latter notes "I agree with Hatab that Nietzsche objected to 'representing this totality of Time 'spatially,' i.e. as a circle" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 3 "On the Vision and the Riddle" 2; Del Caro 245).

[40] The historical cyclicality Nietzsche believes in has already been discussed above, but more than a necessary oscillation between laughter and wisdom, history is truly characterized by the relationship between the weak and the strong, and the subsequent overthrow of Classical morality by Judeo-Christianity. He discusses this at length in the opening of *Genealogy of Morals*.

Just as Nietzsche sees certain repeating oppositional themes throughout history of strength versus weakness or laughter versus wisdom without neglecting the systematic changes brought about by events like the French Revolution or the fall of Rome, so does he here acknowledge both the repeating nature of certain kinds of existence, while others must invariably progress towards something new.

Every alternative to the "circular" way of seeing time that posits a literal amount of time to be repeated suffers the same fate. In order to avoid this problem, two solutions present themselves. First, we can claim that eternal recurrence is only a metaphor, akin to the Kantian categorical imperative in which we ought to act *as though* our action were infinitely repeated (Hatab 120-21). Second, and more appealingly, we can salvage eternal recurrence's literal meaning by claiming that there is some reiterated condition, but not a material condition. History repeats itself, but it always repeats itself differently. It can be true that every moment can recur eternally, while being different from every other moment, as long as there is some aspect of each that does recur. Joan Stambaugh in *The Problem of Time in Nietzsche* claims, "the moment does not recur in a temporal series, but comes in eternity again to eternity" (Stambaugh 197).

There is further evidence Nietzsche did not intend for his concept of eternal recurrence to be taken as a literal material condition:

> Everything has been there innumerable times in so far as the total situation of all forces always recurs. *Apart from that,* whether anything identical has occurred is completely indemonstrable. It seems that the total situation forms qualities anew down to the smallest constituent so that the two

> different total situations cannot have anything identical (Nietzsche *Works* 12:51, as cited in Stambaugh *The Problem*, 159).

What is the aspect, then, that does recur, if not physical circumstance? In order for the eternal recurrence in Nietzsche to have any meaning there must, at least, be *something* that recurs. This recurrence cannot happen occasionally or within limit. There must be something that *necessarily* recurs, in order for that recurrence to be eternal. If the material is at best a contingent recurrence, then surely this is insufficient.

The clue to this is presented in the beginning of *The Gay Science*. Just as the human condition, in so far as it can be essentialized, requires from time to time a search for meaning, there is cyclicality to wisdom and ignorance of it. The building up and tearing down of meaning is not a gradual process, but rather it is always repeating itself for each person. Every new moment is a chance for each person to decide what his or her life will be. Then a new moment presents the same new choice immediately after this, and the former moment is rendered both permanent and insignificant. It remains permanent as the present changes to past, and that present moment of changeable "is" becomes an enduring "was" that can never have been otherwise. On the other hand, just as the present gives way to the past in this sense, so must a new present take its place. There is never any moment besides the present in which one can live, at least in Sartrean good faith. Therefore, there is a sense in which each moment is lost to the pressure of the new choice that must be made regarding that new moment. If we must live in the present, then to an extent, it is the present that matters most. But even this new present moment is destined to become past, permanent, and in a way insignificant.

This necessarily repeated aspect is choice. If every humanly observed moment allows for a human choice free from the trappings of material repetition, then recurrence is saved by the fact of this moderation. Repetition reliant on reiteration is an idea best left to die on the vine—it is neither conceptually possible, nor practically desirable[41]. On the other hand, a repetition of the kind Nietzsche talks about in *Gay Science* and *Zarathustra* is not only a possible construction of existential freedom, but is consistent with the kind of moralizing for which Nietzsche is known. What must recur every moment is the moment itself, and as time progresses, so, too do new moments present themselves for human action. As this is an analytic rather than a synthetic proposition, it can safely be said that the identification of existence with choice is necessary, and to the extent that human existence continues, so, too, must choice. What repeats, more specifically, is the ontological condition of freedom that underlies our choices. This freedom, though, is dialectically opposed with the mandate to choose; the lack of freedom comes insofar as we do not have the option to "opt out" of eternal recurrence. In a sense, we are condemned to be free, to use Jean-Paul Sartre's language[42]. Our choice consists in precisely the choice Nietzsche puts forward in *The Gay Science*: we can either jubilate in our freedom or gnash our teeth and curse our existence (or even end it). Neither of these will change the reality of eternal recurrence, but we may shape our future as we see fit.

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[41] In *Repetition*, Kierkegaard comes much to the same conclusion. I discuss this more in that chapter below.

[42] In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre expands on his concept of freedom and condemnation. For Sartre, freedom comes paired with anxiety (nausea) because the divorced nature of for-itself existence from the material condition of the world makes the individual feel as though there is nothing preventing his non-existence in an ontological sense. This can be related to the above formulation of eternal recurrence insofar as we are the necessary shapers of existence. If there is always this freedom and mandate to create, there is nothing preventing me, as an actor and a chooser of the world, from creating a world in which I do not exist. I can, to again draw on Sartre's terms, throw myself down from the precipice at any time. Anxiety is also a central theme in Kierkegaard's writing, as will be explained more in the next chapter.

Jubilating in our freedom, as one of the choices to the revelation of the demon, is the closest Nietzsche gives to a true kind of joy, or at least a kind that mirrors the joy of rebellion in Camus. Though, it is somehow much stronger than this. For Camus, the joy is a joy of resignation—it is rebellion against the circumstances of existence; for Nietzsche these very circumstances are what gives humans the possibility of joy. Nietzsche's joy is not in spite of the demon's proclamation, but is in fact because of it.

This is why Camus calls Nietzsche's joy "frightful," (*The Rebel* 71). He has torn down the edifices of what meaning should not exist, and in their place allows each person to make his or her own meaning. This is wholly different from Camus who, instead of toppling gods, simply seeks to curse them. Perhaps this is quixotic on Nietzsche's part. Perhaps it is outright naivety. It is only naïve, though, if the enterprise fails. Another parallel can be drawn between this distinction between Nietzsche and Camus and another of Nietzsche's works.

Nietzsche, in *Genealogy of Morals* decries Judeo-Christianity for taking this same kind of approach. He claims that Greco-Roman morality arises organically from the facts of biological existence. As long as there is predator and prey, it is clear that strength, speed and power are valuable, and that their converse ought be avoided (*Genealogy of Morals* I:13). The weaker animals are eaten. Nietzsche extends this to humanity, and says that people ought to be powerful and strong; there is nothing valuable in weakness. However, a new morality came out of the slave classes—one that values precisely this weakness. Blessed are the poor, weak and humble, they claim. This morality, though, is not evident in nature, nor did it originate organically. Rather, it came as a response, and a hateful response at that, to the mainstream Greco-Roman beliefs. For Nietzsche, this

reactionary status is enough to undermine it; there is something inherently more desirable in ideas that are their own, rather than those that are reactions against. If nothing else, the reactions against are limited in that they are dependent on something else. They cannot stand on their own merits, but must rely on something that is often greater. If everyone is a rebel, no one is. Rebellion is against a mainstream, a majority.

Camus' joy is similarly reactionary. It comes not from itself, but instead only in response to the institutions of society that seek to impose external meaning. Sisyphus gets much of his joy from thumbing his nose at the gods, but is this kind of joy as fruitful as a joy that arises instead of its own accord? If the conditions of existence, instead of forcing an individual to strike out against them in order to be happy, themselves planted the seed for joy in each of us, surely this would be preferable. Nietzsche believes that this is precisely the nature of joy. It is not a reaction to anything outside of ourselves. It is not a reaction to what the demon in *Gay Science* section 341 tells us as some kind of new imposition placed on our life, but it is instead the realization that what the demon said is in fact a necessary and unchanging truth of our existence, and that that truth itself is what can bring about our joy.

This is not a joy of ignorance, a laughing at wisdom. Rather, this kind of joy is a joy of knowledge and wisdom. It is the synthesis Nietzsche was seeking at the beginning of *The Gay Science*; rather than the constant swing between laughter and wisdom, it is clear that for him the right kind of wisdom can engender laughter. Therefore, it is not that one must choose between a kind of blissful ignorance, and the philosophical way of life, but rather that there is the possibility for joy in knowledge. More strongly, it is the claim that the philosophical life, when properly practiced, brings about joy as the natural

reaction to the realization of its own circumstances of freedom. Its only limitation is the realization that eternal recurrence means that each of us will lose this joy in the next moment—though it can be rediscovered. As Sartre reminds us when we look over the precipice, there is nothing that would prevent us from throwing ourselves down into self-nihilation. What is even worse than this is the realization that the person who will actually have the choice to throw himself off of the cliff is not in fact me, but a future version of me whom I have never met and cannot influence from my present. No matter how much resolve a for-itself in good faith has in the moment, this is irrelevant for the next moment. This is why Nietzsche must not just posit a joyful existence, but must somehow ensure its continued joyful future. The eternal recurrence does this in part by seeking to make the reality of the present moment true for other moments as well.

Joan Stambaugh further elucidates the implications of the eternal recurrence and temporality by drawing on Nietzsche's (and Arthur Schopenhauer's) terminology of the will. The eternal recurrence is an activity of the will, in thought. For Stambaugh, "the will does not overcome time, but *reconciles* itself with it by overcoming *itself"* (Stambaugh 165). It is the task of the will to "overcome" the challenge presented to it by eternal recurrence, while remaining joyful about it. Stambaugh continues: "What is decisive in the thought of return is not about its factuality, but that it be experienced and incorporated, which in no way means that it is only a subjective hypothesis. Even its so-called factuality is just another way of *thinking* it, again, a "thought" (Stambaugh 165). For her, then, the eternal recurrence is very real but it occurs as a condition of thought within the human mind. It is inescapable—not a "subjective hypothesis—but has meaning only as a 'thought' for a thinking actor, a human being" (Stambaugh 165). How

an individual can both realize the fleetingness of the present moment as well as the infinite possibilities for joy that a stream of present moments allows remains the challenge for all existence; it is something that few humans can do for any extended period of time, and that no one can maintain forever. Still, it is in the possibility to extend this kind of self-actualizing joy that existentialism as a whole can and must offer.

The will that can overcome eternal recurrence is presented as another aspect of Nietzsche's philosophic legacy: the overman. While it is certainly true that the overman must be possessing of a will that is capable of overcoming, Nietzsche has also famously noted that history has yet to give us an overman; Goethe and Napoleon may have come closest, but even they fall short at times. To be sure, for Nietzsche joy is not the only way to measure the overman, and for these two historical figures, a kind of excellence is the litmus test. In every case, though, it is the eternal recurrence that proves the sticking point for the failure of paramount existence. Sometimes we all gnash our teeth. Sometimes freedom is too much. There are times, Sartre claims, when we are all in bad faith. To live in a purely present existence at all times would be exhausting. It would not even be desirable. It certainly is not something that any person can do, and as such does not help us to understand how to live joyfully; ought must, in this and all other circumstances, imply can. Instead of this concept of the overman, then, it may prove more fruitful to analyze the overcoming of the eternal recurrence, not as a task for the overman, but as an occasional capability of the genius as characterized by Arthur Schopenhauer[43].

[43] Schopenhauer, while illuminating, is not existentialist in the way Nietzsche is. Nor is he particularly joyful. Similar to Nietzsche, though, his philosophy offers interesting pieces and parts. The difference is

In *The World as Will and Representation*, Schopenhauer describes genius as "the ability to leave entirely out of sight our own interest, our willing, and our aims, and consequently to discard entirely our own personality for a time, in order to remain *pure knowing subject*…the clear mirror of the inner nature of the world" (Schopenhauer 185 – 86). At first glance, it may seem that by removing herself from the masses of the "non-geniuses," the genius is attempting to transcend the normal human condition[44]. However, Schopenhauer, like Nietzsche, emphasizes that the ideal is not in something external to the human condition, but is rather the nature of the world—this world, not some transcendent afterlife. Because the genius is a genius, she becomes a reflection of the meaning of the world, and the meaning of the world is revealed to be her.

If there is no overarching meaning, therefore, the genius is content in this realization. Nothing changes for this person except the knowledge of the condition. Just as when you are visited by the demon in *The Gay Science*, the situation of recurrence does not begin after its revelation. The only thing that is different is that you have knowledge of the situation that you must confront and act upon. You must react. So, too, must the genius react to her circumstances, and the reality that the rise and fall of meaning for humanity is mirrored by her own creation and destruction of meaning at every moment.

The problem with Schopenhauer's construction, though, is that, nearly to the same extent as the overman, the number of geniuses is quite small. Existentialism must, if it is

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that for Nietzsche the puzzle pieces can come together into something overall positive and joyful. This is less likely for Schopenhauer.

[44] The irony is not lost on me in referring to the hypothetical genius with female pronouns. Regardless of whether Nietzsche can be looked at today by feminists as a champion of feminine beliefs (and some do read this into Nietzsche, see Ansell-Pearson (among others)), no one extends this same courtesy to Schopenhauer.

to be taken seriously as providing a possibility for joy, be able to bring this joy to more than just the elite. At least in Nietzsche, specifically in *Zarathustra*, he tries to share the description of the overman so that more people can emulate this way of life.

In the prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the proselytizing Zarathustra implores the crowd gathered to watch the rope-walker "Let your will say: the overman *shall be* the meaning of the Earth." (Sartre *Existentialism Is a Humanism* 52) While this is not precisely Schopenhauer's formulation, it is not a far claim to assert that the purpose of the world is to create the geniuses; for Nietzsche the entirety of the French Revolution was justified because it allowed for the rise of Napoleon. This formulation of the purpose of existence, that the goal is to exemplify the meaning of the Earth, is nearly diametrically opposed to the goal professed by much of organized religion. This is particularly true if the so-called "meaning" of the Earth is, as it is in this case, that there is no meaning and value structures independent of what individuals set up for themselves at each moment of their own authentic (good faith) existence.

There is both good and bad in this construction. The good is that every moment you have the chance to begin and live anew. If the last moment was not one exercised in freedom, at least the next one can be. If the last moment was one in which the demon's pronouncement caused the gnashing of teeth, at least the next moment you can still accept the condition of the eternal recurrence as the possibility for joy. On the other hand, simply because the last moment was one in which you conquered your fear does not mean the next one will similarly be successful. Sartre separated the past from the present with an indelible nothingness that can never be traversed. The challenge is to repeat it every moment, for all time.

Without the reliance on any kind of predetermined meaning, in Nietzsche, it can be difficult to extend the joy attainable from an initial instant of realization to a more permanent way of life. This is why Nietzsche's concept of joy, while certainly robust in its way and well fleshed-out in the text, lacks the kind of staying power that is apparent in the works if Søren Kierkegaard. This is why the connection between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard is more symbiotic in this regard than between Camus and Sartre. While Sartre's philosophy can draw upon Camus to turn counter-anxiety and the ontological possibility of joy into a concrete path to it, there is little that Camus needs from Sartre in this area[45]. On the other hand, Nietzsche's sense of joy is incomplete without the Kierkegaardian transcendence that I will discuss below; just as for Kierkegaard repetition without the possibility for joy is a meaningless reiteration.

Sartre takes up this issue of transcendence in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, where he claims that humanism provides this transcendence. Sartre claims that "man is always outside of himself, and it is in projecting and losing himself beyond himself that man is realized" (*Existentialism Is a Humanism* 52). Besides the paradoxical statement that "he is himself the core and focus of this transcendence" there is little indication what this atheistic transcendence entails (*Existentialism Is a Humanism* 52). Sartre does explain this better in *Being and Nothingness*, where he elucidates his philosophy of time, and the separation between a present for-itself and a future for-itself. The present always makes decisions with the future in mind, because the present will not exist when the decision's consequences are manifested. There is an untraversable nothingness that remains

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[45] Without a doubt, Camus' philosophy did draw heavily on Sartre, de Beauvoir and other French existentialists of the period. His written works show these connections clearly. The difference is that for Camus, there is a self-contained sense in his writings (though these may be the product of intellectual collaboration, even if subconsciously, from these intellectuals).

between present and future, and the interaction between them must therefore be a transcendence of the present self to its future incarnation—the same for-itself, insofar as there is a consistent identity of any for-itself, is bot the departure and the destination of this transcendence.

This kind of transcendence, though, is not even attempted in Nietzsche. Rather than a self that projects into its future possibilities, the eternal recurrence demands attention be moved inward towards an unalterable immanence. Therefore, joy is necessarily impermanent and fleeting. The moment you realize joy is the moment it slips away from you.

CHAPTER 5. KIERKEGAARD'S MICRO-ITERATIVE REPETITION

5.1 Religious Freedom, Salvation and Joy

Søren Kierkegaard has the reputation of being the only one who could give Prince Hamlet a run for his money in for the title of "gloomiest Dane." His personal life was marred by a failed engagement and the firmly held belief that he would die before age thirty-five. He used his writings as a way to make sense of his life and his faith. There is a noticeable shift in the way Kierkegaard writes, as well as the subjects he chooses to address throughout his life. His early works in philosophy are highly personal; it is no surprise that many of thee books address the subject of love, and particularly lost love. Later in life, his writing focused more on faith, and Christianity specifically. To be sure, these same concepts are treated at length in early Kierkegaard, but there is a sense in which his earlier writings are more about the personal, rather than some of the weeping generalizations in later texts. He was a prolific writer from a young age, and often had more than one major work come out per year. Even though he died young at forty-two, he had still published more than many of the great names in the philosophical tradition. More than most, though, Kierkegaard's works are difficult to synthesize with each other, and not just because of anti-Hegelian predilections.

First, it is important to clarify that until his outing and satirizing in the Corsair magazine in 1846, Kierkegaard wrote many of his works pseudonymously[46]. In doing so, he creates each new author as independent, but familiar with the other pseudonymous creations. Therefore, the "complete picture" in Kierkegaard's early works, while it may be readily apparent to his audience, is not made explicit by the individual characters. This anonymity itself has been the subject of much critical commentary, with Chris Danta even going as far to say that the pseudonymous distancing from himself allows Kierkegaard to truly approach the text and to place himself in the literary in a way the real person, Søren Kierkegaard, could never do (2007).

It also could be said that the creation of these multiple personalities to author each of his works allowed Kierkegaard to, though the conversation created by these distinct authors, perform a kind of dialectic of their own. Wherever the authors agree, there we can say we have found the true voice of Kierkegaard, or, by virtue of their disagreement, there could some sort of a synthesized concept that emerges from thesis and antithesis. While theoretically convenient, this argument ignores the biographical fact that, according to his journals, Kierkegaard published pseudonymously in large part in order to be taken seriously while publishing at such a young age (Garff, 2005).

Nonetheless, there is a clear connection between Kierkegaard's pseudonymous early writings. Not only does he cite himself frequently in his works—which is only in part a tongue-in-cheek rhetorical move—but he tackles similar themes and ideas in many of his books. Therefore, in searching for joy in Kierkegaard, I will first have to lay a

[46] Several of his religious texts, specifically the *Edifying Discourses* were written in his own name. As such, they do not have a role in this examination of his more philosophical, pseudonymous works.

groundwork that seeks to find the common ground amongst his early works, or at least sets up the dialectic between the opposing voices. For Kierkegaard, this is a religious foundation, as much of his philosophy comes from a place in the Christian tradition of which he was a devout practitioner. Kierkegaard's best-known work, *Fear and Trembling* proves to be the culmination of his own dialectical answer to the predominant Hegelian philosophies of his day, as told through the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 of the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament.

5.2 Kierkegaard's Transcendence through God

In the faith traditions of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah has remained a trenchant, oft-cited story regarding the proper role of faith and sacrifice in one's life. It has remained, moreover, one of the chapters on which the most has been written, as its narrative is compelling and its conclusion to the understanding of the remainder of any of the sacred texts in which it is a component.

When approaching a Biblical text, any modern commentator finds himself face to face with a body of critical analysis intimidating enough to force an unenviable decision: either one must read thousands of pages spanning thousands of years of tradition, a particular problem with the more popular stories of the Hebrew Bible, or one must blindly charge ahead, fully aware that the things he is about to say have probably been better, more deeply and yet more concisely said hundreds of years ago. Fortunately for our purposes, what is important here are not the truths or consistencies with regard to the secondary literature, but instead how Kierkegaard engaged with this text.

At least initially, the biographical aspects of Kierkegaard's life seem irrelevant to his writing in *Fear and Trembling*. The text seeks to answer the question of what sort of mindset Abraham could have had when he agrees to follow the word of God's messenger and to take his son up to be sacrificed. Kierkegaard's reasons for the actions he takes in his life do not give an insight into Abraham's reasons as to why he was willing to kill his only remaining son. However, though the pseudonymous authorship of John the Silent—Johannes de Silentio—Kierkegaard does try to humanize the Abraham story, and to make it more relatable. It is not that Kierkegaard tries to explain Abraham though his own motivations and feeling, but rather more powerfully, he tries to explain all of our lives and motivations through the story of Abraham. This is what makes *Fear and Trembling* a philosophical rather than a religious text, though it without a doubt also straddles whatever gap there is between these fields. There is certainly a Kierkegaardian way to view this story, and Kierkegaard shows his readers this in pieces in the text.

Johannes de Silentio does not, in the four Exordia, have a consistent picture of what is going through Abraham's mind. These four brief retellings of the Genesis story do so with emotion at the forefront. While emotion is not synonymous with thought processes, we still have much to learn from Abraham's affected anger in the first story, or his despair in the fourth. This inconsistency, though, is only to be expected, as consistency is not his goal; Kierkegaard is simply looking for justification, in Silentio's own mind, for Abraham's actions. The four Exordia exist as proof of an attempt to make Abraham seem human. This desire for justification does not come from a lack of faith, but rather from someone who is looking to supplement his faith with reason. Kierkegaard will

explain later that this is the entirely wrong approach, and in attempting to humanize Abraham, Silentio is demonstrating just how much he fails to understand about faith.

In the following "Eulogy on Abraham" and the "Preliminary Expectoration," Silentio presents a modern scenario of a father who, after hearing a sermon on the Abraham story, claims he hears the voice of God tell him to sacrifice his son. Of course, the society in which he is living, nineteenth century Denmark, considered this man insane. The minister who delivered the sermon even goes so far as to visit his house to plead for this obviously deluded man to spare his son's life. The difficulty lies in that there really is no difference between the man who hears the voice of God and the deluded man who thinks he hears the voice of God. Silentio cannot untangle these. The man who was deluded and thought he heard the voice of God cannot be understood, just as Abraham cannot be understood, as long as an observer approaches his story with an intellectual understanding.

In order to justify the actions of Abraham, then, and to distinguish him from a madman, Kierkegaard draws upon an allusion he uses in much of his early, pseudonymous writing: the leap. For Kierkegaard, there is a bridge between the logical and faith that cannot be walked across. Unlike logical deduction, which always ventures into uncharted territory with one foot firmly planted in the well-founded assumptions and previous deductions, the leap is that method which requires wholly looking to the future and not relying on what is known as a safety net; that is to say, it is not the case that every step can be made with the previous foot planted on the ground.

Because of the nature of religious truths and the existence of God, what some might call the suspension of disbelief must occur before truth can be known. This is very

important in Kierkegaard—just as the leap requires one to leave behind in himself that which no longer serves his purpose, it also requires the leaper to land on new ground, just as solid if not more solid than that which he left. This new ground is sufficiently different from what has come before that it might not be recognizable as such to those about to take the leap. However, visible or not, it is there, as for Kierkegaard the religious is a very solid foundation. That ground, in the case of Abraham, and all of occupy the category Kierkegaard calls the "knight of faith," is explicitly religious. Kierkegaard, under the name Johannes Climacus in *Philosophical Fragments,* describes the leap as simply the disconnect that naturally occurs between quantitative and qualitative analysis. In his essay "Faith and the Kierkegaardian Leap" M. Jamie Ferreira helpfully reminds us that the leap is not a leap *of* faith, but rather it is a leap *by* faith; faith is necessary for the leap, but the leap is not itself of an explicitly religious character (208).

However, for Kierkegaard, the leap has nearly always been associated with the religious. The leap, when it is used to describe the religious character, already has a history behind it that needs a description before it can be fully expounded. Looking for a coherent philosophy across multiple works by any author can be daunting. In the case of Søren Kierkegaard, his use of pseudonyms and irony in his early works makes this more difficult. His most famous example of the leap occurs in *The Concept of Anxiety* in which the leap is used to explain the Genesis story in the garden of Eden. That text describes what Christianity describes as "the fall" in these terms of the shift from the quantitative to the qualitative. In Christian terms, the fall is meant to be applicable to all people, yet caused by one. It is this disconnect in traditional causality the leap seeks to address. It is a movement away from the quantitative frame of mind that would be so

eager to dismiss the taking of the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as the grievous mistake of one man. Instead the leap moves thinking into the qualitative realm, and the subsequent understanding of not one man but humanity itself, because Adam represented all people. Kierkegaard argues that there cannot be any logical connection between the quantitative and the qualitative here. Philosophers and logicians looking for any kind of proof of this move will be left empty handed. Nonetheless, Kierkegaard says, the connection is there—just not able to be explained. This is why the leap is necessary.

Simply because the leap is necessary to connect the singular actions of one man with the fate of humanity is illogical, does not mean that such a leap is either prescribed or proscribed. Ultimately, it remains a choice an individual can make to believe in such things, or to only take such steps that logic would naturally allow. To bring it back to the primary thesis of this essay, it does not mean that this is a course of action that is likely to bring about joy. It should be stated, though, that neither does it mean that such an action should necessarily impede joy. What will become clear below is that the importance of the leap lies not in its religious character, but in the power it represents for an individual to decide for him or herself exactly what life means, and what it should mean. Kierkegaard explains this more fully in his work that predates *Fear and Trembling* or even *Concept of Anxiety*.

Despite the fact that the leap was written about first in *Philosophical Fragments,* then in *The Concept of Anxiety* later that year, there is a sense that this idea, and all of Kierkegaard's ideas are refined throughout his corpus. There is a continuity of ethical theory from his first major work, *Either/Or*, to his most famous, *Fear and Trembling*.

While both of these texts were before Kierkegaard's discussions of the leap in later works, the concept is still there in a real sense. Perhaps Kierkegaard himself has not grasped it. Perhaps, by virtue of his writing Kierkegaard became aware of the implications of his texts. The swift pace of their release, though, left little time for revision, and any insights he had about what may follow from his earlier works had to wait until his next publication[47]. Prolific as he was in his early years, Kierkegaard did not have to wait long. Still, in order to examine the groundwork Kierkegaard laid for the leap in later works, it is important to examine *Either/Or* more deeply.

Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* can be a formidable text on its own. Continuity is far from assured, as each of the two books of *Either/Or* is broken up into essays that we, as readers, are told come from a collection of papers by possibly distinct individuals. Still, there is a clear theme to each of the two parts. In part one, we meet the seducer who lives life according to aesthetic sensibilities, is easily bored, and generally fears death. Judge William of the second book, on the other hand, is an upstanding member of society who embodies the ethical. In this work Kierkegaard does not seek to synthesize these two character types in any meaningful way. The closest he comes to doing so is in his essay in book two "Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical," but even this is written in the hand of one who is ethical rather than aesthetic, and the predictable bias shows through. Perhaps Kierkegaard is mocking them both. Perhaps he presents these two character sketches as incompatible because at the time of his writing, he really sees them

[47] It is more likely, though, that the varying pseudonymous authors were meant to characterize the inner debates that he had with himself and then subsequently either resolved or did not, rather than that, upon re-reading his own works, he was enlightened—at least, this has been my experience.

that way. He does not continue to present these character types as incompatible, though, as his body of work develops.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Søren Kierkegaard fulfills the seemingly implicit dialectic promise made in his earlier *Either/Or*. The aesthetic and the ethical merge into a third characteristic—the religious. In this text Kierkegaard, under a new pseudonym, follows closely the story of Abraham in Genesis 22, and comes to the conclusion that his action—nearly killing his son—cannot be construed as ethical in the sense that Judge William is ethical. For Kierkegaard, or at least for Johannes de Silentio, the "author" of *Fear and Trembling*, the ethical is about following the rules of a given society. It is reminiscent of the popular understanding of Kant's categorical imperative in that it seems for Kierkegaard ethical action does not admit of exceptions. This view is supported in part two of *Either/Or*, when the text tells of the life of Judge William, an upstanding citizen who marries because it is right and obeys the laws of the land because they are right, seemingly in and of themselves.

This kind of uncompromising ethics leaves little room for individuals like Abraham. Abraham cannot be construed as an ethical actor because of his willingness to kill. That does not mean, though that Abraham acted *wrongly*. In fact, Kierkegaard applauds in Abraham his willingness to look past the ethical and to make the "right" decision, or at least that action which aligns itself with the will of God. For Kierkegaard, this is the essence of the religious character—the willingness to look past the ethical, or more accurately, the faith that good will be done when the will of God is followed. Kierkegaard is clear in his distinction of this faith from optimism or hope; it is more of a knowing determinism. That which is best is in this way beyond the ethical.

It would be easy, if oversimplified, to say that the aesthetic becomes the ethical that in turn becomes the religious. The move away from the ethical and towards the religious is, in an important way, a move back towards the aesthetic. Insofar as the aesthetic sensibility directs adherents to what is beautiful, then the religious emulates this character. Before the religious is considered, what is good—called the ethical—and what is beautiful—called the aesthetic—seem to be at odds. However, for Kierkegaard, God is that which is most worthy of our love, and what is more worthy of this kind of admiration than the mix of the beauty and the good?

In Kierkegaard's terms, he calls this process the "double movement" of faith: it takes individuals both forward past the ethical, but also backwards to the aesthetic particularism. It is necessary for the knight of faith to go through a stage first of infinite resignation on his way to the religious character. This is the moment that Abraham agrees, in his mind, to obey the word of God and to sacrifice his son on the mountain. It is a resignation precisely because it is a resignation of Abraham's own desires—namely, to keep the child alive. This resignation, for Kierkegaard, is a profoundly aesthetic state, conjuring up poems of loss and melancholy. The ethical alongside this never gives up hoping for that which seems unattainable, but the ethical individual, knows, in his mind, that it is never to be his. The knight of faith puts his faith in the impossible; he *knows*, in a real sense, that the impossible target of his desires will in fact be his. The irony, of course, is that in infinite resignation, whatever desires an individual may have must first be put aside. Therefore, to achieve an individual's goals, that person must first relinquish them. This is not being foolhardy, but rather the realization that, though God, all things are possible.

Yet, despite his faith in God, Abraham did not believe, at least according to the presentations in the four exordia, that Isaac was somehow going to be saved in his ordeal. Had he believed this, his movement would not have been a leap. The leap requires uncertainty, even trepidation. It is a fine line, of course, between this kind of trepidation and outright doubt. A doubter could never become a knight of faith.

The knight of faith, for Kierkegaard, is the individual who has adopted this way of life, seeing that there are times where it is "better" to act in a way seemingly incommensurate with the good. She must be well versed in both the aesthetic and the ethical before being open to the religious. The religious stems from the ethical and so a grounding in the ethical is a necessary component of it. The knight of faith knows that her actions are in service to the greater good, and so an understanding of that good must come first. The aesthetic, too, is a requirement for the transition from the ethical to the religious. Without the aesthetic recognition of what is beautiful, the voice of God cannot be discerned. The knight of faith realizes, though, that she does not have the requisite foreknowledge to question the divine will, and so she must go along with it, and act in accordance with it, with full faith in the outcome.

Just as with the connection between the quantitative and qualitative nature of the original sin of Adam Kierkegaard describes in *The Concept of Anxiety*, the movement from the ethical frame of mind to the religious requires a leap. There is not a logical reason to give up the ethical; probability certainly says that any voice that someone hears commanding them to take actions that would otherwise be thought of as unethical should be quashed rather than heeded. If Abraham had instead been tempted by the devil into nearly killing his son, how different a story that would have been! The only reason that

Abraham is justified in taking the action he takes is because he knows that it is God speaking to him—because at this point in the Genesis story, Abraham has spoken to God before. This does most people little good. For those citizens of modern-day Copenhagen, or even for Kierkegaard's contemporary readership, this kind of explicitly personal relationship with God is unlikely.

To trust that God was advising Abraham to do something good rather than something evil cannot be explained logically. It requires of Abraham the kind of leap that Kierkegaard discusses only later in his corpus. Abraham certainly knew the laws of his God regarding murder of one's own family, even though this text predated the Ten Commandments of Moses and the Exodus account. He had, prior to this, always tried to act ethically, and that was usually compatible with the word of God.

Abraham was sure that the voice was the voice of God, but had he not been sure, he would have had to rely on infinite resignation alone to try to discern the truth. Infinite resignation removes the possibility that the voice is the voice of temptation. For everyone who is not Abraham, infinite resignation alone is the test that can be applied to mysterious voices commanding actions against the normal codes of ethics. Only removing any stake an individual has in the outcome of a particular action can ensure that a voice that prescribes the action is not somehow a manifestation of one's own selfish desires. It is not a great test, but it is the best one we have.

5.3 Infinite Resignation and Joy

The problem with all of this is that it would seem that the infinite resignation necessary of a knight of faith in Kierkegaard's writings almost precludes any possibility

of joy. By definition, infinite resignation requires the individual to first remove himself from any stake in the outcome of his actions. If, as Abraham did when he put his trust wholly in what he assumed to be the voice of God, any person removes himself from his circumstances, then it would seem that person would not be able to take any sort of pleasure in the outcome of them. There is no way to take credit for actions that are chosen when in a state of infinite resignation. Even if the outcome is somehow more preferable to what it would have been had an individual not been in infinite resignation, this measurement only matters when that individual is considering himself.

Ultimately, though, infinite resignation is a state achieved by comparably few, and Kierkegaard believes that there have been fewer still knights of faith. So few, in fact, that it is not even necessarily preferable to be in this kind of religious orientation. This is one of the ways that Kierkegaard shows his existentialist colors—the relationship between God and the individual is always personal and can take on many different forms. You cannot identify the knights of faith by looking for the most pious churchgoers, as it could equally likely be that the local tax collector down at the tavern is truly the one who is a knight of faith (*Fear and Trembling* 39).

Still, for Kierkegaard, the path of the religious individual, from the aesthetic individualism to the ethical universal and then ultimately returned to a religious particular by virtue of infinite resignation, is at least one path to joy. Even considering infinite resignation, Kierkegaard argues that joy is possible, particularly with a more targeted kind of resignation. Though this seems to countermand the idea of infinite within infinite resignation, Kierkegaard argues in *Repetition* that it is precisely this kind of distancing

oneself from the factors in reality that no one can change that allows for contentment, and that infinite is more a qualitative than quantitative distinction.

5.4 Repetition in Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard's notion of repetition is best outlined in *Repetition*, but finds its roots in *Either/Or Part I*, written pseudonymously under the name "A" and "edited" by Victor Eremita. As discussed above, rather than a straightforward essay, *Either/*Or is more a collection of essays. In them Kierkegaard distinguishes among the past, the future and the present in "The Unhappiest One." For Kierkegaard, living in the past through recollection or in the future through hopefulness are meaningless endeavors doomed to yield unhappiness. Instead, only in living through repetition of the present can true happiness be achieved.

Kierkegaard also takes a position against cyclicality and material reiteration of similarity in "Rotation of Crops," later in *Either/Or Part I*. In this short essay, the narrator espouses the notion that true happiness in life is through new experiences, and that stagnation is the natural conclusion to any long-term relationship. The title, of course, harkens back to the cyclical nature of the seasons, and this physical reiteration of circumstances, to the extent it is even possible, leaves a person unfulfilled[48].

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[48] It is important to note that volume two of *Either/Or*, written pseudonymously under the name Judge William, paints a wholly different picture from volume one. Moreover, much of the Kierkegaard scholarship acknowledges that the relationship between the two authors, "A" and "Judge William" is a dialectical one, with the aesthetic A and the ethical William leading us to a synthesis in the religious character. Of course, Kierkegaard would object to this characterization, if for no other reason than that a synthesis resolves tensions between the thesis and antithesis. His reliance instead on the aporia, or unresolvable paradox is certainly a strike against Hegel. That said, to what extent we can liken "Rotation of Crops" to *Repetition* with any coherence is subject to question.

In his later *Repetition,* Kierkegaard, this time writing under the name Constantine Constantius, more fully explains how repetition can be achieved. The first part of this text takes the form of an essay that expands upon the foundations set up in "The Unhappiest One." In *Repetition*, Kierkegaard says, "he who will merely hope is cowardly; he who will merely recollect is voluptuous; he who wills repetition is a man, and the more emphatically he is able to realize it, the more profound a human being he is" (132). This is, for Kierkegaard a kind of process, and not simply a frame of mind one can choose to suddenly adopt. He tells of this process through the lives of two characters in after the initial essay. It is not similarly successful for both, but it is clear that each character is attempting repetition in his own way. While the individual is ultimately prized not just in Kierkegaard, but also to an extent in all existentialist thought, there can still be a right and wrong way to achieve a particular end. Kierkegaard shows that repetition can be done correctly, and can be done incorrectly.

In this text, there are two characters who arrive at different conclusions regarding the possibility of the repetition phenomenon. In the first part, there is the narrator, Constantine, who attempts repetition by means of reiteration. That is, he believes happiness can be found in repetition and the desire for the same. He remembers a particularly enjoyable trip he took to Berlin, and wishes to recapture the happiness he felt on that trip. To that end he attempts to recreate the journey in its entirety, reiterating every detail he could, from the hotel to the restaurant and to the theatre to see the same show. However, this repetition is impossible for Constantine—the maître d' has changed;

the actors in the play are not the same—and so Constantine is unhappy[49]. Material repetition has failed him, and so he believes that repetition is, itself, impossible.

However, Constantine's letter writing friend, the young lover, in part two of the book, claims he ultimately is able to find repetition. For the young man, the trials of Job prove to be a useful guide through his own tumultuous breakup, and the inner serenity Job ultimately finds by divorcing himself from the external world serves as a model for his own "transcendence" of his circumstances[50]. The young man likens his calm after he comes to terms with his failed romance to the calm Job feels at the end of his ordeals. To be sure, the young man conflates the "get[ting] everything double" of Job's reward from God with repetition ("Repetition" 221). This reiteration of the material is the failed repetition of Constantine in part one of the text. Happiness of this sort, in which the material conditions of happiness are repeated exactly in the present as they were in the past, "has never been granted to a human being in his whole life, not even for as much as half an hour," according to Constantine ("Repetition" 173). It is never clear whether the young man is ever truly at peace, although he claims to be. Still, when he claims, "I am myself again," we get the sense that he has transcended his circumstances sufficiently to revel in his current situation necessary for true repetition ("Repetition" 221). In *Repetition*, this repetition is about general reiteration in the sense that, while only an individualized, non-material repetition can bring satisfaction, no claims about the

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[49] While Kierkegaard never asserts this in *Repetition*, or elsewhere, it is same to assume that even if the trip could have been remade in every detail, it still would not be able to bring Constantine the same kind of happiness it did on the first trip. To be sure, this is the allegorical message Kierkegaard is trying to convey with this story.

[50] Much has been said about the trials of Job in critical literature outside of Kierkegaard. It may be that the young man, and therefore Kierkegaard, has a warped conception of the events related in the Biblical tale. It is not important to the content of the essay whether Job actually did transcend his circumstances, only that Kierkegaard claimed he did in *Repetition.*

religious character of the repetition experience are offered here. This repetition, though, gains real content when Kierkegaard explains the dialectical interplay between sin and repentance in *The Concept of Anxiety*.

While it can always be dangerous to compare Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works with each other, or to try to draw parallels between them, where there is overlap of philosophical concepts it can be fruitful to draw these out, especially where they can shed light on each other. In *The Concept of Anxiety*, Kierkegaard, under the pseudonym Vigilius Haufniensis, explains the nature of repentance as bestowed upon us by God. Sin is inevitable due to our fallen, free nature; redemption is *"*posited *in concerto"* with this possibility for sin because of the nature of Jesus, according to Kierkegaard (*The Concept of Anxiety* 112). Therefore, it is not simply the repetition of the "self" that is key to happiness, but the realization of the dialectic that created the self and its freedom. The condition of our existence is the dialectical give and take of the ontological possibility of sin being negated by the *always already* existent condition of forgiveness of that sin that exists at every moment. Kierkegaard clearly claims, though, that redemption is not proactive. There must be a sin to be forgiven, and so every moment requires its own redemption in so far as every moment contains its ontological possibility of the commission of sin, even if no sin is committed in that moment.

The personal realization of this propensity to commit sin through our free natures can cause within us, according to Kierkegaard, an "anxiety…defined as freedom's disclosure to itself in possibility" (*The Concept of Anxiety* 111). The condition necessary for repetition, then, is one in which we confront our sin and the redemption guaranteed to us by Jesus, but realize that this redemption does not prevent us from future sin. Freedom

is revealed through this process of continuous redemption from sin. This, though, is a choice for Kierkegaard. Instead of always living in freedom and in repetition, humans have the opportunity to live in recollection—the past—in which the self's ontological possibility has been redeemed, or in hoping—the future—in which we look past the ontological condition of sin and *assume* ourselves forgiven.

For Kierkegaard, this connection to the religious is not only unavoidable, but in fact provides the surest path to any kind of happiness. Foreshadowing his later and more complete treatment of the same kind of material unhappiness in *Repetition*, Kierkegaard takes up the possibility for transcendent happiness in *Either/Or Part II*, specifically in the "Ultimatum" he presents as the closing to this book. Here he discusses the problem with making attachments in the physical world, and juxtaposes this with the possibility for happiness loving God. Kierkegaard claims that our souls were designed in a way such that we necessarily seek attachment; the problem comes when we choose the wrong subject for such an attachment (*Either/Or II,* 350)[51]. What makes this a fundamentally existential approach in Kierkegaard, as opposed to the essentialism of Spinoza, is the reaction that the former says comes naturally from this condition.

Just as for Sartre, anguish is not characterized by likely actions, but instead by possible ones, so, too, does Kierkegaard rely on the ontological to inform his characteristic uneasiness, anxiety. It does not matter if an individual actually sins, the fallen nature that all people share makes each person possible of sin because of the distance from God that Adam caused in the Garden of Eden when he ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

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[51] Spinoza actually makes much the same case in *The Ethics* discussed above.

Even living in the present moment, at the center of the dialectic process of sin and redemption, an individual can avoid repetition. Anxiety can be powerful for Kierkegaard, even though he calls it "a feminine weakness in which freedom faints" (*The Concept of Anxiety* 61). To joy in the repetitive certainty of our ontological status and to will its continuation, rather than be consumed in anxiety, is the heart of freedom. David Kangas in *Kierkegaard's Instant* characterizes repetition as "the possibility for freedom to take itself back to itself, to…preserve its capability from out of the circular rotations of being" (93). We can and must save freedom from the clutches of debilitating anxiety in the face of the ontological possibility of sin.

The two choices, anxiety and repetition, are presented as similarly opposing forces to the two possible reactions the individual has upon hearing the demon's news in *The Gay Science* in Nietzsche: either you can gnash your teeth or you can declare it the best news you have ever heard. The differences are both in the inevitability of an individual arriving at that point, and the transcendent nature of the repetitive experience.

Returning to *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard concludes his "Ultimatum" by asserting that not only are we wrong in the eyes of God when we sin, but that, "in relation to God, we are always in the wrong" (354). While in a sense this seems demeaning, Kierkegaard means it as ultimately liberating. Just as Dostoevsky famously asserted that without God everything is permitted, this final assertion of Kierkegaard seems to have the same effect. Nothing we do will ever be good enough for God, so why worry about it? Instead we should just do what we want. This is not a cynical reading, as Kierkegaard claims that this realization should serve to " [put] an end to doubt and [calm] the cares" (354). The "flight of the soul" that each of us ultimately chooses, should be unencumbered by any

kind of feelings of inadequacy or fears of doing wrong in the eyes of God (355). Instead, Kierkegaard posits, we should live in accordance with God's law precisely because this kind of love is the only love that is in any way sustainable. What is vital, though, is that this must never be a coerced choice. This sustainability in the possibility for joy requires as its object something that is unchanging in only the way God can be, and so is ultimately transcendent.

5.5 Nietzsche's Opportunity for Transcendence

Admittedly, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard seem at first to be unlikely bedfellows. Nietzsche famously proclaimed: "God is dead;" Kierkegaard is considered the father of Christian existentialism. However, when it comes to the way to live one's life to the utmost, there is a surprising similarity between the two. Both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, at first glance put forth an idea that the moment is supreme, and that only in living in the present can we live truly genuine lives. This may be no great surprise. A case can be made that it is this thought that defines the existential movement. Kierkegaard's place in this tradition has never been doubted. Even if unsurprising, the similarities between Nietzsche's eternal recurrence and Kierkegaard's idea of repetition deserve some scrutiny as, to an extent, these two concepts serve as a microcosm of the entirety of their respective creators' thought.

Nietzsche never read Kierkegaard directly, and so any comparison between the two must be taken with this grain of salt: similarities and differences between them must be regarded mostly as coincidence or as similar responses to shared influences rather than in

response to each other[52]. That said, some of the philosophical rigor in Kierkegaard's works proves instrumental in understanding Nietzsche's eternal recurrence from the perspective of a transcendent immanence.

The secondary literature is surprisingly scarce on the comparison between the two thinkers. There is one noteworthy book on the subject by Tom Angier, but even this text fails to mention Kierkegaard's *Repetition*. Karl Jaspers takes up this comparison in great detail, but his areas of commonality, too, shy away from discussing either *Repetition* or Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. Jaspers' comments on the way transcendence is presented by these two authors, however, are relevant to my discussion of this concept below.

It is true that *Repetition* is one of Kierkegaard's less famous works, but as much of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous works complement each other, to say that it is somehow less a part of the canon would be to try to assemble a puzzle without a piece. Still,

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[52] While Kaufmann asserts that Nietzsche had only "heard of Kierkegaard too late [in his life] to secure any of his books" (14), Brobjer, in his 2003 article, tells us that, while Nietzsche never read Kierkegaard, he did read secondary literature that mentions him. The closest he came to having access to Kierkegaard's notion of repetition was in this passage Nietzsche read (underlining by Nietzsche in Harald Höffding's *Pyschologie in Umrissen auf Grundlage der Erfahrung*, 1887): "S. Kierkegaard hat in diesem psychologischen Gesetz den Ausgangspunkt genommen, um die Grenzen zwischen ästhetischer und ethischer Lebensführung nachzuweisen. Jede Erregung und jeder Enthusiamus ist ästhetischer Art; wir verhalten uns genießend, indem wir von der starken Einwirkung ergriffen werden. Das Ich läßt von sich unwillkürlich hervorbrechenden Gefühlswogen mit fortreißen. Während der täglichen Arbeit, während des <u>verstimmenden und dämpfenden Einflusses der Wiederholung</u> muß es sich aber zeigen, ob das Gefühl andre Stärke besitzt, als jenes momentane Entflammen. Deshalb ist für S. Kierkegaard <u>die Möglichkeit der Wiederholung das ethische Grundproblem</u>."

Angier's effort is among the most complete. The only comparisons between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard refer to shorter passages in other works. In the consideration of repetition and eternal recurrence, I will rely on what comparisons I can find from the works of Claire Carlisle, and in a lesser sense, of Gilles Deleuze. "There is a force common to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche…each, in his own way, makes repetition the fundamental category of a philosophy of the future" (Deleuze 5).

5.6 Different Freedoms, Different Determinisms

Nietzsche's eternal recurrence derives much of its impact from the inevitability of its condition. Individuals do not have a choice whether to "participate" in eternal recurrence. However, just as the reader in *The Gay Science* is ignorant to the truth of eternal recurrence before the demon apprises him of it, so, too, can we be ignorant of its effect on us. This does not mean that we have no choice. On the contrary, we are left with nothing but choice. Because the eternally recurring condition is a condition of freedom, we are left with the question, "do you want this again and innumerable times again?" (Nietzsche *The Gay Science* (341)). The word "this" in that sentence does not refer to the encounter with the demon, or even the material condition of the world, but existence itself. As long as we participate in existence we are confronted with choice and freedom, even the freedom to end our lives. Nietzsche points out, though, that this freedom is ours, whether we acknowledge it or do not; "Freedom," he says, "is the will to be responsible to ourselves" ("Twilight of the Idols" 38).

However, the notion of recurrence of this moment eternally imparts a terrifying significance to each of our actions. Because the only moment we have access to is the

"now" moment, the entirety of perceivable time is occupied with however an individual chooses to spend that single moment. This reduction of recurrence from that of a cycle to that of an instant is precisely what David Kangas tries to do in *Kierkegaard's Instant* with regard to repetition, and I have examined elsewhere mathematically.

Consider, to emphasize this point, the development of differential calculus and how one might explain the concept of derivative[53]. This is how a repeated series such as Nietzsche's future as recurrence of the present and the present itself, and how Kierkegaard's sin and forgiveness cycle becomes condensed down to being mathematically identical: a single point. More important, it is how Kierkegaard's repetition can be temporally equivalent to Nietzsche's recurrence. When Kierkegaard loses his cyclicality in repetition, and the sin-forgiveness cycle condenses to one moment, then the result is a moment of gravity and realization not far from what Hatab would characterize as an existential reading of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence. Initially, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche seem to be discussing a philosophy of cyclicality, but, as we ought not "be too easy on ourselves," we must analyze the concepts more fully to see that, in so far as they are cyclical, they are cyclical in a micro-iterative sense. That is, each of the components of the moment is itself without duration, and like a point in space conceptually "next to" another, there is no discernable distance between them, nor do

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[53] Let us imagine a curve in Cartesian coordinate space, and say we desire to know the slope, or the rate of change of the rise in the curve with respect to its run at any given point (X_1) on the curve. Before we have the tools of calculus, in our trigonometric years of study, we are taught to approximate the slope of the tangent line at that point by drawing a secant line on the curve. As all secant lines do, this will intersect the curve in two places, one on either side of the point for our inquiry (X_0 and X_2). The easily found slope of this line will give us a rough approximation of he slope of the line tangential to the curve at point X_1. To get the approximation more and more accurate, we reduce the distance on the curve from X_0 to X_1 and from X_1 to X_2; the closer the points are, the more the secant will resemble the tangent line. Ultimately, we have to employ the concept of limits to describe the secant line as the distance between X_0 and X_2 approaches 0 and each becomes infinitely close to, yet still distinct from X_1.

they, taken together, represent more space taken up that a single point in space would. Despite this similarity, though, the inevitability of the recurrence of Nietzsche is not evident in Kierkegaard, as, for the latter, to live in repetition requires a life-long struggle.

It would seem, though, that Nietzsche does not recognize this struggle of Kierkegaard's for happiness. More than that, Nietzsche asserts, "the human being who has become free — and how much more the spirit who has become free — spits on the contemptible type of well-being dreamed of by shopkeepers, Christians, cows, females, Englishmen, and other democrats. The free man is a warrior." ("Twilight of the Idols" 38). Perhaps, comments such as these are meant for those Kierkegaard would call ethical. For the Judge Williams of the world, certainly contentment is the goal. For Kierkegaard's religious particularism, though, happiness is renewed every moment, while remaining constant in its longevity.

With Kierkegaard, the realization of the repetitive condition of freedom is not something forced upon us, but something to aspire towards. It requires us to understand the religious conditions of our ontologies: sin, repentance and freedom. Only when we dwell, by choice, in the space in between sin and repentance, which, as we analyzed above as the space between two points "next to" each other in space and therefore without discernable length, and, while accepting their possibility, taking neither for granted, can we act in freedom and find happiness. This is the goal for Kierkegaard—happiness, contentment; this is the final promise of *Either/Or Part II* in the Ultimatum. This is not synonymous with the complacency that Nietzsche rails against. For Kierkegaard, we must leave behind the determinism at the root of anxiety and happily make our way towards repetition. Once there, though, we enter another kind of

determinism that resembles the inaction that Nietzsche fears. Of course, this appearance is such only to those from the outside looking in. Just as Kierkegaard's knight of faith can never be picked out of a crowd, so can the individual in joyous repetition resemble someone who is blissfully ignorant.

Like with Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, repetition requires freedom to be a freedom aware of its circumstances. There is nothing an individual can do to remove the ontological possibility of his sinning, nor the redemption offered by Jesus. Just as with Nietzsche's eternal recurrence, knowledge of the condition is a necessary precondition to acting in accordance with the principle. The redemption offered in repetition is only available within a Christian framework, as it is an explicitly Christian construction of Jesus dying for the sins of mankind. Therefore, only through accepting of the principles of the Christian faith can an individual be redeemed in this way, and therefore be a possible candidate for living in repetition. For both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, knowledge is a prerequisite to this ultimate freedom of repetition.

The knowledge of the respective determinisms governing our circumstances is what allows us to act freely, as the determinism for neither philosopher is a material one. Without the knowledge of the conditions of our existence (as recurring in Nietzsche, as dialectically religious in Kierkegaard), our actions, while free, are without meaning. In his heavily-Nietzsche-influenced *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, novelist Milan Kundera presents the importance of awareness of the recurrent nature of existence by invoking the German saying *Einmal ist keinmal*, or “once is nothing” repeatedly. As a fraction of infinity, any finite number might as well be zero.

Actions without the importance afforded by recurrence occur and get lost in history. Only if, at the time of action, the significance of the action as repeated eternally is known by the actor, can that action be in any way meaningful and representative of freedom. If actions do not repeat, if they are lost in the flow of time, then freedom of choice is the sort of freedom a prisoner has as to how to spend his time in jail, a freedom even Meursault yearns for when confronted by the priest in his cell. Without the chance to change his world or his circumstances, his actions lose any sense of meaning, and he cannot be said to be "free." The question now raised is over what freedom is offered in knowledge, and whether the freedom and happiness these two thinkers are describing is in fact the same concept, or if instead by equivocation we are unfairly comparing two writers with very different agendas in their works.

5.7 Immanence, Transcendence and the Synthesis of Micro-iterative Conditions

To examine what kind of freedom is offered in the eternal recurrence and compare it to the kind of freedom Kierkegaard promises in repetition, we need to look at knowledge revealed by each, and what each means for an individual's worldview. The difference between the knowledge in these formulations of freedom is the knowledge of the individual. In the last section, I argued that Nietzsche, while he had a robust concept of joy, did not have a way to sustain this joy beyond the moment of its realization. What is sought after here is transcendence of that moment to a relatively permanent happiness.

Karl Jaspers, in his comparison of the two thinkers, specifically takes up the issue of transcendence. For Jaspers, transcendence is the conclusion to the leap of faith towards truly confronting their own existence. He claimed that both Nietzsche and

Kierkegaard incorporate this leap into their philosophy: Kierkegaard towards the Christian God, and Nietzsche to eternal recurrence and the overman ("Existenzphilosophie" 199).

However, this leap of Nietzsche's is problematic in that neither of these two destinations is a viable one. First of all, the leap cannot have as its object the eternal recurrence, because the eternal recurrence is itself the condition that requires the leap. While existential authors are not strangers to paradoxical constructions, if the point of departure and the destination are the same, then the leap is irrelevant. The overman, on the other hand is at best a regulative ideal forever out of reach. An important part of the leap is that its destination has as firm a footing as its departure. This is not true of the supposed transcendence in Nietzsche.

The idea of transcendence in Jaspers is a part of his specialized vocabulary regarding the actualization of the authentic self, nothing more. The way that I am using transcendence here is that it requires going beyond the instant in an existential way that is not possible in Jaspers' formulation. The kind of realization that Jaspers says is transcendent does not address the issue of present always becoming past.

Joy cannot be permanently sustained. There is always the risk of falling back into the old patterns. To be sure, to remove this possibility would be to eliminate the kind of freedom that is essential to understanding existentialism. Kierkegaard does not remove this possibility. Instead, he shows how, though a kind of non-complacent contentment, the repeated moment can be sustained, and brought into each subsequent moment. He seeks to have the present moment transcend into the realm of what is usually called the future. This is the kind of transcendence that neither Nietzsche nor Jaspers incorporates.

Because, for Kierkegaard, repetition can only be achieved through God, the transcendence of the self is a necessary part of repetition. Obviously, Nietzsche does not call for turning to God, but instead "melts down the vertical axis of Kierkegaard's spiritual movement and, in opposition to the supernatural repetition claimed by Christianity, proposes incessant renewal as the essence of nature itself" (Carlisle 138). This kind of incessancy would seem to preclude joy just by virtue of its tedium.

Moreover, Carlisle argues, "Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God not only disconnects the self from any kind of transcendent ground, but also disregards the protective seal that Kierkegaard builds (or upbuilds) around inwardness" (137-38). It is in this sense that Nietzsche's eternal recurrence truly diverges from Kierkegaard's repetition. For Nietzsche, living well, within eternal recurrence, means embracing the significance of the situation and the power that recurrence imparts to the individual. Carlisle claims that Nietzsche cannot have transcendence as a part of his philosophy if God is dead.

On the other hand, it could be contended that movement from man to overman is exactly this sort of transcendence, much in the way Jaspers does. This is a possibility Nietzsche both anticipates and cautions against. In "On Poets," Zarathustra warns his followers that Romantic idealists have a tendency to "[set] atop these [clouds]…motley bastards and call them gods and overmen" (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra* 100). Del Caro points out, "what Nietzsche refers to as 'ascending life' is the process whereby life strives for immanence, strives for and succeeds in manifesting itself" (Del Caro 63). For Del Caro, Nietzsche's project is one of "immanent reorientation," in which one must align his personal ambitions away from the transcendent, which Nietzsche would call illusory,

toward the true and guaranteed Earth (Del Caro 81). Moreover, for Nietzsche "[w]hat matters…is *eternal liveness*, not 'eternal life'…The reorientation here is evident in the implied redefinition of life…liveness can more easily be conceived as a state, such as immanence" (Del Caro 71).

It might be claimed that, while Nietzsche clearly does not wish to make his philosophy one of transcendence, in valuing the present moment the way he does, he does precisely this. With the significance that Nietzsche imparts to the present, he elevates it above the status of a moment, though he would likely deny this characterization. A moment, forever repeated, must transcend the conventional notions of past, present and future. On the other hand, Kierkegaard has no trouble admitting what repetition does to the present moment when he writes, "repetition is and remains a transcendence" (Kierkegaard "Repetition" 186). Still, both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche talk about time differently than this traditional trichotomy of past, present and future.

Gilles Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition*, characterizes this move as towards a "philosophy of the future" (Deleuze 5; Carlisle 139). In this sense, he is right. In the way Nietzsche defines time, even if we take eternal recurrence as a purely existential formation, he makes the future into the present. The past must then be also merged with the present, as it is the present in which the repetition of the past must occur. However, while Deleuze may demonstrate outstanding scholarship on Nietzsche, he fundamentally misreads Kierkegaard in one significant way. Deleuze claims, "in the case of Kierkegaard it is repetition itself which takes place once and for all, whereas according to Nietzsche it operates for all times" (Deleuze 295; Carlisle 139). This view is less compelling than David Kangas' formulation of the instant in Kierkegaard as the

fundamental unit of repetition. Taking this idea in conjunction with how I have already characterized this instant, as the repetition of sin and forgiveness, proves Kierkegaard's repetition far more similar to Nietzsche's eternal recurrence than has been contended in either Deleuze or Angier. For Kangas, along with for me, transcendence must continually recur if repetition is to be achieved, rather than in the Deleuzian presentation that seems to say that repetition, once achieved, can never be relinquished.

Additionally, there is a sense in which any philosophy that highly praises the now is somehow in celebration of immanence. What is immanence but for the "now" moment in time? If it can be rightly said that Kierkegaard's repetition is a focus on the now moment, as the moment in which sin is possible and forgiveness for that sin not yet meted out, then it seems that this is a philosophy which wholly relies on immanence to prevent the determinism of redemption to negate the necessity of repentance. The moment is critical, as it is in the moment in which the individual must supplicate himself before God. This is respect of the immanent.

I would have to conclude that Nietzsche seeks out a transcendent immanence, while Kierkegaard advocates an immanent transcendence. The former seeks to make the moment of time more than it has previously been thought to have been, to thrust the immanent moment into the realm of the transcendent[54]. Without a doubt, this is because the idea of transcendence is abhorrent to Nietzsche on its face, as he believes "we are always only in our own company" (Nietzsche *The Gay Science* III:166). Transcendence admits the possibility of both the divine and an unbounded infinity.

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[54] Nietzsche would never admit to this, as he shows in "On the Poets." However, there is no denying the fact that the moment means more for Nietzsche than it has meant for any philosopher before him—most of those would rather claim that, without duration the moment is nothing. For Nietzsche, the moment is everything. This is a kind of praise of transcendence, if the moment can be elevated in this way.

There is an important difference between bounded and unbounded infinity. For Kierkegaard, God is unbounded, and infinite in an infinite number of ways. To be infinite in one way, for instance in time, is what Nietzsche acknowledges as the eternal recurrence. For Nietzsche, this not a transcendent infinity, as every moment everyone is forced to contemplate that instant itself, rather than to try to grapple with the larger picture. The latter values the transcendence of the self as possibility at every moment, bringing that transcendence into the purview of immanence.

5.8 From Transcendence to Joy

There is much that can be said about the comparison between Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, and a number of dimensions I could not explore within the scope of this chapter. They are both trying to confront the stagnation that comes from inaction or pure contentment by looking “to movement as a way of overcoming the nihilism that results from the Platonic-Hegelian tradition of philosophy” (Carlisle 138). Both thinkers are trying to explain how meaning can be different for each person by virtue of their interaction with the world.

However, I believe I have shown how Kierkegaard’s repetition stacks up next to Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence. For Nietzsche, eternal recurrence is not a choice we make—although we can remain in ignorance of it—and it imparts a significance not otherwise afforded to each of our actions, leaving us free to live our lives commensurate with the meaning of the Earth. For Kierkegaard, repetition is a goal of life; it is the relative acceptance of the truths about sin, repentance and forgiveness put forward in Christian scripture and the realization of freedom that arises from their dialectic, even

though the power of this dialectic is not through its Hegelian synthesis, but rather through the paradox that arises on account of its impossibility and the leap that is necessary to traverse the logical gap between the qualitative and the quantitative understandings of existence.

The similarities, though, are more illuminating than the differences, as it doesn't take a scholar of philosophy to guess that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche were different. Both repetition and eternal recurrence are micro-iterative interpretations of the "moment" and time, and both point us towards freedom. Kierkegaard and Nietzsche both see a significance outside of the normal purview of humanity: Kierkegaard in God and Nietzsche in the Earth. Both of these represent transcendence in a sense, while both are still tied up in the immanence of every moment.

Both of these thinkers, moreover, are able to find joy, but only with the help of the other. Nietzsche clearly shows a kind of jubilation and self-affirmation, but his insistence on a moment, even a repeated moment seems to imply that this joy is temporary; it is pure immanence. There is a sense in which this is more intellectually honest to existentialism. Just as in Sartre, no past decision that a for-itself makes can guarantee that the present for-itself looking over the edge of the precipice will not throw itself into nihilation, so, too does it seem that no current joy necessitates that joy being extended into the future. Similarly, though, the actions one takes in the past can have an effect in the future. Just because time has passed since wine has spilled on the carpet does not mean that I cannot, in the present try to clean it up. If the decisions we make in the past can have an effect on the future, what is it about the kind of existential decisions that seem to avoid this kind of temporal permanence?

For Nietzsche every moment is one where the truth of the demon in *The Gay Science* is revealed all over again. Every new moment means that an individual can again be confronted with the truth of existence and can therefore choose whether in that moment to gnash his teeth or to jubilate in his freedom. This kind of repetition cannot avoid the chance for failure, nor should it. However, just as with Sartre, in order to take action in the present, the for-itself of a given moment must look to the future, when it has ceased to exist as reflecting consciousness and gives way to a new for itself, so, too, does Nietzsche need to find a way to guarantee some stability in the joy that freedom brings. Without some kind of connection, however loose between past, present and future, there is no purpose to finding joy in the present; as soon as you have it, it would be gone. Nietzsche needs, at least in part, some kind of transcendence.

Kierkegaard, on the other hand, does a remarkable job showing how repetition is not simply reiteration. Reiteration, physical recurrence, cannot provide meaning in the same way that repetition does for Kierkegaard. This joy, then, can transcend the individual moment, even as that moment repeats itself indefinitely, as long as this repetition is not of a literal sort, but rather as a figurative repetition, or a repetition of a realization of the conditions of existence. For Kierkegaard, then, happiness in the moment can be stretched across individual present moments into a kind of continuity Nietzsche would covet.

Just as Nietzsche's joy benefits from Kierkegaard's construction of repetition, so could Kierkegaard's repetition stand to be a bit more jubilant. In the two volumes of *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard presents the competing possibilities of a life lived in selfish aestheticism and one lived in ethical regularity. The aesthetic was a stage on the way to

living life ethically. The ethical includes having a family, being active in a community and otherwise setting up for your life a kind of comfortable familiarity. This could be a kind of contentment, to be sure, but contentment is not synonymous with joy. Even though the text ends with Kierkegaard's recipe for joy: leading a life where loving God is the primary objective, this still seems a relatively unsatisfying response to the problem. Just as Camus had a fiery response to the conditions of existence, so does Nietzsche's joy have the kind of vim and vigor behind it that captures our attention better than Kierkegaard's constant happiness of repetition.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Two Possibilities for Existential Joy

At its core, existentialism is a philosophy of freedom. Therefore, how individuals choose to confront and react to that freedom is up to them. This is not to say that there are no "wrong answers" as to how existentialism can be interpreted. On the contrary, one thing common to many within the existential tradition is the acknowledgement that freedom is always set against a background of things outside of an individual's control. Heidegger called this "thrownness;" Sartre used the word "facticity" to describe this state of affairs. The facticity of existentialism, then, constitutes the things about it that are not subject to change or interpretations—the things outside of the control of for-itself agents. For instance, existentialism is about freedom. An interpretation that says that existentialism is not about freedom, is not just a different, equally valid interpretation. It is wrong. Philosophers must be willing to say it is wrong, or "existentialism" would lose its meaning. Words have meaning, and existentialism has a particular meaning as well.

To advocate the contrary, a kind of extreme relativism, strips concepts of their meaning. If "A" for instance, can mean both "A" and "not A," then "A" as a qualifier is not useful. Existentialism is not equivalent to extreme relativism. Indeed, this has always been a problem with a philosophy as popular as this one. As it grows in recognition, those without a full grasp of it seek to appropriate it and use it as a label.

Sartre laments this development when he points out that "the word [existentialism] is being so loosely applied to so many things that it has come to mean nothing at all" (*Existentialism Is a Humanism* 20). Though a philosophy of freedom, for existentialism, precision cannot be a dirty word. There are things it cannot be said to be, and there are other things it can be.

This meaning of existentialism, though, does not have to include the overwhelming negativity that modern commentators have of it. Existentialism has been portrayed in the media as negative for decades, though this is not the prescription of the original texts. Existentialism can be fear inducing. The pessimistic readings of these texts by so many are certainly within their freedom as agents to accept. What is important is not to say that existentialism *must* be optimistic or *must* be pessimistic. There are things it must or must not be; there are oppositions where it must choose one side over the other. This is not such an opposition. Insofar as existentialism is about freedom, an individual can choose to create a positive life, a happy life, or an individual can choose to create misery. Treating existentialism as another essentialist condition that shapes human interaction and inevitability from on high runs completely counter to its purpose. It does not have to be positive, though, for this same reason. It can be negative.

This analysis has sought to reconcile this popular view of existentialism with the popular misconceptions surrounding its alleged connection with pessimism and nihilism. I have found two things: first, existentialism is as negative as we let it be, and second, that joy can take two different forms depending on which existential tradition we wish to follow.

While they owe a tremendous debt to their intellectual predecessors, the French existentialism typified by Sartre and Camus allows for a kind of joy in the face of overwhelming circumstances. The joy of Sisyphus, which is the kind of joy that can be extended into Sartrean ontology, is a joy in response to unending imprisonment. It is joy in cursing the gods, in defying the overarching authority and in thumbing one's nose at the unavoidable circumstances of existence. In doing so, though, one must still acknowledge the power these circumstances have; if there is something to rebel against, that thing has a kind of ontological primacy in that the existence of joy is always subsequent to rebellion.

The joy offered by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard is more organic, as in both cases it comes from the affirmation, rather than the negation of indelible truths of existence. Both recognize the importance of finding joy not in the physical circumstances, but in what is beyond them. To be fair, Camus and Sartre do much the same thing, but they both do it in a way that is dependent on the less pleasant aspects of existence.

This essay never meant to present all four of these thinkers and then declare one of them some kind of winner. Instead, I wished to find some sort of possibility for joy. There are as many approaches as there are thinkers, but it seems clear that the surest recipe for some sort of joy would come from a combination of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. Nietzsche has the clearest path to joy; Kierkegaard has the best staying power.

The existentialists of the twentieth century, while they do bring the possibility of joy, do so in the face of external institutions, specifically the historical powers in World War II. This was a helpful feature given their historical circumstances, but does

somewhat limit the universal application. However, as existentialism is fundamentally a philosophy of freedom, I will stop short of recommending one kind of joy over the other—this, too, must remain a choice for each person who confronts the philosophy anew.

Perhaps, like Nietzsche, we can choose one form of joy when it suits us one day and another the next. There are certainly times where Camus' suggestion of rebellion sounds particularly tempting, as there will always be times when institutions oppress, or otherwise stand between an individual and her desires. More positive times could call for Kierkegaard's sustained contentment. What is important is that the media interpretations of the 1950s be put aside in favor of the primary texts of the existential movement. Through their philosophy and literature, the authors of the existential movement each present joy as a valid option for individuals for whom individual freedom is the primary, if only determined value.

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