

## CONQUERING BAD FAITH

CONQUERING BAD FAITH:  
THE MORAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOGNITION  
OF SARTRE'S ABSOLUTE RESPONSIBILITY

By

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*Abstract:*

I examine Sartre's theory of responsibility and the phenomenon of bad faith in order to erect a theory of personal responsibility that is intended to operate as a possible recognition in one's moral-psychological life. I argue that our condition as fundamentally responsible and our avoidance of it in bad faith creates a dynamic that is immediately present in our individual and moral-psychological lives. The condition for the possibility of Sartre's particular sort of self-deception (bad faith) as well as the origin of absolute responsibility is Sartre's existential ontology. I argue that, because of the dynamic of bad faith and responsibility in which *we are responsible in order to hide it*, absolute responsibility is 'brought to the concrete' through our moral-psychological confrontation with bad faith. What this implies is not only the possibility of recognizing our absolute responsibility in the process of self-discovery or moral-psychological improvement, but also that this precedes and in fact is the necessary antecedent to the recognition of Sartre's much maligned radical freedom. There is a categorical differentiation between our ontological condition as freedom and the moral-psychological dynamic of responsibility recognition. In light of this, concrete freedom's definition as 'being conscious of ourselves as free', requires the recognition that we are fundamentally disconnected from *what we are* because *we are the authors of what we are*, i.e. responsible. Thus, responsibility recognition becomes the antecedent to authentic change. However, a methodology of *how* one may achieve responsibility recognition remains somewhat obscured because of the individuality of every human being that is inherent in an ontology that implies absolute authorship of ourselves and our world.

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## Introduction

What I propose is to develop a theory of absolute personal responsibility that will provide a solution for, or more specifically, provide the conditions for the possibility of escaping self-deception. I intend for the development of the theory to be steeped in Jean-Paul Sartre’s structure of consciousness and theory of bad faith and responsibility that is mainly explicated in the existential ontology of *Being and Nothingness*<sup>1</sup>. This means that I am not critiquing Sartre’s theory itself; instead I am utilizing Sartre’s early work on responsibility and the phenomenon of bad faith in order to support my argument for a concrete, absolute personal responsibility. The purpose of such a theory is to provide a concrete foundation on which we may contend with our various, personal instances of bad faith. At the same time, the theory I develop here is an elucidation of Sartre’s theory and therefore will contribute to an understanding of his theory of responsibility as well as providing the moral-psychological condition for the experience of Sartre’s much maligned radical freedom. It may be that “a radical notion of freedom and responsibility is Sartre’s major philosophical contribution” (Aronson, introduction from Sartre, *Truth and Existence*, p. xxix)<sup>2</sup>. However there is more to gain from this contribution in part because of Sartre’s presentation of “a sharp individual and ethical urgency” (Ibid, p.xxx) in his theory that has not been sufficiently developed in regard to our individual moral-psychological existence. This would explain why, in *Being and Nothingness* in the section “Existential Psychoanalysis”, Sartre considers the psychoanalysis to merely be

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<sup>1</sup> *Being and Nothingness* obviously contains the most theoretical detail on bad faith, however Sartre’s other significant early works contribute to this theory as well. For a full list see “Works Consulted”.

<sup>2</sup> *Truth and Existence* will now be referred to as *TE*.

‘possible’ and may not yet ‘exist’, for it “has not yet found its Freud” (*Being and Nothingness*, p.734)<sup>3</sup>. At the end of *Being and Nothingness* Sartre tells us that such individual, moral considerations or more specifically, freedom’s realization of itself as *free* (concrete freedom) are questions that will have to be devoted to “a future work” (*BN*, p.798). In this thesis I argue that the possibility of such concrete freedom can only come about after the recognition of our individual, absolute responsibility. However the core of this thesis concerns responsibility recognition and how it facilitates our confrontation with our existential condition. Absolute responsibility is the condition of not being in bad faith because it is precisely responsibility that is denied in bad faith in order to avoid our existential condition as responsible. What follows is an investigation of this moral-psychological dynamic and the emergence of the possibility of recognizing our fundamental responsibility for ourselves and the world.

### **Bad Faith and Responsibility**

For Sartre, “bad faith” was a term denoting a lie to oneself and it had a specific ontological delineation, differentiating it from a conventional lie. The reason for this differentiation from a conventional lie and consequently, its theoretical emphasis, is that bad faith is directly dependent on the human structure of consciousness as intentional in order to be simultaneously knowledge of what I am hiding and ignorance of what I know. That is, in order to make the lie successful I have to both know what I am lying *about* and hide it from myself. This is bad faith’s ontological structure; however, the phenomenon

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<sup>3</sup> *Being and Nothingness* will now be referred to as *BN*.



of bad faith in our moral-psychological lives operates as a denial of responsibility<sup>4</sup>. The denial comes in the form of hiding the 'truth' from ourselves and this act of hiding is always a process by which we deny responsibility for authoring such a truth.

Fundamentally, the truth reveals the fact that we are unjustifiably and absolutely responsible for ourselves and the world we consciously apprehend and author. *This authorship is the process by which we reveal being through our intentional consciousness*. The desire to avoid responsibility is the result of our anguish in the face of recognizing that 'I am at a distance from the truth and only I, at this distance, constitute what that truth is'. This is a heavy burden that we avoid in bad faith. Such self-deception is a "patient art" (*War Diaries*, p.136)<sup>5</sup> and the source of a myriad of psychological problems and general dysphoria<sup>6</sup> in which 'the way I am' or 'the way the world is' is marred by a complex web of irresponsibility and bad faith that leads to confusion and discontent.

The significance of bad faith to the individual is expressed through one's daily life; we regularly deceive ourselves in order to cope with our concrete existence. This fact is noted not only by others and conferred upon us, but also recognized by us upon discovery of some moral or psychological revelation concerning 'who we are' or 'the way we are'. As Sartre says, "if bad faith is possible, it is because it is an immediate,

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<sup>4</sup> This of course is not an original correlation, for example, Ronald Aronson in his introduction to Sartre's *Truth and Existence*, 1992, writes: "As we already know, one of the central themes of Sartrean bad faith is wanting to hide from or avoid the truth, or refusing to take responsibility for it" (From *TE*, p.xxv). The difference from the theory that follows is that Aronson calls it 'one of the central themes', whereas I argue that it is *the* central theme; for all instances of bad faith can be reduced to responsibility avoidance.

<sup>5</sup> *War Diaries* will now be referred to as *WD*.

<sup>6</sup> Dysphoria is a more general term used here in order to encapsulate whatever problem, with its origin in bad faith, may be pursued by an individual. Dysphoria refers to a state of mental discomfort or unease.

permanent threat to every project of the human being” (*BN*, p.116) which is an expression of the pervasiveness of this self-deception. We deceive ourselves quite regularly. One may think that there are various reasons for deceiving ourselves; however, what is common to them all is that they are all some form of avoiding responsibility for the truth that we wish to hide from ourselves in bad faith.

Because the structure of consciousness is intentional, it therefore always holds some belief or has constituted some meaning concerning the world. Therefore in a case in which I make some ‘self-discovery’, I have moved from believing something that was ‘wrong’ to adopting a new belief that I consider ‘right’. In this moment I may feel, upon my discovery, as if I have escaped something about which I was formerly in bad faith, for a ‘discovery’ implies its own truth. Sartre defines bad faith as a lie to oneself, but “(t)o be sure, the one who practices bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth” (*BN*, p.89). If we are to ‘discover’ what we are, in a process of escaping bad faith, then in revealing these ‘truths’ we must confront their nature, i.e. what they are, where they came from and why they are there. My claim is that in such a discovery we encounter something we have *made*, revealed in its contingency and our contribution to *what it is*. What becomes pivotal to our moral-psychological existence is not *the thing* we have authored, but *the fact* that we have authored it. Refusing to come to terms with this authorship implies a continuation of bad faith. In escaping bad faith, we realize that we are *being* it (whatever we have discovered) only by making it up and are therefore not identical with it, but the author of it.

What I actually am is an intentional consciousness, always directed upon something other than itself and therefore always making-up or authoring what that something *is* and *what it is, is always ‘not me’*. This is our ontological condition according to Sartre, for consciousness, as intentional, *transcends* what it is not and consciousness, because its very being is intention, is nothing. What this implies is that consciousness is responsible for authoring what the world *is*. Thus in a process of escaping bad faith, or ‘discovering the truth’, we must also take responsibility for what we formerly did not. In bad faith we employ various explanations for what we are, or more accurately *excuses*, thus relieving us from recognizing our fundamental responsibility for ourselves. The avoidance of this responsibility becomes the sole purpose of any self-deception or the phenomenon of bad faith. Theoretically, this implies that all cases of responsibility denial are a form of bad faith, or that all cases of bad faith can be reduced to a shirking of responsibility.

In light of this, my discussion and argument is concerned with moral-psychology<sup>7</sup>. For Sartre our being is always in question: my consciousness is intentional and I am therefore always being what I am in the mode of not being it and being what I am not (*BN*, p.86, 110, etc.). In answering the question of what we are, we see that it is

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<sup>7</sup> The term “moral-psychology” here connotes individual consciousness in regard to what is right and wrong. What the term denotes in the context of this thesis is consciousness (which represents the psychological dimension of the term) and human being’s concrete struggle with issues such as responsibility and responsibility avoidance which come to a head in one’s project of bad faith. The project of bad faith revolves around issues of values, i.e. a person retreats into bad faith when they want to avoid believing certain things that conflict with their perceived values. Essentially bad faith is the avoidance of the following: “Life has no meaning *a priori*. Before you come alive, life is nothing; it’s up to you to give it meaning, and value is nothing else but the meaning that you choose” (*EH*, p.49). Therefore the project at hand, which is discovering the role of responsibility in self-deception, is a moral-psychological issue in that it must take account of one’s authorship of meaning and value and one’s avoidance of responsibility for them in bad faith.

inextricably connected to our responsibility for self, for whatever we are is authored by us.

### **Moral-Psychology**

In our daily concrete lives we dwell in a world of meanings and values that we rely on, that we struggle with and that prescribe our actions and choices. The recognition that we author these meanings and values, that we are responsible for them, is pivotal to the meaning and value of our individual existence. Thus, I consider this a moral-psychological investigation of extreme existential and ethical importance. This, in part, explains why Sartre’s most intense discussion of responsibility in the section “Freedom and Responsibility” from *Being and Nothingness* begins with the statement that “the considerations which are about to follow are of interest primarily to the ethicist” (*BN*, p.707)<sup>8</sup>. The moral-psychology of responsibility is inevitably pressing to the individual because “from the instant of my upsurge into being, I carry the weight of the world by myself alone without anything or any person being able to lighten it” (*BN*, p.710). This upsurge into being implies our “fundamental project of unveiling” (*TE*, p.xviii) and to ignore it in bad faith is to contradict that very upsurge into being and to deny our responsibility for such an unveiling.

Responsibility in our moral-psychological lives is made possible and its conditions are provided by the structure of consciousness as an intrinsic and inevitable negation of being. This negation is due to the nature of intentional consciousness. As sole author, consciousness is also solely responsible for what it authors. Absolute

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<sup>8</sup> The section is from p.707-711 in *Being and Nothingness*.

responsibility will therefore have its logical foundation within the context of a fundamental structure of consciousness. However, absolute responsibility will receive its moral importance and psychological prevalence through its concern with the concrete phenomenon of bad faith. Thus, despite the ontological foundation of bad faith and responsibility, it is evident that bad faith is a project we commit to in our daily moral-psychological lives. It is a distinctly moral-psychological project, “being the normal aspect of life for a very great number of people” (*BN*, p.90), with its “essential problem” being “a problem of belief” (*BN*, p.112). It is thereby in our concrete lives that we are confronted with responsibility. On the one hand, responsibility is what stops us from living authentically and is the source of self-deception and on the other hand responsibility is what enables us to realize our fundamental freedom and free us from ignorance, the former in its denial and the latter in its acceptance. Responsibility is the most important concept that we wrestle with in our daily moral-psychological and existential lives and bad faith is our only recourse to avoid it.

It may seem that there is a moral assumption at work here: it is bad to deceive ourselves and it is not good to live in bad faith. This thesis is meant to clarify *how* it is possible to not live in bad faith, i.e. the conditions we have to meet to escape a project of bad faith. However there is a judgment of bad faith which also interprets it as literally *bad*<sup>9</sup>. The value of escaping bad faith is mentioned by Sartre as well, for example: “we

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<sup>9</sup> There is psychological research that advocates self-deception as valuable because it is a coping mechanism that ensures our mental health. For example, Shelly E. Taylor & Jonathon D. Brown, 1988, call such self-deception “positive illusions” in order to promote adaptive and socially engaging behaviour (Taylor & Brown, 1988, p.193). This however cannot be taken up as an argument here (space does not permit) and at worst I will have to concede that self-deception is something to avoid whenever we can be

want freedom for freedom’s sake and in every particular circumstance” (*EH*, p.46). In this context Sartre is denouncing bad faith as a way of excusing the revelation of one’s own existential condition, and therefore he remarks: “I may pass judgment on those who seek to hide from themselves the complete arbitrariness and the complete freedom of their existence” (*Ibid.*). Therefore it is because of our fundamental condition as a consciousness that reveals *being* that makes it of value to come to terms with such a being.

### **Responsibility and Freedom**

In utilizing Sartre’s theory of bad faith as a lie to oneself, it not only represents an accurate and detailed depiction of self-deception but also serves to immerse the discussion in an existential framework, providing the context in which to comprehend the absolute responsibility for which I am arguing. This absolute responsibility is essentially the concept of responsibility that Sartre theorized along with his more famous proclamation of radical freedom. However there are two points of departure, not in definition but in theoretical emphasis. First, despite the fact that throughout *Being and Nothingness* Sartre depicts moments of bad faith as a denial of responsibility, he does not make it explicit that bad faith is *always* reducible to a form of responsibility-denial, whereas I argue that bad faith is always an instance of avoiding our responsibility. Second, I make an effort to separate responsibility and freedom through a categorical differentiation, *in order to view responsibility in full light* and realize its moral-psychological role played out in the ontic world instead of the ontological. This is

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conscious of it and agree with “decades of psychological wisdom” that “contact with reality (is) a hallmark of mental health” (*Ibid.*).

contentious because the two concepts are ontologically inextricable<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless, this does not entail that it is the case psychologically or phenomenologically. I will differentiate responsibility and freedom through an analysis of existential anguish and the moral-psychological dynamic of responsibility avoidance in bad faith.

What this analysis reveals is that, for the individual, responsibility is confronted head on in our daily lives and in this way is distinct from our *experience* of freedom. That is to say, responsibility is primarily a moral-psychological issue that we confront in our escape from bad faith, whereas freedom is primarily ontological and therefore not *necessarily* confronted in our individual moral-psychological lives. This is because responsibility is thrown into the concrete by virtue of having my ‘lived life’ as its object, whereas freedom can remain directed on possibilities that have yet to arrive (and are not guaranteed to ever become concrete). In responsibility we are given something substantial, *something to contend with*; at the same time the assertion of freedom is limited in its importance *without* responsibility. Responsibility is the ‘burden’ part of the ‘burden of freedom’. Freedom is the recognition that we *could* do something different in the future, while responsibility is the recognition that what *is*, is mine: it *was* my choice and now I must bear it. The former does not necessarily imply that we will ever actually *do* otherwise, while the recognition of the latter implies that we *did* do otherwise, so to speak, i.e. *we authored the situation that we already must contend with, and contend with it in light of it being ours. Responsibility is the recognition of authorship, while freedom*

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<sup>10</sup> In fact at various times throughout *Being and Nothingness* responsibility is even depicted as the consequence of ontological freedom; “man *being condemned to be free* carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being” (*BN*, p.707, my emphasis).

*is the recognition of the possibility of authorship.* Therefore responsibility throws us into a relationship with our concrete selves that we either embrace or deny in bad faith.

This emphasis on responsibility in our moral-psychological existence displays its integral role in making a concrete freedom possible. Sartre's definition of freedom as "by oneself to determine oneself to wish" (*BN*, p.803) demands a requisite responsibility, because ontologically, freedom is simply "the permanent *possibility* of this rupture" with the world and with my self that is synonymous with the structure of consciousness (*BN*, p.567, my emphasis). However, Sartre certainly intended there to be a more concrete form of freedom; nevertheless it is characterized differently from our ontological condition *as freedom*. In this way *concrete* freedom is an iteration of responsibility. This concrete freedom requires the recognition of one's authorship in order to fulfill its *determination* because we cannot determine what is not ours. This concrete freedom therefore requires the recognition that what I am is wholly *mine* and only then can I transform it. In order to confront nothingness and experience existential anguish I must realize all that I am has been constituted by me; it is not enough to point toward a future possibility, proclaiming freedom. That is, responsibility for ourselves is the first step in recognizing in the concrete this ontological 'rupture' that we have with being: for if I made it, I am *not* it. Thus, responsibility provides the conditions in which to achieve the sort of concrete freedom Sartre expounded.

The way that we arrive at a moral-psychological responsibility recognition is through bad faith, or more specifically, an escape from bad faith. Responsibility immediately confronts us in this very escape, without the explicit or necessary revelation



of concrete freedom. This is because in responsibility we became cognizant of something we *are* and the fact that we constituted such a way of being, which we formerly denied in bad faith. This is radically different from confronting what we *could* be and how we could realize such a possibility as freedom attempts. The former demands its moral-psychological impact; the latter is subject to escaping such an impact. I therefore claim that in this moral-psychological context freedom and responsibility are not inextricable. Nevertheless, responsibility recognition provides the permanent possibility of exercising concrete freedom precisely because the two are ontologically inextricable.

Therefore we see that responsibility carries a psychological weight that freedom does not necessarily carry. Responsibility for our lives is carried on our shoulders, in this way, life “comes on you from behind” as Sartre says “and you find yourself up to your neck” (*WD*, p.76). In this sense absolute responsibility is the cause of existential anguish; it is responsibility that we deny in bad faith *in order to avoid this very anguish* and to avoid concrete freedom. Therefore responsibility represents the concrete manifestation of the nothingness which we are in light of this robust person and world we have chosen to be. That is, we acutely experience this nothingness in the face of what *is*, revealing that we constituted it. In this way responsibility mediates our existence with the revelation of concrete freedom on the moral-psychological level and explains why it is confronted in our departure from bad faith.

Thus, I have two reasons for separating freedom and responsibility. The first reason is to recognize responsibility’s importance due to our individual, existential and psychological lives. Instead of responsibility gaining importance as a consequence (and

sometimes as a corollary) of the contentious theory of radical freedom, *absolute responsibility will arise due to good moral-psychological and existential health* (i.e. not being in bad faith). Thus, the conclusion of absolute responsibility has as its foundation Sartre’s structure of consciousness and the phenomenon of bad faith as opposed to his theory of freedom.

The second reason is to illuminate the impact of *responsibility* on the individual moral-psychological being which thereby provides a more detailed picture of our escape from bad faith. This will reinforce the idea that absolute responsibility is necessary in order to tear one away from one’s condition of bad faith and provide the conditions for the possibility of any concrete freedom. This process will contribute to an understanding of self-knowledge and the process by which we ‘heal’ ourselves, or progress through undesirable perceptions and beliefs that cause psychological dysfunction or general dysphoria<sup>11</sup>. To ‘know’ ourselves is to recognize that we made up such sources of unhappiness and to become responsible for this is to provide an *opportunity* for change or the possibility of freedom in regard to it. That is to say that if we are ontologically free, as Sartre contends, and therefore author our lives according to the ends we pursue, then in order to realize this psychologically, we require a recognition of responsibility for authoring not only those ends, but how we achieve them and why we desire them. *Only*

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<sup>11</sup> In contemporary existential psychotherapy, the integral role that responsibility for self has in the therapeutic process is well documented. For example, the well known existential psychotherapist, Irvin Yalom, in his introduction on responsibility writes, “for the patient who will not accept such responsibility... no real therapy is possible” (Yalom, p.218). However I would like to point out that my ambition is for this thesis to provide some insight into the nature of responsibility utilizing Sartre’s theory, yet its therapeutic application must remain for future work due to the space here permitted.

*in this way can the ends that we thrust ourselves toward become unhinged from explanations that are in bad faith.*

This argument relies on the fact that such sources of sadness, frustration and discontent are the result of bad faith and is reinforced according to Sartre’s structure of consciousness. I will give a brief example in order to clarify requisite responsibility: if I believe that my depression is *caused* by being an abused child, I am in bad faith because I retreat into the facticity of the situation believing that its physical characteristic (physical abuse) constitutes, via causality, the robust meaning of my situation (i.e. my depression). By doing so, I limit my freedom to alter such an effect through my belief that my condition is determined. I deny the contingency of what the situation *is* by denying that my consciousness is that which transcended the situation and *made it what it is*. Thus, the way out is to accept responsibility for the abuse and the depression as ‘mine’ because I authored it and in doing so, confront my own nothingness. This in turn illuminates my own possibilities and provides the possibility of freedom. Responsibility is therefore requisite to being able to exercise concrete radical freedom; for unless I realize that the abuse is something *I made*, I will not be able to change it from acting as a *cause*, but instead, only be able to avoid it, flee from it, again in bad faith. Concrete freedom as a ‘conscious determination of myself’ can only arrive therefore, when I realize that the world did not make me, but I made myself, which equates to the recognition of my responsibility<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> I cannot also argue for and describe concrete freedom in this paper due to focus and space permitted and will have to be the focus of future work. However it remains my contention that absolute responsibility is requisite to the experience of concrete radical freedom whatever it may look like, due to the argument here explicated.

These two reasons for my treatment of responsibility thereby avoid becoming entwined in discussions focusing solely on Sartre’s famous claim of radical freedom. I wish to stay away from the ‘freedom argument’ because it is often isolated from the rest of Sartre’s theory and therefore, not only misunderstood but also has little to say about our moral-psychological progress. We cannot tell people suffering from depression that they are free in regard to their depression and expect that to be fruitful in successfully escaping the bad faith they pursue. When the concept of freedom is taken and applied to various situations without the responsibility I am arguing for here, it loses its radical possibility that Sartre intended. This ‘isolated freedom’ is debated, not just as a metaphysical or ontological issue, but the debate tends toward political interests (understandably)<sup>13</sup> which, as a moral-psychological endeavor I intend to avoid. It is obvious that concrete freedom is a political issue; however, the discussion of responsibility provides a basis on which to construct a more thorough understanding of what this Sartrean freedom would look like *to the individual*, without which our treatment of freedom is going to be superficial and conceptually anemic. The interest in analyzing freedom-by-itself may lose sight of the kind of freedom that Sartre intended to be absolute in his early work by distorting the manifestation of concrete freedom, again ignoring the thorough, ontological basis for such a freedom which must include a moral-psychological recognition of our absolute responsibility. In light of this I will briefly take into account two criticisms of Sartre’s radical freedom which are guilty of minimizing responsibility and what it constitutes. I will do this in order to show the importance of

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<sup>13</sup> I say ‘understandably’ because the degree of our concrete freedom is important to our analysis of various aspects of our political freedom.

responsibility’s integration into the debate on Sartre’s freedom. Charles Taylor in his well known essay, ‘Responsibility for Self’ asserts that radically free choices are void of moral consideration. This is a misrepresentation of concrete freedom and is due to a misunderstanding of the substantiality of our responsibility for *being what we are*.

Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre’s closest contemporary, in her paper *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, considers freedom in light of oppression and therefore intimates conclusions about the ambiguity of concrete freedom. However this ambiguity is present precisely because it is lacking the inclusion of the absolute responsibility I will explicate and defend.

### **What Responsibility?**

Sartre does not explicate the strict relationship between the absolute responsibility he argues for and the phenomenon of bad faith that I will here; however I believe that it is intimated throughout and in fact consistent with his theory<sup>14</sup>. Others have pointed out that bad faith is in such a relationship with responsibility: “bad faith is fundamentally an ontological attitude of fleeing one’s freedom and responsibility” (Zheng, p.265)<sup>15</sup>, while not making the distinction I do. Most of Sartre’s description of responsibility is in tandem with freedom and is therefore explicated as our ontological condition. However, the moral-psychological confrontation of responsibility that brings

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in the chapter called Bad Faith, Sartre gives examples of people in bad faith who regularly ‘make excuses’ for their behaviour, e.g. the “pederast” (*BN*, p.107). Excuses are a form of responsibility evasion, however Sartre does not explicitly tie responsibility evasion to the pederast’s bad faith, instead choosing to describe it as ‘refusing to draw the conclusion his actions impose’, ‘he considers himself different’, he is not pinned down by such a definition, (*BN*, p.107). However, “every man who takes refuge behind the excuse of his passions, every man who sets up a determinism, is a dishonest man” (*Existentialism and Human Emotions*, p.44-45 – From here on referred to as *EH*), and this dishonesty is a form of bad faith, avoiding the fact that neither his passions nor determinate causes can supersede the authorship which his existence entails. Thus, I will argue for and make more explicit the intimate tie between bad faith and responsibility that I believe is implicit in and consistent with Sartre’s theory.

<sup>15</sup> However, this quotation continues to consider responsibility and freedom as inextricable, which I, as I have said, distinguish based on our moral-psychological confrontation of each.

it to the surface of our concrete lives and separates itself from freedom phenomenologically, will not only reinforce Sartre’s ontological concept of absolute responsibility but more importantly to this thesis, will recognize its pivotal role in our moral-psychological lives and its connection to the persistent project of bad faith.

The question may follow, what sort of responsibility is this that is emphasized and made distinct on a moral-psychological level? The answer is an *absolute* responsibility that has a fundamentally different origin than the conventional understanding of responsibility.

More specifically, responsibility still is conventionally defined: as Sartre says, “we are taking the word ‘responsibility’ in its ordinary sense as ‘consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or of an object’” (*BN*, p.707). What differentiates absolute responsibility from a conventional definition of responsibility are the *criteria* that constitute responsibility assignment. Despite the fact that “authorship” is required for being held responsible, the conventional understanding in some way requires some sort of *power* rooted in efficient *causality* that the Sartrean conception *is not limited to*. For example, Sartre gives the famous example of the soldier who is responsible for the war (*BN*, p.709). This responsibility requires that we can say that Sartre’s soldier is responsible for the war because he has *made it be*, or the war *is what it is* through him. However he has not *made it be* in that he *caused* the events to occur in the efficient sense (e.g. the soldier ordered the occupation of a neighboring nation). The example that I consider (if only to differentiate myself from Sartre) is the terminal cancer patient who is responsible for his cancer. In the same sense as the soldier, he is responsible for the

cancer because he has authored what “having terminal cancer” *is*; however he is not the efficient cause of the physical cancer. The conventional definition of responsibility would require our cancer victim to cause the being-in-itself aspect of the cancer to exist, something which he cannot do because he cannot be the foundation of the phenomena of being or being-in-itself.

It is due to a lack of understanding of what authorship *is* that the criteria for conventional responsibility in fact, in some instances, *prohibit* us from claiming responsibility when we should. The problem is that we must be absolved of conventional responsibility as soon as a ‘cause’ can be applied to our actions or beliefs. This is a danger in the mode of bad faith that is not difficult to point out, for every day we encounter some form of responsibility evasion that we base on causal factors, whether it is ‘my parents’, ‘society’, ‘a chemical imbalance’, or ‘my bad knee’. The problem is that causality acts as a slippery slope that can aid us in our avoidance of responsibility as long as we adhere to the conventional criteria for responsibility assignment. The abusive husband, for example, employs such bad faith when he blames his wife for ‘making him do it’, denying his responsibility for the abuse by employing this (albeit weak) criterion of causality. Causality is a paradigm of excuse utilized in bad faith in order to avoid responsibility. Thus, it is *authorship* itself that I will examine and argue for throughout this paper, erecting a conception of authorship that is independent of causal explanations, which will reinforce our individual condition as one that authors our situation<sup>16</sup>. It will

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<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, bad faith may ignore the situation altogether, shirking responsibility for making it *be*, contending ‘I am not what I am’. The abusive husband may say, ‘I’m not *abusive*, it was an exception’, in this way denying his very ability to make the situation what it is. This second mode of bad faith I will explain below.

become evident that authorship is independent of efficient causality and at the same time is responsible for making the situation what it is. Ignoring this is an effort, in bad faith, to deny responsibility for the situation<sup>17</sup>. The *conventional* understanding of authorship oversteps the boundaries of the human condition, expecting consciousness to achieve certain powers of causality in order to be responsible, only then to strip consciousness of responsibility when it cannot achieve such powers, thereby explaining away authorship via independent causality.

This is due to an ignorance of what Sartre delineated as being-in-itself and being-for-itself. *Being-in-itself* is being that is outside of consciousness, i.e. “non-conscious being” (*BN*, p.800) or being that consciousness is not the foundation of, and its existence is causal. For example I can hit the cue ball into the 3-ball and *cause* the 3-ball to move. This causal movement of the billiard balls is a function of being-in-itself and only is what it is and therefore has no inherent meaning. Now what this process is in human reality is authored by consciousness, or *being-for-itself*, and is therefore wholly the responsibility of consciousness. Being-for-itself is “the nihilation of being-in-itself” (*Ibid.*) and therefore transcends the phenomena of being-in-itself and gives it its meaning. The situation with the billiard balls may be “tense”, “playful”, “a waste of time”, “life altering”, “a good shot”, “a bad shot”, etc. This situation, i.e. *what it is*, is authored by consciousness alone and therefore consciousness is responsible for making the situation what it is. Outside of such meaning constitution there is nothing but the meaningless

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<sup>17</sup> The interesting (and contentious) thing about absolute responsibility is that the abused wife is also responsible for the abuse, for she constitutes her situation as ‘abusive’, and the situation’s objective conditions come into existence through her as ‘abusive’.



physical operations of being-in-itself. Now what is so significant about this structure is that *the world is what it is by virtue of meaning* and simultaneously, in human reality the world does not exist without meaning. Thus, being-for-itself is responsible for all that the world *is* by virtue of being the only thing that makes up what the world is; in other words the world only is what it is *through* consciousness and is therefore consciousness' responsibility despite being-in-itself having its own foundation and causal function. This authorship is directly derived from Sartre's ontological structure of consciousness and constitutes responsibility for all that we *are*, for "man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (*EH*, p.15). I must admit in absolute responsibility that 'I am the author of all that I am' and consequently escape bad faith, realizing that 'I am not a product, an effect, or a result of some other cause and *I am something only in so far as what I author myself as*'.

After first explicating the conditions for the possibility of this absolute responsibility, second, elucidating *what* responsibility is and defending it, third, arguing for its integration with the phenomenon of bad faith and showing its solitary significance within the context of our moral-psychological existence, lastly I will explore the possibility of the concrete recognition of absolute responsibility and *how* we may accomplish that. The theoretical result of responsibility recognition is existential authenticity<sup>18</sup>, because responsibility acceptance is inherently free of bad faith which

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<sup>18</sup> Authenticity is the recognition that one defines his world not according to only facticity or transcendence but recognizes both in his recognition that any possibility could spontaneously be apprehended; that is, realizing that nothing causes or dictates in any way what one must believe or value or do. This is equivalent to the result of the escape from bad faith, thus, for my purposes authenticity is the complete and daily escape from bad faith. Sartre mentions authenticity at the end of his chapter on bad faith: "a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted. This self-recovery we shall call authenticity" (*BN*,

therefore leaves us confronting the reality of our existential condition<sup>19</sup>. Sartre, at times has referred to the escape from responsibility as “inauthentic” (*WD*, p.112). Our existential condition, and why we avoid responsibility in bad faith, is the condition of being a consciousness that is always in question and that is at an alienating distance from the world. Yet the most important and empowering moral-psychological consequence of such an ontological structure is that it is a life that is wholly constituted by us and therefore our responsibility. This is what we flee in *anguish*, spiraling into bad faith, and it is the acceptance of responsibility for *what we have constituted and authored* that is the necessary condition of recognizing this fact. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that such an absolute state may not be possible (i.e. to live authentically all the time); however I will argue for the *result* of responsibility recognition as outlined by this thesis and illustrate such consequences for the person in bad faith<sup>20</sup>. This is meant to provide a benefit to our understanding of moral-psychology and personal responsibility.

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p.116, n9) and it is bad faith which corrupts this being. Authenticity is the ‘daily escape’ from bad faith because there is always, due to the structure of consciousness, “a permanent risk of bad faith” (*BN*, p.116).

<sup>19</sup> Our “existential condition” is derived from the ontology explicated in Chapter 1; we are intentional consciousness never quite ourselves due to this fact, always engaged in making up what we are and what the world is. This of course entails responsibility for what we are and what the world is due to our unavoidable authorship (the facticity of our consciousness). To not be in bad faith implies the recognition of this existential condition and therefore the recognition of responsibility.

<sup>20</sup> I have no reservations about pursuing my conclusion of authenticity through responsibility recognition just because it may not be practically possible. The theoretical conclusion is enough to direct not only this thesis but an individual in bad faith as well. The reason behind the latter is that the goal of not deceiving oneself implicitly ends in this theoretical authenticity *because*, one, responsibility acceptance is the converse of lying to oneself and complete acceptance of absolute responsibility is the condition of authenticity. Two, I am assuming no one wishes to half lie to themselves; i.e. if the goal is to not deceive one self then the goal is to ‘go all the way’, so to speak, even if it is perceived as impossible.

## Chapter 1: The Ontological Condition

Given the aim of this thesis we must first look at the conditions that make bad faith and absolute responsibility possible. The structure of the lie in bad faith is ‘knowing the truth in order to hide it’ (*BN*, p.89), which is made possible by the structure of consciousness. Of course the world that we may be in bad faith *about* is not *in* consciousness; it is a world made up of things that consciousness points at. Therefore, this chapter will also explain the phenomenon of being that is integrated into our situation and its appearance to our consciousness; for being-in-itself is what is transcended in order to constitute our situation. In bad faith we either deny responsibility for our situation that we have constituted or we deny responsibility for constituting our situation. This responsibility has its foundation in Sartre’s structure of consciousness. This structure of the Sartrean consciousness is one in which consciousness is intention, always and necessarily directed at something other than itself (as it has no self to be directed at)<sup>1</sup>. The intentionality of consciousness facilitates the negation of being-in-itself and the creation of human reality as we experience it<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sartrean self is what we create *through* intention. The consciousness is not the self, as it is an ontological entity – all human beings have the same consciousness, strictly speaking. It is what the consciousness makes up through its intention that culminates in a ‘self’. In Sartrean terms it is called the fundamental project and it is the self that each of us creates through our authorship of what we are. The fundamental project is a contributing factor in our pursuit of bad faith, for it represents something substantial, something that is a facticity that we concretize in our effort to not recognize our responsibility for a given action or belief. E.g. ‘I can’t help that I’m racist, it’s just the way I grew up’, accompanied by tears, displaying the anguish in the face of responsibility for holding racist beliefs.

<sup>2</sup> I am not here arguing about the nature of consciousness as intention, rather, for the purposes of this thesis, I am stipulating that consciousness is inextricably intentional. I assume that this stipulation is not the contentious issue in Sartre’s theory or in this thesis and therefore content myself to move forward. I contend that consciousness is analytically intentional, i.e. intentionality is necessarily implied by what consciousness is, i.e. to be conscious is to be conscious *of*. The ‘*of*’, always there, always implying something else.

## I: Intentional Consciousness

“All that there is of intention in my actual consciousness is directed toward the outside, toward the world” (*BN*, p.12). Yet there is nothing to know about this consciousness that is intentional; it cannot be a thing *in* consciousness, we cannot point to intention as something distinct from the rest of our consciousness. In pointing we are again a consciousness doing the pointing, i.e. being intentional, and therefore what we are pointing at cannot be consciousness itself, rather consciousness is what we point with. Therefore, “If the intention is not a thing in consciousness then the being of the intention can be only consciousness” (*BN*, p.14). Intention *is* consciousness and “all consciousness is consciousness of something” (*BN*, p.21).

By positing an intentional consciousness we say that *what* consciousness is, is consciousness *of* something. Thus, Sartre says, consciousness has as its constitutive structure transcendence, as it only transcends itself toward things that are *not it*. Thus, “consciousness is born *supported by* a being which is not itself” (*BN*, p.23). That is, if consciousness is only consciousness of something, that something is supporting consciousness, in that it is making consciousness a thing that reveals (because to reveal requires something to be revealed) and consciousness can thereby only be qualified as a revealing intuition “or it is nothing” (*BN*, p.23). Through this we are meant to see that if consciousness is always revealing something other than itself, then the being of consciousness will always be in question; “*its being is in question in so far as this being*

*implies a being other than itself*" (BN, p.24)<sup>3</sup>. Consciousness is always revealing the thing it points to and in doing so only ever can reveal itself *as intentional*, and as something that always implies something other than itself there cannot be anything else ascribed to *intentional consciousness*. We see this when we look at consciousness in action, for consciousness always holds something that is not quite it<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the being of consciousness is such that its being is in question *because* it implies something other than itself. "How can he *be* what he is when he exists as consciousness of being?", Sartre asks (BN, p.101).

The fact that consciousness 'reveals itself as intentional' may seem to cause the following problem: if it is only intention how can we say it is intentional? That is, it must be consciousness that is aware that it is intentional if we are to say it is so. This is true, for consciousness is always a tacit and non-positional consciousness of itself as intentional; consciousness is aware of itself when it transcends the objects of the world, but only as something that transcends.

Of course the being of phenomena is different from consciousness, "it is what it is" (BN, p.29), as it does not take distance from itself, it does not *question itself* and does not then refer to itself as *not that*. This is the first sense of how consciousness brings

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<sup>3</sup> I will take it for granted now that the reader does not wish to seriously criticize Sartre on grounds of the epistemological problem of appearance vs. reality that caught the attention of so much philosophy for so long, nor on the grounds of a Berkelean idealism. Sartre dispenses with both of these rather summarily: "The phenomenal being... is nothing but the well connected series of its manifestations" (BN, p.5) and "it can not be *supported* by any being other than its own" (BN, p.7) [e.g. a noumenal being], for Sartre's explanation see BN, p.4-7. If being is constituted by the series of its appearances then it transcends even us as we cannot hold such a 'subjective plenitude' in mind, thus, we cannot be the source of its being and therefore it must constitute its being; being is the foundation of phenomena, for Sartre's explanation see BN, p.9-17.

<sup>4</sup> This is of course the case even when people refer to 'them selves', to say something about one's self is to point at this thing, a 'self'. Whatever this self is (in Sartrean terms the fundamental project) it is obviously not the thing which points at it, which *intends* it.

nothingness into existence, when we discover that consciousness is itself a negation.

Consciousness as intention is always *not that*, *not* that being which it points to.

“Consciousness is a pure and simple negation of the given, and it exists as the disengagement from a certain existing given” (*BN*, p.615). As it posits or points at something other than itself, it therefore indicates itself as *not* the thing it is pointing at. This certain existing given is what consciousness points at and in doing so consciousness is a perpetual negation, always not the thing it reveals: “What is present to me is what is not me” (*BN*, p.241).

This nihilating being of consciousness must be, for it could not be like the rest of being which is characterized as a given, for its structure will not allow it. “If this being were not its own negation, it would be what it is – *i.e.*, a pure and simple given” (*BN*, p.615) like other phenomena, for example a rock or a tree. If consciousness were a given or a being like phenomena then it would lose its character of intentionality that I described above, for no given can intend something other than itself, a given merely posits itself in full positivity; a chair is a chair and only indicates itself and cannot indicate, point to or intend anything else. The chair may seem to point to something else, for example, it may point to a table as ‘not being a table’ or point to a person to sit on it, but again this is only evidence of consciousness’ negating function, for it is consciousness which says ‘it is not a table’ and says ‘it is for sitting on’ (or ‘I am not sitting on it now’), it is not the chair which says this.

“*Nothingness haunts being*” while it “*exists only on the surface of being*” (*BN*, p.49); nothingness arises subsequently out of being, through consciousness which

transcends being, as the inevitable negation of what *is*. This requires consciousness to bring about the possibility of *not* with every encountered appearance. Without consciousness we would only have pure positive being, i.e. what *is*. Negation arises through consciousness and therefore haunts being in everything we do. At the same time Nothingness requires being to exist, in this sense dwelling on the surface of being; for without being, non-being, which arises through the negation of being, could therefore not arise. The negating act of consciousness on being, which brings nothingness to the surface of being as the inherent act of consciousness, *is thus authored by consciousness*. Human beings, as consciousness, bring nothingness to the surface of being and therefore are responsible for all that this brings with it. What this negation brings with it is human reality as we experience it. Without consciousness’ negation there would be no ‘chair’ but instead only the positive being of some substance (wood for example) in some meaningless shape. Through its transcendence of the chair it is consciousness that defines it as *what it is* (not a table, to sit on, built well, etc.).

The nature of intentional consciousness as transcending, negating and thereby constituting what the world *is*, is illustrated by Sartre in his novel *Nausea*. The main character, Antoine Roquentin begins to see the phenomenal world detached from the meaning he gives it, something that could only be possible if the phenomenal world was void of meaning. Roquentin’s own hand becomes “like a fish” or a ‘beast at the end of his arm’ (*Nausea*, p134), illustrating the separation of being and consciousness because it is consciousness which assures us, which constitutes our hand as ‘a hand’, ‘for picking things up’, ‘has four fingers and a thumb’, etc. What becomes evident to Roquentin in

this process is that consciousness is always there and as a consciousness *he* must *exist*, despite catching a glimpse of raw being, made possible through an irregular, swirling constitution of *what the given being is*. Roquentin does not see being as void of consciousness, for he cannot, but his nausea is prompted by the fact that he sees being as *separate* from consciousness. *What* consciousness assigns to the being of the world as what it is, is not necessary, it is contingent and generated through consciousness' transcendence of being as being *not that*. This is why soon after Roquentin sees his hand as "a crab" (*Nausea*, p.134) revealing, simultaneously, the contingency of reality and the permanence of being, he realizes that he must exist and there are "many ways to *make* myself exist, to thrust myself into existence" (*Nausea*, p.136). This serves as a literary illustration of the experienced separation of consciousness and being, however what Roquentin is doing in this separation is viewing being without meaning, whereas what I am here concerned with *is the meaning of this being*.

As Roquentin illustrated, human reality is not raw being, rather reality is the meaning constituted by consciousness and it must be this that we are responsible for in our authorship. This ontological separation of being and consciousness through consciousness' negation of being makes up human reality and provides the conditions for the possibility of Sartre's version of responsibility.

Consider a more general example indicative of consciousness' distinction from the being of given things. It is plain to see consciousness could not be a given, a being like phenomena, because we (as consciousnesses) could not be such due to the complexity of our individuality. If we were simply phenomena, like chairs or tables then



we would be homogenized; we would be 'people' in the same way that 'chairs' are 'chairs' or 'trees' are 'trees'. We would be homogenized by virtue of having a certain causal nature, as certain given things (i.e. human things). Our experience tells us this is not the case, for we experience people acting and reacting, conceiving of the world in radically different ways. In this way our individuality by itself is indicative of the nihilating function of consciousness, as it is the result of varied meanings assigned to what each person encounters in the world coordinated with certain varying beliefs and values. If consciousness were like a chair, it would be governed by certain determinate causes, but the fact that individuals are so varied, in fact that there are no two alike, is evidence that we, as conscious beings, are not simply phenomena like chairs, trees, moons, etc.

For example, it is not hard to imagine two people who experienced the same life situation having the same physical results (e.g. starvation, broken bones, obesity, etc.) as the other. Now if they were simple givens, they would be the same person (in so far as the situation was concerned), by virtue of both being a 'person-thing' determined by their conditions. Similarly, if two chairs were subject to identical conditions we could expect that they would consequently be identical chairs. But concerning the two people this could not be the case. They would be different, and possibly radically different, and this is due to the fact that consciousness transcends being and is separate from being. That is, the two may constitute the same situation differently, therefore differentiating themselves from one another. Consciousness' transcendence of the phenomena encountered is the differentiating factor that the being of the phenomenon does not have. For our

transcendence, as a negation, includes infinite possibilities of what the situation is *not*. The mere *possibility* that the two *could* be different indicates the fact that they, as conscious human beings, are not phenomena determined by causes acting on them and producing an effect. Contrarily, the two identical chairs could not possibly be different.

This possibility of difference among human beings, creating radically different meanings from the same life experience, is indicative of the authorship of consciousness that is implied by intentional consciousness. This authorship is made possible by the nihilating function of consciousness, i.e. the separation of being and consciousness through this nihilation as spontaneously defining what ‘it’ is. Person A says situation X is ‘bad’, while person B says situation X is ‘not bad’. This cannot depend on a formulaic relation between the being-in-itself of X and *what* situation X is; it cannot because situation X has the possibility of contradicting such a relation as displayed by human beings themselves, a possibility which exists because of negation, i.e. it could be *not this*. For example we may see this with two similarly abused children who become two different people in relation to the abuse. Such traumas (e.g. abuse, torture, loss) are paradigmatic situations that exemplify the individuality of human beings based on how they construe the meaning of these significant phenomena in their own life.

It is the case that there are some elements of our existence as human beings that are obviously the same, for example, our physiology. However, that does not infringe upon the domain of consciousness which apprehends the world not only according to its facticity (i.e. the fact that it exists) but also its transcendence (i.e. how it exists). Consciousness is for-itself while human bodies, biologically speaking, are in-itself; they

are part of a facticity whose nature we cannot impede. While the *meaning* of a blow to the head from another person is strictly the domain of consciousness and obviously cannot be in a determinate relationship with the strike itself<sup>5</sup>, the reaction of the skin to the strike, for example bruising, may contain a determinate causal relationship. Nevertheless, what the bruise *is* to consciousness, for example, ‘something to be proud of’, ‘something to be ashamed of’, ‘something I suffered’, ‘something that victimized me’, etc., is subject solely to the authorship of consciousness itself as it transcends the bruise and assigns meaning to it (inevitably). What the bruise *is*, aside from its explanation as a non-specific physiological causal event, is authored by consciousness, therefore *what the bruise is*, is the responsibility of that which authored it, i.e. the responsibility of consciousness.

This is more pivotal than may be expected, for the fact that consciousness makes up the meaning of the in-itself entails that we are responsible for the meaning acquired by

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<sup>5</sup> This is a point that I am reiterating because I believe it needs to be said in order to, at least, point out what should be obvious and easily defensible: I do not believe that any rational argument could succeed in saying that meanings and values are that of a determinate relationship. Even if one were to assert psychosocial causes, as some developmental psychologists do, they would be very unsuccessful in predicting the behavioural outcome of any influence or environment, thereby displaying the lack of causality in the relationship. Nevertheless they are successful in predicting behavioural outcomes more than may seem to be possible. The way this is done is by getting to know the tendencies of their client or subject, getting to know former choices that he or she has made and then counting on the odds of he or she continuing with their behavioural choices, e.g. he has always made reckless choices, he will again in this situation. This of course says nothing in regard to the relationship between an event or situation and the person’s meaning or behaviour as a result, *causally* speaking. This is in part because many people (if not all) have a tendency, through their flight from anguish, to live up to their current project. Despite this, I do not want to be ignorant of the epistemological problem that is presented by a thesis of determinate behavioural cause, while we (human beings) have just not been able to describe it or have knowledge of it. This of course must remain a possibility whose denial I must take for granted with pragmatic innocence and say that if it were true, it has not proven to be so and does not work as truth, and we therefore will accept that human behaviour is not causally determined and we are individually differentiated. On this note, I may point out that the Sartrean explanation of consistent behaviour based on our desire to have an identifiable ‘self’, something to live up to, as a way of avoiding a fall into complete anguish in the face of our fundamental contingency, is both complete and sufficient for explaining any behaviour that may seem ‘predictable’.

things as they are revealed by consciousness. However what this also indicates is that we can say we are responsible for the very thing, or event or situation itself, for it is through our meaning constitution that the situation comes to life; it is through our transcendence that it becomes human reality because without our transcendence the situation would not exist per se. Jeanson puts it well in this description of responsibility, which re-emphasizes my examples above as well as integrating them with the reality that consciousness brings to life: “To say he is absolutely responsible for such a choice simply means no one else would have chosen the same, not even if he were in exactly the same objective circumstances. And this entails that these *objective conditions show themselves as such only through the subject’s intervention*” (Jeanson, 1980, p.189, my emphasis)<sup>6</sup>. Our bruised victim is the author of what the bruise becomes and no other individual could reproduce the meaning the victim makes up concerning the bruise. Thus, the bruise *is* X by virtue of our victim, and *it is therefore through our victim that the objective, physiological conditions of the bruise are revealed*. We can therefore conclude that our victim, simply put, *is responsible for the bruise*<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Francis Jeanson’s relevance should be noted here if only to justify references made to his work throughout this thesis. Jeanson gives us a further elucidation of Sartre’s early work; the work referenced here, *Sartre and the Problem of Morality* was originally written in 1947 and reissued in French in 1965 with a letter-forward by Jean-Paul Sartre. In this letter forward Sartre endorsed Jeanson’s book “as interpreting my views to my complete satisfaction”. It is because of this and the nature of Jeanson’s book that I choose to utilize it, at times, as an extension of Sartre’s work, in helping to explain Sartre’s theory (Stone, Robert V., “Translators Introduction” From Jeanson, Francis, *Sartre and the Problem of Morality*, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> There will be further description below of the genesis of this sort of responsibility; however this iteration is bound to seem contentious, for despite its consistency, one may find it intuitively incorrect. How could the person who caused the bruise not be responsible? This is where one must be careful because it is the case that if everyone (all consciousness’) are absolutely responsible than the attacker will also be (equally) responsible for the bruise. There is no traditional ‘assignment’ of responsibility here which excludes it from being the responsibility of others, it is the responsibility of all who reveal the in-itself through their transcendence of it, for they each make up *what it is*.

What is underlying this point is the fact that both being and nothingness are necessary for the constitution of the world. Being without nothingness is a mass of meaningless physical being and it requires nothingness, which is consciousness, to “cause the existence of a ‘this’ rather than a ‘that’” and so on (*BN*, p.249). However, what is clear to Roquentin is that the ‘this and that’ of the world is not fixed and necessarily defined; on the contrary, it is contingent and dependent on our consciousness. While the fact that there *is* a ‘this and that’ must be the case, for that is existence and human reality as we know it. The facticity of existence is that consciousness, as nothingness, necessarily determines phenomena through its transcendence and the negation inherent in intention in order to produce reality by revealing reality.

## **II: Negation**

If this separation of consciousness from being-in-itself is the case, it must also be the case that our intentional consciousness is able to encompass the world as *that*. If it is not the case that all phenomena are revealed by consciousness, then the preceding section goes out the window as not accounting for phenomena in general or failing to account for some aspect of reality, thereby marginalizing consciousness and derivatively allowing exceptions to the absolute responsibility I am here arguing for. Therefore, it is necessary to describe in detail consciousness and its apprehension of the world, or more accurately: its relation to phenomena and *how* this negation constitutes reality.

Our consciousness shows its negating character not only specifically due to its nature as intention, but also in regard to the apprehension and therefore interpretation of the world of phenomena. Without negation, things would exist as some sort of ‘pure

given', some undifferentiated being. The fact that we can differentiate things (objects, situations, people, etc.) from one another; that we can determine this thing as X, is indicative of our nihilating structure. The world to consciousness is not only being but the spaces between being which differentiate being from being and are constituted by nothingness. Consciousness differentiates being because being is surrounded by nothingness, as *not* anything else but what *it is*. As a single determination by consciousness, X is determined as 'something to be changed', 'something deficient', 'an obstacle', 'not Y', etc. All of these things gain meaning through negation. The fundamental negation that our consciousness performs, originally and generally formulated as the reality of X, is "that it *is* there and that it *is not me*" (BN, p.5). Everything in the world exists as it is, only because it is in relation to something else, and this relation must be tempered or conditioned or constituted by a negation (a question, a possible alternative, a possibility of X *not* being what it is, the fact that it is not Y<sup>8</sup>). "What is present to me is what is not me...It is impossible to construct the notion of an object if we do not have originally a negative relation designating the object as that which *is not* consciousness" (BN, p.241). If X were not like this, then it would not be any-thing, so to speak, i.e. not to be determined as anything in particular. As soon as it is determined by consciousness as X, it carries with it the meaning *not-Y*. Therefore it is the possibility or threat of X not existing as it seems to, that gives X its substantiality; it

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<sup>8</sup> Let me here point out that these examples in parentheses embody two aspects of the world that consciousness illuminates: one, that the objects of the world are delineated and pinned down as what they are via the negation of consciousness and two that what the objects of the world *are* is itself contingent, as our own existence is. These two points are salient throughout this paper, for they both can be a source for the existential anguish which motivates our avoidance of responsibility in bad faith; that is, they both provide us with the revelation that *we* author our reality.

paradoxically gives it being (*BN*, p.635). That is, the nothingness which surrounds X points to possibilities that are not it, and this condition gives it its being-X and does so as something which appears to me (or you). This is what Roquentin was confronted with when he saw X as being what it is contingently, as lacking the substantiality of his authorship and therefore requiring him to give it its definition as *what it is*.

The negation of X by consciousness is what constitutes the phenomenon of X as *that thing*; the phenomenal being is the object’s being in so far as it is revealed to consciousness (*BN*, p.25). Phenomenal being is always being revealed by consciousness, for as phenomena they appear and as ‘something that appears’, they must appear *to* something. Thus phenomena, accordingly, appear to us, i.e. consciousnesses that apprehend phenomena and that point at phenomena.

It is apparent that this nothingness arises in our *relation* to being: being “is what it is” (*BN*, p.29) it cannot be what it is not, it cannot posit itself as other-than, it knows no alterity. But “what being *will be* must of necessity arise on the basis of what *it is not*. Whatever being is, it will allow this formulation: ‘Being is *that* and outside of that, *nothing*’” (*BN*, p.36). And when we point out that something is *that*, we imply this formulation. Of course this nothingness arises out of our relation to being, but that does not imply that it is something superfluous, over and above being. Firstly, as Sartre points out, “how could we even conceive of the negative form of judgment if all is plentitude of being and positivity?”, (*BN*, p.42-43) for “no question could be asked, in particular not that of being, if negation did not exist” (*BN*, p.56). Secondly, negation, analytically, cannot arise from being alone, for “the notion of being as full positivity does not contain

Nothingness as one of its structures” (*BN*, p.56), therefore nothingness appears through our consciousness; it is our consciousness that constitutes nothing’s haunting of being; it is when *we* determine something as *that* that we surround it with nothingness. For what it is, is contingent and therefore negatively relative to other things, i.e. it is *not* those other things, and it is surrounded by these possibles which it is *not*; it is surrounded by nothingness. This nothingness is necessarily brought to the world through consciousness, for it is consciousness which holds these possibles which *X is not*, for *X* itself cannot hold other possibilities of what it is precisely because it is not conscious; it just exists as positive being; *it just is*. “From the moment the world appears qua world it gives itself as *being only that*” (*BN*, p.52); there is an inherent negation in consciousness’ apprehension of the world, which is only to say that there exists both being and nothingness. At the same time nothingness is at the heart of being, for the world as something that exists already contains the nothingness of consciousness, ““there is’ being because I am the negation of being” (*BN*, 296). Our consciousness therefore, as nothingness, creates existence as we know it, therefore providing us with the ontological basis for the fact that we author that reality, thereby being responsible for it. “This *nothing* is human reality itself as the radical negation by means of which the world is revealed” (*BN*, p.251).

Thus, it is our transcendence of phenomena that we reveal in their meaning that constitute the objects of the world that we are wholly responsible for. When we investigate our transcendence of phenomena, it becomes apparent that a given object becomes *what it is* in light of the meaning it has. This meaning is acquired through our authorship and is not essential to the object itself.



### III: Being

Being itself just *is* and is neither revealed by phenomena nor hidden by phenomena, being is what Sartre calls “the condition of all revelation” (*BN*, p.8), which is just to say that being *is* and must be if anything is to *be*, if anything is to *exist*. Being is not something hidden behind existence to be revealed later or something brought into view with enough concentration or rationalization to discover *what it is*. It does not make sense to push aside what is revealed to us as that which exists to find being lying behind it, rather “being is being of them all equally” (*BN*, p.8) and “(being) is everywhere in (the existent) and nowhere”, Sartre says<sup>9</sup>. Being is everywhere because it is the condition of revelation, while it is nowhere in the object or phenomenon because the phenomenon does not indicate some substantial being, rather the object just is. While it is and must be on the foundation of being for it is something that appears to us and is distinct from us.

Thus, we have phenomena, which are revealed to us as beings that these phenomena appear *to*. Thus, things are what they appear as, for they must be as they are revealed through this appearance and as phenomena they reveal reality. Everything, in order to appear, must appear *to* something and this appearance must constitute something. The appearance is an appearance of *that thing which appears*, thus, Sartre says, “the appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it *is* the essence” (*BN*, p.5). The

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<sup>9</sup> I do not want here to get into Sartre’s transphenomenal foundation for being. For the purpose of this paper it will suffice to see that we experience the phenomena of being (i.e. what we perceive). The fact that being is ‘underlying’ phenomena in a way unlike some sort of Kantian noumena, instead in a way necessitated by the fact that phenomena point to it in their being, point to a being which is not subject to the conditions of the existence of phenomena as something which exists only in so far as it reveals itself; this fact does not need to be investigated here, we can accept that transphenomenal being is that which is indicated by the phenomena of being and that which we cannot have knowledge of. What we are concerned with here is the *phenomena of being*.

phenomenal being “does not have the double relativity of Kant’s *Erscheinung* [appearance]. It does not point over its shoulder to a true being which would be, for it, absolute. What it is, it is absolutely, for it reveals itself as it is” (*BN*, p.4). In this quotation it is easy to see how Sartre erects the reality of the phenomena of being, they are not mere appearances, for what they *appear as*, they must *be*. The alternative is to ignore the reality of appearance, to degrade it to the point of making it a façade that cannot admit to the being that the phenomenon hides. Another alternative to conceiving of appearances as constituting reality would be to retreat to some sort of essentialism, positing some absolute reality of what this façade stands in front of. This possibility cannot be because this absolute reality of phenomena would have no differentiation, i.e. it would only be a mass of positive being, irrelevant to our moral-psychological lives (which is what I am here concerned with). Or if this absolute reality did have some sort of differentiation it would amount to a Platonic idealism, their appearances imperfect reproductions of some essential form ‘out there’, or even a Kantian *noumenal* realm, which is equally ideal and essentialist to the point that it is irrelevant to the existential reality that overshadows our moral-psychological lives. It is irrelevant because it ignores the pervasive nature of our intentional consciousness, making reality something metaphysical, to rationally discover, ignoring our individuality and authorship of meaning<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Of course I am here touching on what could be a much larger metaphysical discussion on the nature of reality. I intend to avoid this issue through the explicit intent of this paper as well as the existential context in which this is framed, i.e. as a moral-psychological investigation. From this starting point, I believe it is much easier to make tenable this ‘realist’ argument about the nature of phenomena. In the examples that appear throughout this paper the reader will see that our constitution of meaning is undeniable, what seems to be more challenging is to bring to light the *reality* that these meanings constitute. This is something

The phenomenon *as an appearance* therefore is confronted by our consciousness. Our consciousness is that which perceives appearance, which is the appearance of phenomena, which *are* the phenomena of being; i.e., the object’s being insofar as it is revealed by consciousness (*BN*, p.25) through our negation of being. However, “The existent designates itself as an organized totality of qualities. It designates itself and not its being. Being is simply the condition of all revelation” (*BN*, p.8). Thus, the being of phenomena is not itself a phenomenon, while the phenomena of being make up the reality we are confronted with<sup>11</sup>. The existent does not designate something other than itself, as Sartre says, the only possible formulation for the sort of thing the phenomenon is, is that *it is* (*Ibid.*) and that is all it is<sup>12</sup>. Being-in-itself “is full of itself yet is incapable of self-affirmation since to affirm itself it would have to be at some distance from itself” (Jeanson, 1980, p.117). This ‘distance’ would have to be constituted by some kind of relation to itself or relation to something else, something which the in-itself cannot perform; again, the in-itself knows no alterity. Phenomena are therefore reality and our consciousness is thereby confronted with the reality of phenomena, through already

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which I also see as undeniable. However I am not here concerned with this metaphysical debate, for what we are responsible for is only being as it reveals itself, i.e. the phenomena of being.

<sup>11</sup> Catalano puts it well when he writes, “*Being is that which reveals (the existent), although being is not itself simply that which is revealed*” (Catalano, 1980, p.30).

<sup>12</sup> The phenomena of being may point to this being of phenomena, but we cannot say anything about the being of phenomena, as its status is transphenomenal. Sartre is quick to point out that “that does not mean that being is found hidden *behind* phenomena” (*BN*, p.9), rather it only indicates that the being of phenomena is not subject to the phenomenal condition, “which is to exist only in so far as it reveals itself” (*Ibid.*), rather, as we have seen, it provides the condition for the phenomena of being. The being of phenomena is implied by the phenomena of being that we encounter, while it is not revealed. But again, this is not the concern of this paper, the phenomena of being as that which is what it is, is all that is needed for our account of responsibility for one’s self. *A fortiori*, it is only the phenomena of being which we can be responsible for in our absolute responsibility, i.e. we are only responsible for what can be revealed to our consciousness and we are not responsible for the foundation of being, as we (as consciousness’) do not author the foundation of being.

affirming it as phenomenal reality through the distance that emerges with its negation of being.

“Thus my being supports a mode of being of which it is not the source” (*BN*, p.19). This mode of being is the phenomenal being and it is supported by my being in that it is indicated through that which appears to me. I am not the source or foundation of this being, for I did not create the being of phenomena in my apprehension of the phenomena of being. As I indicated above, the being of phenomena has its own being as *the condition* of revelation - *it is*. This being can never disclose itself to consciousness for consciousness cannot transcend the *being* of phenomena. Rather consciousness transcends the phenomena of being as one way that being (the condition of revelation) manifests itself.

The result is that we reveal the phenomena of being, because we transcend the phenomena of being. In transcending the phenomena of being we assign a meaning to it, the phenomenon becomes X or Y in our transcendence. We are then responsible for X qua X and Y qua Y as the authors of *what they are*. Apart from that they are raw, unencounterable being; everything that they are revealed as has been *authored* by consciousness, thereby making consciousness responsible for what the phenomena *are*. The phenomena appear to us and in appearing are necessarily transcended and made into what they are.

In order to perceive the phenomenon we must be conscious of perceiving it as something that is not our consciousness. This requires that we are conscious of perceiving the phenomenon and therefore, being conscious of perceiving the

phenomenon is to say that consciousness *reveals itself* as something that reveals a phenomenon that *is not it* (BN, p.24). That is, we are conscious of being consciousness’ that reveal phenomena. This echoes the sense in which we above indicated how consciousness brings nothingness to being; as an intentional consciousness, it is always revealed as *not* the thing it reveals and therefore it is nothingness or always not-that. The phenomena that consciousness reveals make up *the reality of that which exists*.

It is not being that is encountered as an appearance, rather it is being that is implied by our apprehension of existents, thus, being surpasses what we know of it, and therefore we cannot be the source of being itself while being the source of *what phenomena are*<sup>13</sup>. Thus, Sartre sums up the structure of consciousness in this way: “consciousness is the revealed-revelation of existents, and existents appear before consciousness on the foundation of *their* being” (BN, p.24, my emphasis). Through this, consciousness becomes that which is a being that in its being, it is in question, because it always reveals and constitutes a being other than itself, i.e. phenomena.

#### IV: Ontology and Meaning

What is it to ‘author meaning’? I have said that our structure of consciousness necessitates such authorship. Now I can address in more detail what the phrase means and what meaning is and what it is not. In *Nausea*, Sartre says that “the essential thing is contingency” (from *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*, p.22). What Roquentin realizes in

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<sup>13</sup> Transcendence is a necessary condition in order to be or provide the foundation of the thing transcended. Without the ability to transcend, one could not create or author or be responsible for the thing transcended. One must ‘go beyond’ the meaning of something in order to create it anew – this should be obvious. If we were to claim that consciousness does not do this, this would be to claim that things somehow came ready-made with meanings, which would be to claim some sort of essentialism. Our experience tells us otherwise.

*Nausea* is that things have no necessary reason for being, that they could just as easily not be; the world of existence is contingent and anything could not be what it is. The things confronted in human reality (phenomena) do not give their meaningful nature as necessary; as I said in the previous section: all we can say about phenomenal being is that *it is*. This provides us with a general ground on which to interpret how nothingness inhabits the phenomena of being. Because existence is inherently meaningless (Priest, 2001, p.24), when we define something as *that*, we delineate it as not anything else, that is, *we give it meaning*. This of course would not be the case if the meaning of the existent were necessary (i.e. essential to the existent), as we could point to the thing and *what it is* would be necessarily exhausted by this pointing. But because existence precedes essence we cannot apprehend the foundation of the phenomenon’s being. Therefore when we delineate something as ‘that and *only that*’, implying negation, transcending and giving meaning, e.g. this table is a table, because it is not a chair, it is not a bed, etc., we constitute *what it is*<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> It may seem that the chair has a certain affinity with our bodies and therefore contains some meaning that likens it to be ‘for sitting on’ and therefore is not some stripped down meaningless in-itself being waiting to be appropriated by our consciousness to make it what it is. For example Merleau-Ponty writes: “In so far as I have hands, feet, a body, I sustain around me intentions which are not dependent upon my decisions and which affect my surroundings in a way I do not choose” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p.440). For Sartre these facts that exist between my body and a chair may be facts of the in-itself; however they are still a part of the conditions that receive meaning according to our consciousness because we cannot say that the meaning is *in* the world somehow, which would be to say that the world was able to transcend itself, thus, the world is conscious. Merleau-Ponty does not seem to hold an aversion to such an idea that for Sartre is ontologically impossible, it has been said that Merleau-Ponty thus believes that “the *world* intends, and not merely human consciousness” (Enns, p.51). However, we have seen thus far that the world, or objects such as chairs, cannot transcend themselves, they cannot intend ‘to be sat on’, because chairs are not conscious. There are many moments in which Merleau-Ponty’s ontology, for example his ontology of ‘the flesh’ explicated in *The Visible and Invisible*, differs greatly from Sartre’s. Nevertheless, I mention this here only because it is impossible to begin to contrast his ontology from Sartre’s in this paper, given my current direction. It is interesting to point out, given what I have just described, that the idea of the objects of the world *intending* the world for us somehow is absurd, for we require consciousness to intend.

Thus, consciousness cannot pass beyond the existent in order to apprehend the foundation of being; however what is left for consciousness to do is pass beyond the existent toward its *meaning*: “Consciousness can always pass beyond the existent, not toward its being, but toward the *meaning of this being*” (BN, p.25). *For the meaning of phenomena are the phenomena of being, i.e. in so far as it is revealed by consciousness.* In this sense consciousness transcends phenomena as a meaning, consciousness *must*, through the genesis of nothingness, create the meaning of the phenomena that it encounters. Therefore, as a consciousness that reveals being, we can conclude that “to reveal Being makes us personally responsible for it” (Aronson, *TE*, p.xxix).

Nevertheless, it is clear that consciousness cannot possibly transcend the *foundation* of the object’s *being*, because although we support being through the nothingness that consciousness constitutes we do not produce the being of the existent; the existent must appear on the basis of its own being. Only in relation to us (to nothingness) can an object be manipulated and therefore be something that we author and

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Merleau-Ponty claims that “I am never a thing and never bare consciousness” (Ibid, p.453), and this is true. We are a vacillation between being a thing (facticity) and being bare consciousness (transcendence), while never completely being either, which makes possible our bad faith and absolute responsibility. However, this distinction remains and just because we are never either does not entail that we can conflate the two into some kind of ‘fleshy’ ontology. Instead we have to retain consciousness as intentional and thus, authoring, i.e. consciousness is what creates the meaning of the world. Thus, when Merleau-Ponty points out that we are in situation and “it is impossible to determine precisely the ‘share contributed by the situation’ and the ‘share contributed by freedom’” (Ibid), this apparent dilemma can be explained in terms of our responsibility for the situation that then weighs upon our future choices. As I will point out below in discussing Charles Taylor’s criticism (Ch.3, sec.III), we cannot take freedom in isolation from the world we have already constituted, for freedom as engaged must contend with our manifested authorship, (i.e. we cannot take freedom without responsibility). As I said, this digression cannot be considered in the body of this paper because it is too extensive a topic (i.e. the differences between Merleau-Ponty’s and Sartre’s ontology) to begin to explore it in detail. It will suffice to note that this brief comment is here only to reinforce the nature of being-in-itself as opposed to being-for-itself and to make the reader aware that Merleau-Ponty’s ontology could play a role in such a discussion in a different context with different goals. For a complete investigation of the radical differences in Merleau-Ponty’s ontology see his *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible*.

have responsibility for, that is, its meaning is only one possibility among an infinite amount that consciousness could constitute. Consciousness is therefore *responsible* for what it constitutes the object *as*, however it is not responsible for the *fact* that the object exists, or for the strict being-in-itself of the object, i.e. that it exists materially or physically. Therefore our ontological delineation, as consciousnesses, is that we cannot transcend the foundation of being, implying that we are not responsible for the *fact* that phenomena exist. However, what phenomena exist *as* are produced only upon their appearance to us and therefore must be our responsibility. Previous to that, as I argued above, they are only meaningless material, void of definition<sup>15</sup>

If it were the case that we could transcend the *being* of an object we could do things with it that are currently impossible. For example, we could make a table melt like wax, or we could fly, or pick up a car. Being would no longer be *what it is* if we could transcend its foundation, which is the same as saying that we are the foundation of this being, which we are not. A car may exist in-itself however we may author it in various ways. If we want to lift the car we may constitute its meaning as that which ‘I cannot lift’; if we want to drive it, we may constitute it as that which is ‘pleasant to drive’ (or unpleasant depending on the car), thereby authoring the ‘car’ and authoring the role and limits that may then be presented in our lives. We reveal the car as what it is as we live it in our lives.

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<sup>15</sup> Again, this would not be the case if we were to entertain some sort of essentialism that posited a meaning inherent in each object. According to Sartre this would require some other consciousness to imbue being with meaning, which would require a pervasive consciousness to transcend the foundation of being itself, i.e. God. I cannot begin to discuss the existence of God here, and will be content to assert that phenomena are given meaning to by us. The main argument for this is simple and subject to observation: a chair would have no meaning without human beings, a rock would have no meaning without human beings, a hurricane would have no meaning without human beings, etc.



Thus, what the world is, is always construed, interpreted, and given meaning to by consciousness itself and that meaning could *always* be different. And as was pointed out above, this meaning constitutes human reality in which we exist transcending the phenomena of being. For consciousness, in its negating quality, provides the in-itself with all possibility, for the in-itself is strictly positivity and therefore generates no possibility. That meaning is always authored by consciousness and thus, consciousness is always responsible for what that meaning is, while we are not the foundation of being itself in any way. As Sartre says, the facticity of consciousness is that we are not the foundation of our “*presence to the world*” (BN, p.127), and yet “(we are) responsible for the world and for (ourselves) as *a way of being*” (BN, p.707, my emphasis).

We will see later that the problem for Sartre’s theory of responsibility and freedom arises in light of the permanence of being-in-itself: by asserting that the foundation of being provides an aspect of reality that we cannot transcend and therefore cannot be responsible for<sup>16</sup>. This assertion underestimates the reality consciousness constitutes in its transcendence of the objects of the world and simultaneously raises raw being to a state of meaningfulness it cannot attain. It is the case that we cannot assert responsibility for being itself, yet our preoccupation with the reality of being-in-itself is the result of a misunderstanding of what constitutes our very reality; it is an indication of a belief that being somehow comes ready-made with a name-tag saying what *it is*. What occurs in this case is an expectation that the permanence of being-in-itself somehow

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<sup>16</sup> This could come in the form of an assertion of ‘basic meaning’ or ‘brute facts’ derived from being-in-itself that our meaning-constitution cannot infringe upon in its creation of reality, thereby infringing upon our absolute authorship and responsibility.

carries over into the meaning of phenomena, thereby construing the meaning of our situation to be governed by the same permanence that governs the foundation of the object, i.e. being which is distinct from our consciousness<sup>17</sup>.

What is actually the case according to Sartre’s ontology is that we always transcend the meaning of being because being-in-itself has no inherent meaning, thus providing evidence of our authorship and responsibility. We inevitably manipulate and make-up the meaning, the place, the role that an existent has in our life, for we directly experience it through our consciousness which must make decisions in regard to it. Nevertheless, we do not manipulate the being of any existent, it is being-in-itself, distinct from being-for-itself, and only is what it is prior to our appropriation of it. However, in the face of various elements of being-in-itself we still have responsibility for making them what they are.

Thus, the meaning of the car as ‘too heavy to lift’ becomes the responsibility of the person who pursues the goal of lifting it. As his limitation, the person is responsible for it as the reality of his world and his life. While he is never responsible for the foundation of the car as being of a certain physical makeup, he is responsible for what that in-itself constitutes in the world. “Human reality is first of all consciousness... It only *discovers* the world... on the occasion of its own reaction” (*WD*, p.109-my emphasis). It is through us that the world is revealed as *what it is*. Meaning pervades all

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<sup>17</sup> This attitude is in fact integral to being in bad faith, as will be described below, one significant form of bad faith is to believe that the meaning of an object or event or situation is as determined as the in-itself nature of the object itself, thereby releasing us from responsibility.

being-in-itself as our experience, because it presents itself as a phenomenon that we transcend and consequently author what it is.

What follows is an examination of this very meaning-constitution and the impact it has on our moral-psychological existence. Authorship's overwhelming responsibility for making up what being is in one's life evokes existential anguish which we avoid in bad faith. First, however I will separate responsibility from its much maligned counterpart freedom in order to better account for responsibility's role in our individual concrete lives. This chapter has merely provided the conditions that make possible bad faith and absolute responsibility (*BN*, p.87).

## Chapter 2: The Moral Importance of Responsibility

The description of freedom is very important for Sartre, for we are fundamentally free consciousnesses. However even in Sartre's various descriptions of freedom, we see responsibility, its important counterpart, is ever-present and actually existentially prior to freedom. As a moral-psychological revelation, responsibility carries more 'weight'<sup>1</sup> and as a process toward authenticity, as a process escaping bad faith, the revelation of responsibility for oneself (and all that encompasses) is a theoretical necessity. The reason for the latter point is this general problem: without being responsible for what *is*, one cannot be responsible for *changing* what is, i.e. cannot exercise freedom. Whatever you did not author yourself cannot be altered through your authorship but only from the outside. In this sense the taking on of responsibility facilitates one's ability to act according to one's ontological freedom. In discussing the importance of responsibility it is necessary to discuss the phenomenon of bad faith because the two are intimately connected as two sides of the same coin, so to speak<sup>2</sup>. The 'weight' of responsibility, what this absolute responsibility is and why its recognition is avoided in bad faith will be the focus of the following chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> When I say 'weight' I mean that it implies an ownership of choices and meanings that culminate in a morally life altering recognition, this fact we apprehend pre-reflectively as it is our ontological condition to be aware of our existential anguish in order to avoid it (bad faith). This will be further expanded in this chapter. The recognition of freedom does not necessarily carry this weight with it, for it is directed toward choices that we *will* make. Choices that we *have* made, meanings that we *have* constituted, ways that we *have* been, are all things that we must take responsibility for if we are to conceive of freedom in regard to them. Inherent in our *past* choices, is the responsibility for them and this responsibility becomes heavy with what these choices constitute (actions already taken); these choices become part of our *facticity*, while freedom takes solace in its inherent possibility. This is what I intend to describe in what is below.

<sup>2</sup> This colloquial phrase is actually an accurate metaphor for the relationship between bad faith and responsibility. To avoid responsibility we dwell in bad faith and to escape bad faith we recognize our responsibility.

### I: The Scope of Absolute Responsibility

Sartre says, “freedom is total and infinite, which does not mean that it has no limits but that it *never encounters them*. The only limits which freedom bumps up against at each moment are those which it imposes on itself” (*BN*, p.680). Freedom never encounters real limits or exterior limits because consciousness always has the freedom to redefine the most constricting situation, to make of it what it chooses. In order to realize the concretization of this ontological freedom one must first realize that the limits that we seem to encounter are *our* limits, i.e. that these limits that are meaningful to us as limits are our responsibility. They are not exterior limits; they are limits that we have constructed. We must recognize our responsibility for these limits before we are able to experience the sort of freedom Sartre is describing.

In bad faith we give these experienced limits the seemingly immutable nature of the in-itself, i.e. these limits acquire the status of the in-itself because they have become our facticity, when in fact the facticity of these limits is something that we have created in our transcendence and meaning-creation. Therefore, in order to come to terms with the nature of these limitations, we need first to realize that these limits are not limits in-itself, they are not exterior to me, inflicted upon me. Rather, they are *mine* in that what I am including as my limitations are *mine*, I make up what I am and consequently make up what I am *not*, or what I cannot be, i.e. my limitations. Therefore I have made the limitations facticity through the process by which I make up or author *what I am*. Thus, when we examine the above quotation, we see that it is not freedom that it reveals or makes evident, instead it is responsibility in that it forces us to come to terms with the

fact that the choices are *mine*, not specifically that I can freely make any choice I like.

The quotation states the ontological fact of freedom, while recognizing that we create our own limitations. These limitations are “the weight of the world” that we ‘carry on our shoulders’ (*BN*, p.707) and though this weight has as its ontological basis the fact of our freedom, this weight, i.e. the responsibility for them, is what we primarily encounter as existing, moral-psychological beings. We therefore run up against the weight of responsibility, not freedom.

Yet the problem persists: from a moral-psychological perspective we ask, why are these limits construed as limiting our freedom if we are absolutely free, the answer to the question is that we fear the acceptance of the heavy responsibility *for these choices and these limits*. We do not directly deny our freedom, we directly deny our responsibility and in doing so implicitly avoid the revelation of freedom. It may be that freedom is our ontological reality, but it is responsibility that is in the way of us realizing this ontological reality; the fact that the limitations to our freedom are constituted by us is something that necessitates a concrete revelation of responsibility if we are ever to experience freedom. That is, my freedom being ‘total and infinite’ is only *made applicable*, under the condition that one embraces responsibility for all of one’s limitations, i.e. realizing that I ‘imposed them on myself’; otherwise an assertion of freedom is ineffective. It cannot be that we declare freedom in the face of limitations, fighting against them, rather we embrace and take ownership of these limits as ours, as our responsibility, in order *then* to

realize the freedom Sartre theorizes<sup>3</sup>. In this way responsibility is existentially, morally and psychologically primary to freedom; it stands in the way of our recognition of freedom, its acceptance made tacitly necessary. Responsibility must awaken us from bad faith in order to have the possibility of realizing our fundamental freedom, i.e. to become authentic.

This freedom and these limitations constitute *what we are* and being responsible for this freedom and these limitations, we are responsible for all that we are. Nevertheless, just as freedom has its ontological delineation so does responsibility<sup>4</sup>. The for-itself “is responsible for its manner of being without being the foundation of its being” (*BN*, p.701). It is important here to reiterate that we are responsible for our *manner* of being and we are not responsible for the fact that we are a consciousness that is of this ontological nature. Nevertheless we are responsible for everything that consciousness apprehends or intends and must be, for without our consciousness all that we intend would not be *what it is*. The sort of responsibility this refers to is pervasive and significant, to be responsible for all that consciousness intends is no small matter and I do not want to leave room here for the reader to underemphasize this radical nature of Sartrean responsibility.

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<sup>3</sup> Again, I wish to point out here that this is not an essay on the path to freedom through responsibility, this is only a point that arises on the way to the real business of this chapter: erecting the existential and moral-psychological importance of responsibility. If absolute responsibility be possible, it would thereby make authenticity possible and consequently this sort of realization of freedom will follow, but it is not my intent to explicitly argue for this here. As I said in the first chapter, this sort of authenticity may not (or even probably may not) be possible given the ontological character of bad faith and its importance to a person’s identity. Nevertheless this does not discourage the direction of psychological improvement (i.e. escaping bad faith about whatever possible – for we do not want to lie to ourselves), which, I believe, will culminate in Freedom and Authenticity.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 1, Section IV on responsibility’s ontological delineation.

To be responsible for our 'manner' of being is inherently pervasive due to the structure of Sartre's ontology. As we saw in Chapter 1, this sort of 'meaning creation' that we author and are therefore responsible for creates human reality; for without meaning, reality, as we experience it, would not exist. The definition of each thing we experience is made up by conscious delineation as being 'that', differentiated by consciousness as 'not anything else'. However, heaped on top of X being 'that', are various, complex and robust meanings that make *X what it is*; i.e. X is not *only* 'X', because our consciousness integrates X and inevitably constitutes X as a full and meaningful thing. Therefore, the authorship and responsibility for ourselves and the meaning we create translates to a responsibility for the whole of reality. The whole of reality is transcended by my consciousness and thereby constitutes this robust meaning the world has. What we see here is that there are two arguments underlying this sort of conscious authorship of reality: first is the *logical point* (that is derivable from Chapter 1), which says because consciousness is intention and is distinct from the phenomena of the world it transcends everything it encounters and therefore is responsible for what the world is. The second point is a *phenomenological point* that I have described here which says we inevitably incur a piling-on of meanings as we perceive and integrate things (objects, situations, beliefs) into the world and in this way make things *what they are*. The phenomenological point insists that because the world does not exist without such meaning, i.e. because this is *how the world exists* (with rich, full, relevant meaning) this meaning creation is inextricable from a conception of what the world is outside of such meaning. Or, put another way, despite the fact that we can talk about 'brute facts' or



being-in-itself it does not actually exist in human reality, for even by talking about it we transcend it and make it into something through meaning constitution.

A radical example relying on both arguments for authorship will be illustrative of the pervasiveness of our responsibility: the victim of terminal cancer is responsible for his disease. More specifically, the fact that it is ‘a disease’ is constituted by the victim’s consciousness of ‘*what is*’. It is only according to *his* human situation (and his needs, desires, goals, etc.) that the disease impeding his health exists, i.e. as a situation that exists as ‘terminal cancer’<sup>5</sup>. Such situations are the ones which opponents of this radical responsibility are most likely to point out as what we are *not* responsible for or limits to our responsibility. It is the case that reality is made up of many situations such as the ‘terminal cancer’ example that we seem inept in regard to. However the ‘logical point’ tells us that we must be responsible because if consciousness does apprehend being-in-itself through its negation of it, the whole world that consciousness intends is made up by and is therefore the responsibility of consciousness no matter what it is<sup>6</sup>.

Although the ‘logical point’ is useful, we must look at how the victim of cancer actually makes the cancer *be*, i.e. how he authors this ‘terminal cancer’. Sartre’s definition of responsibility is appropriate to revisit here. If we do mean responsibility as

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<sup>5</sup> However, it may be the case that the doctor constitutes the meaning of the situation as ‘terminal cancer’ as well, thereby constituting the situation as such. This raises the issue of the Other that I will address below. What will become clear is that, due to our consciousness, even meanings generated by the Other still are mediated by the individual’s consciousness. I.e. what insures the reality of the situation as ‘terminal cancer’ for the victim of cancer is fundamentally dependent on the victim himself, despite other meanings being presented. Whether he takes on the meaning of the Other is another issue related to bad faith that, as I said, I will take up below in my consideration of the Other. The point is that the Other cannot relieve us of responsibility.

<sup>6</sup> Sartre’s best example of the fact that we are responsible for the whole of reality is his soldier who is responsible for the war (*BN*, p.708-710).

being conscious of 'being the incontestable author of an event or of an object' (*BN*, p.707) then this implies the 'logical point' that Sartre explicates this way:

“in this sense the responsibility of the for-itself is overwhelming since he is the one by whom it happens that *there is* a world; since he is also the one who makes himself be, then whatever may be the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself must wholly assume this situation with its peculiar coefficient of adversity... he must assume the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it” (*BN*, p.707-708)

However the phenomenological point arises when we individualize this facticity of consciousness and notice that the man with 'terminal cancer' must realize that “it is on the ground of the engagement which I am that (this cancer) appear(s)” (*BN*, p.708), despite being saddled with this 'coefficient of adversity' (i.e. the growth of cancer cells, the 'brute fact' of his physical situation). It is in his engagement with the world that he arrives at 'having terminal cancer' as a complex, robust situation that is contingently based on his authorship and is unique to him.

Even a conventional interpretation of 'meaning' (i.e. unattached to the Sartrean structure of consciousness) is illustrative of this phenomenological point.

Conventionally, meaning shapes and constitutes our reality in very real ways, revealing just how deeply 'meaning' ventures in creating the experience we have of the world.

Meaning constitution is not some superficial act and not some sort of epiphenomenon of reality. For example, take two visitors to an impoverished village in Burkina Faso: one says, “this is scary” and the other says “this is enlightening”. From this moment the objects of the scene (the in-itself) are imbued with consciousness and become facticity for each person. The village becomes “scary” or “enlightening” to each person, in this sense making up their reality; the village actually *is scary* to the person who ascribes that

meaning to it and it *is enlightening* to the other person. It becomes *what it is* according to each person’s authorship. The significance of this meaning constitution becomes more evident when we take the rest of the impressions and meanings in their experience: for the ‘scared’ person the details of the experience become other ingredients in this ‘scary’ village and fill in his ‘scary’ picture. If the scared person believes the situation to actually be so, i.e. for the scary meaning to *be of* the village instead of him, he would be avoiding in bad faith the ontological fact that it could just as easily and contingently be ‘enlightening’. More importantly, he would be avoiding responsibility for making it ‘scary’. In doing so he would be avoiding his *responsibility* for the authorship of his fear and believing instead that the ‘scary’ village is the *cause* of his fear. On the other hand, if he takes responsibility for the ‘scary village’, he must recognize that he authored such a meaning and thus, not deceive himself (escape bad faith) about his fear through his responsibility recognition.

Meaning creation is inevitable, for consciousness intends and transcends phenomenal objects, and it is almost overwhelming. It is full, it fleshes out and creates one’s experience, it *constitutes* the experience, it constitutes human reality and in turn it makes us responsible for the human reality as the scared person is responsible for the reality that he confronts in the village in Burkina Faso. The village *is* scary because he is scared, while he is scared because there are scary things to be seen, a reality created by him alone. This is what constitutes a *situation* for Sartre and it is this situation that the scared person is responsible for authoring since the phenomenal reality is not scary in-itself. Nevertheless, for him, the reality is that it *is scary*. He may retreat into bad faith

which implies his belief that the village itself *is* scary. In bad faith he denies the fundamental fact that his fear is authored and therefore *is* him in the mode of him not being it, because he is it at a distance from it, authoring it in his pursuit of revealing being.

The purpose of this example is to first illustrate how we constitute the meaning of our situation in everyday life and thereby make evident the authorship we employ in this process. Secondly, this example exemplifies the contingency of *what* the situation actually is, because the situation can neither *be* scary or enlightening in-itself, thus providing a picture of the situation as only *what it is* according to each person’s consciousness as they reveal the situation. However this does not mean that such meaning creation is less real than an essentialist interpretation<sup>7</sup>; what it means is that what the situation actually *is* requires consciousness to make it so, thereby making consciousness inextricable from the reality *that is the village*. Without consciousness, the village in Burkina Faso could not *be* scary or enlightening or anything else for that matter; it would only exist as some buildings, some people, some colour, some weather, all void of meaning, for such is the nature of being-in-itself. The situation could not be “scary” without the scared person.

What becomes contentious is the idea that this meaning-constitution somehow makes up *all* of human reality, resulting in the more radical absolute responsibility that I am advocating. Nevertheless, what I intend the reader to see is that the situation is “scary” because of a consciousness constituting it as such, and all situations are what they

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<sup>7</sup> I.e. that the situation, or in this case the village, is essentially scary or enlightening, that it being ‘scary’ is an aspect of the reality, or being-in-itself of the village.

are because of a consciousness constituting them as such. Thus, the same conditions that make the Burkina Faso example a correct description of responsibility make *absolute* responsibility possible.

One may object that this Burkina Faso example is uncontroversial because it refers to obvious relative meanings that we author. However the patient with terminal cancer exhibits an example of various ‘brute facts’ that do not seem subject to our authorship, such as for example, that his cancer ‘*is* terminal’, which appears to be a real, fixed meaning below the level of these contingent meanings that we pile on top of such ‘brute facts’ and therefore something we cannot be responsible for. It may seem that the terminal aspect of our cancer patient’s disease is a brute fact-meaning that he does not author. However it does not exist as ‘terminal’ without acquiring such meanings and it is through this process that he makes the ‘terminal cancer’ *be*. That is, we may insist upon these brute facts, but phenomenologically they do not exist. We necessarily go through a process, as negating consciousnesses, in which we make the ‘brute fact’ some *thing*. For example, for our cancer patient, as soon as he says, ‘I have terminal cancer’, it has already *become* according to his life or project; it became ‘something I will die from’, ‘something that will upset my family’, ‘something I am scared of’, ‘something I can’t talk about’, etc. Phenomenologically we make it what it is; we author the terminal cancer in being confronted with it as our ‘coefficient of adversity’ and therefore it is his cancer as authored by him, as made real by him and as something that will cease to be, along with him. If we compare the conventional definition of authorship with this absolute sense of authorship and responsibility, this point will become clearer.

## II: The Detachment of Consciousness

One may object to the aforementioned terminal cancer example as a case of responsibility by responding that a disease such as cancer exemplifies the exact opposite of responsibility; it occurs as a brute fact against the victim's will and we cannot be responsible for what we do not will. It must be admitted that there is a disconnection between the victim's desire and what the situation is: the victim is not the *cause* of the cancer in the same sense that a corruption of cells is the cause the cancer (i.e. an efficient cause). The objection states that the victim could be held responsible only if he were willfully creating the cancer cells for example and could, in turn, change that, i.e. kill the cancer cells. If this were required for being responsible, Sartre's theory of responsibility would be incorrect. Given this objection, and its criterion for responsibility, that responsibility can only come about through what we will or cause, if we are going to stick to Sartre's theory, it would seem to follow that there must be some way that the victim's consciousness *causes* the cancer itself in order to consider him responsible. Otherwise we are not responsible in the way I have claimed above. However, what is the case is that if absolute responsibility is possible we cannot be talking about the same sort of causality (e.g. willing, efficient causality) or the same sort of authorship here considered in the objection. Let me first consider the objection:

Gary Jones' critique encapsulates the objection well: "unless Sartre can show why consciousness is uniquely sufficient for its objects, then the Sartrean notion of global responsibility collapses leaving the more traditional account of responsibility" (Jones 1980, p.236-237). Essentially what this objection implies is that we wish to say that we

can only be responsible if we cause the situation, in Jones’ case, if our consciousness is sufficient to make the phenomenon *what it is*, which would equate to requiring the consciousness of cancer to be sufficient for the biological event to occur. My immediate reply to this is that Jones is misinterpreting Sartrean responsibility right off the bat, for this is to beg the question, by assuming the criteria that we hold this ‘conventional responsibility’ to in an effort to prove conventional responsibility to be the case, thereby, showing absolute responsibility to not be the case. What is problematic about this statement is that the restriction of responsibility to ‘being sufficient for its objects’ is false. Because Sartre’s absolute responsibility is not conventional, it is not sufficient for its objects in the way that causality or the will is; the conventional criteria do not apply<sup>8</sup>.

The point that Jones does not account for here is that it would be theoretically impossible to have consciousness be sufficient for its objects in this manner in the first place. In fact, in order to be responsible, quite the opposite must be the case: *consciousness of situation X as ‘cancer’ cannot be sufficient for the physical event we call ‘cancer’ to occur.* Despite the fact that the reality of the situation is the responsibility of the victim, this does not entail that the meaning the victim is giving the situation is a *cause* for the occurrence of the cancer, in the way Jones means, or even sustains the cancer in-itself. In order to make this distinction we must again reference being-in-itself as opposed to being-for-itself. The *event* that the victim gives the meaning of ‘cancer’ to (i.e. the growing of a tumor) is not something that consciousness can be

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<sup>8</sup> It is true that we can be responsible for an event we did not ‘cause’ in this way (in as far as making the physical events occur). Nevertheless, whenever we are responsible we do ‘cause’ it in some way; we cause the situation to *be* by revealing it and we cause the situation to be ‘cancer’ through our definition of it as ‘cancer’ in a spontaneous manner. However this is not the sort of causality that this objection refers to, so I will leave this distinction for the time being and concentrate on Jones’ objection.

sufficient for; consciousness cannot sustain nor inhibit (on its own) this in-itself event. The physical fact of the situation is not within the realm of consciousness. This represents a fundamental reconceptualisation of authorship and responsibility which Jones refuses to accept, as Jones says that *guaranteeing the occurrence of X*, “is a necessary condition of being held responsible for (X)” (Jones 1980, p.236). For Sartre and I this is not the case: *guaranteeing the occurrence of X is not* a necessary condition for being held responsible for X. The meaning we give the situation does not guarantee its occurrence (on the level of the in-itself), that is, the meaning we give the situation does not sustain our cancer patients ‘coefficient of adversity’; *however* it is still the case that the *reality* of the situation depends on the victim’s conscious authorship of it. Jones cannot believe that we can be responsible for something that we possibly contribute nothing to in regard to its physical occurrence. In this case Jones is ignoring the ‘logical point’ from the previous section. In doing so he is presupposing the idea that the situation, in-itself, *is ‘terminal cancer’*, if it is to have any meaning at all and deemphasizing the robust reality we give the situation through our authorship.

Now it is difficult to assert that the situation as ‘cancer’ is contingent and is therefore a meaning that is given to it through consciousness, as I have throughout this paper (e.g. the account of Roquentin and the scared woman in Burkina Faso both exemplify the contingency of meaning displayed by our intentional consciousness). However, fundamentally the situation as ‘cancer’ is contingent (as evidenced by the fact that in history it has not always been ‘cancer’). Nevertheless, I turn to the ‘logical point’



and the 'phenomenological point' in order to argue for assigning responsibility to the cancer victim.

The reason why our absolute responsibility tends to be overlooked is because the gap between being-in-itself and being-for-itself goes unnoticed precisely because the in-itself does not exist without meaning *de facto*, for it is immediately and inevitably given meaning to through the negation of consciousness. The word 'cancer' must take on meaning that is not of its being-in-itself existence as soon as it is uttered and assigned to the person; and *what it is* in the world is made up of this meaning and cannot only be 'certain cell malfunction'. As soon as this in-itself comes into this world it is *that thing* and not anything else; it is pinned down by our conscious authorship: it is a 'sickness', a 'disease', 'something to be treated' or 'something terminal'. The important point is that all of these designations and connotations can only come about through consciousness as consciousness transcends and negates the phenomenon that becomes 'cancer', thereby being the author of such connotations and responsible for what the 'cancer' is. Just because things *seem* to come with meaning, does not entail that things inherently have that meaning, or that the meaning comes from the situation or object itself, instead it is indicative of the facticity of consciousness: that consciousness gives meaning to all that it apprehends, for the cancer does not exist as 'cancer' in pure being but instead is only some physical occurrence, a growth of cells. Therefore, in making the 'terminal cancer' what it is we must take responsibility for the cancer as such, otherwise we are denying our authorship and avoiding our absolute responsibility. To elaborate, our phenomenological experience says that the cancer does not come as strictly 'cancer', as

some brute fact. As soon as it is uttered a plethora of meanings ensue, in fact they immediately confront us as ‘what the cancer means’. Thus, to our cancer patient, the cancer inevitably takes on a rich, robust and complex bunch of meanings that erupt out of his consciousness thereby making him responsible for it.

The disconnection between the cause of the situation and the meaning of the situation, i.e. *what it is*, is very important to this thesis: not only is it representative of the dichotomy between the in-itself and for-itself, but in addition it is a disconnection that allows for the absolute conception of responsibility as well as the phenomenon of bad faith. Transcendentally<sup>9</sup>, therefore, if the phenomenon of bad faith is evident, which it seems to be, for we all document our deception of ourselves, or as Sartre would put it, ‘we hide a displeasing truth or present as truth a pleasing untruth’ (*BN*, p.89), there is *necessarily* a disconnection between the consciousness of a situation as X (being-for-itself) and the occurrence of the situation that is interpreted in the mode of X (being-in-itself). In regard to the terminal cancer patient, this implies that there is a gap between the physical situation, which just *is*, void of meaning, and the situation as a totality, as ‘terminal cancer’. The *fact* that what-we-call-X occurs is distinct from the fact that it *is* X, otherwise we could not hide anything about X from ourselves. It is our calling it ‘X’ that not only gives the physical fact human reality, but it does so through its engagement

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<sup>9</sup> I am not alone in this transcendental reasoning, i.e. the idea that the phenomenon of bad faith shows Sartre’s structure of consciousness to be the case. For example, in *Being and Nothingness*, “Sartre has recourse to a transcendental argument” and “the recognition of bad faith establishes that consciousness *necessarily* has a certain specific being” (Perna, 2003, p.30). Sartre also explicates this transcendental view himself, “if bad faith is possible... it is because... the nature of consciousness simultaneously is to be what it is not and not be what it is” (*BN*, p.116). And it is consciousness as an intention, that is non self-coincidental, that points at things other than itself, that is a nothingness, that makes it ‘what it is not and not what it is’.

with consciousness, in it being delineated as ‘X’ and nothing else. While, at the same time, we must be what we are (e.g. a man with terminal cancer) in the mode of not being it, because our consciousness is always *not* what it authors. Therefore our cancer patient is this cancer in the mode of not being the cancer, because he authors the cancer as ‘that’, and authors himself as ‘me with cancer’, which in turn facilitates the possibility that he could be in bad faith about the cancer, hiding what the cancer *is* by virtue of his authoring of *what it is*.

There is no situation in which some brute meaning imposes itself upon us as absolute, thereby dictating what it is, as constituted outside of consciousness. Thus, our patient may, in bad faith, believe that the cancer itself *is lonely*, denying his responsibility for authoring this loneliness, only because the cancer remains, being only *what it is*, void of meaning. This is why Sartre says “if man is what he is, bad faith is forever impossible” (*BN*, p.101); the lie to oneself would fall apart in the substantiality of being and the necessity of meaning if we were made up of brute meanings dictated from the outside. Therefore, the disconnection between being and consciousness is once again reemphasized, here for the sake of disarming this objection explicated by Jones as well as making bad faith possible as the dark side of our condition as fundamentally and absolutely responsible.

This disconnection also entails that we are responsible for the situation as far as consciousness takes us. Our cancer victim cannot be responsible for the being in-itself that furnishes the situation, for example that his cells *are actually, physically* growing out of control and impeding his breathing function. However this is not what the ‘terminal

cancer' situation *is* because despite being and consciousness being separated, the cancer only exists *because* of being *and* consciousness, for it is being *and* consciousness that make up reality. That is, in our concrete existence neither being nor consciousness exist on their own because we are beings in the midst of the world, surrounded by being and consciousness. We are consciousness engaged with being. However, the difference between the two remain, being is only being and by virtue of that does not transcend anything and therefore does not create meaning, whereas consciousness as intentional only transcends being thereby creating what it *is* that it transcends. Therefore the being-in-itself of the cancer only exists as consciously apprehended, making it what it is to become. And at the same time the 'terminal cancer' patient's reality cannot, because of consciousness, be merely 'a growing of cells', the situation's human reality phenomenologically and necessarily is more: a 'loneliness', a 'fear', 'intolerable', 'readiness to die', etc. For even the choice to ignore all meaning, to try to strip it down to its in-itself nature, to say it is merely a 'growth of cells' is a choice to make up the situation as 'something to ignore' or 'something to passively accept' or 'something to be calculative and unemotional about', all of which are evaluations involving our transcendence of the phenomenal being of the cancer.

Therefore Jones' objection is merely guilty of underestimating (missing the phenomenological point) or forgetting about completely (missing the logical point) the meaning of the situation and the reality it constitutes, e.g. the fact that the situation *would*

*not be* ‘terminal cancer’ without the conscious authorship of the victim<sup>10</sup>, or take for granted the meaning of the situation as inherent in the ‘growth of cells’. But the fact remains that there is no meaning inherent in the dysfunctional cell growth; it simply *is* as being-in-itself *is*. Thus, we must be responsible for what the situation *is* as a human reality and recognize that the situation is inevitably constituted by consciousness. The nothingness that is our consciousness both surrounds in determining and is at the heart of what the cancer is as soon as it comes into being. After this authorship ensues, our victim displays the fact that what his ‘terminal cancer’ is, is contingent as a reality. For example, it is not necessarily ‘something to be feared’ and therefore not ‘something to be feared’ in-itself. The fleshing out of *what it is* must be the responsibility of the victim as he constitutes his reality, this contingency absolutely being upheld by him. When he dies his ‘cancer’ is no more; the consciousness *being* the victim of ‘terminal cancer’ ceases to exist and so too does the situation that was his<sup>11</sup>. It was upheld and made what it is

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<sup>10</sup> One may object that this, however, would never be the case; despite counter examples, really no one would construe the situation as not being ‘cancer’. It is true that the being-in-itself of ‘cancer’ is a brute fact, but what it means is not. However, a consistency of meaning that may exist among all individuals does not indicate that this meaning is somehow fixed. This is a fallacy based on correlation and logically cannot be accepted. The agreement of many on ‘cancer’ and what it means is not sufficient to make cancer in-itself be such. This is analogous to Hume’s argument that ‘constant conjunction’ does not necessarily indicate causality. Just as we all call a ‘table’ a ‘table’, we all call ‘cancer’, ‘cancer’, however this does not result in the meaning of the disease being pinned down in the same way that the physical growth of cells may be. It may be the case that we continue to call it ‘cancer’ for convenience, but this is restricted to being a referent for the in-itself fact of cancer. A more robust connotation would confront our cancer victim with objectified meaning; given meanings for him to realize, from what it feels like to what the result is to what obstacles he may encounter to what he should do about it, etc. and in accepting these he is authoring the situation as such.

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note here that the cancer victim should recognize absolute responsibility for it even in the absence of feeling that he can do anything about it. This is poignant because it illustrates another manifestation of my reason for the separation of responsibility and freedom (to follow). The moral-psychological concerns of this thesis require that feeling free not inhibit our responsibility assumption, i.e. *it is important to see in this separation that freedom is not a necessary condition of assuming responsibility for ones situation and life in general*. On the contrary, responsibility recognition is the condition for

through the victim's situation and therefore he is responsible for it. Why this responsibility is avoided is because of the fear and anguish that is revealed through the fact that our existential condition is to give the world meaning at a distance and are therefore *always* responsible<sup>12</sup>.

### III: Bad Faith

The disconnection between the in-itself and for-itself, constituted by the nothingness that is consciousness, not only implies that we are responsible without being able to 'cause' being-in-itself' but it is what enables us to *hide* responsibility from ourselves. For example this separation enables the abused woman to excuse her situation as 'normal'. If her consciousness were 'sufficient' to constitute the situation then the abuse would stop, it would be 'normal' according to the meaning she ascribed to it. Or our cancer victim, if he defined his cancer as 'something that will disappear tomorrow', would wake up without his 'growth of cells'. But this is not the case precisely because the in-itself, strictly speaking, has no entailed meaning and cannot be impregnated with it via consciousness and exist as something *distinct* from consciousness. Bad faith and thereby our responsibility avoidance, in order to exist as they do, are facilitated by the distance between being-in-itself and consciousness. The origin of bad faith is the fact that we are a nothingness and thereby are at a distance from what we are, which enables us to vacillate between the reality we have constituted and the ability to transcend it,

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recognizing the sort of ontological freedom that Sartre explicates in *Being and Nothingness*. This will be detailed in Chapter 3.

<sup>12</sup> I will expand on this point in Chapter 3, Section I, for it is this fear that precipitates our existential anguish, anguish that we avoid through a shirking of responsibility. Nevertheless, the point remains here as a reminder that our conventional definition of responsibility in fact avoids such anguish by making it not ours.

adhering to one or the other in order to deny a certain reality to ourselves. Being this nothingness that avoids the object of what we are in bad faith is possible “because I *am* my own detachment” (*BN*, p.366), while “the origin of responsibility is this primary fact that we realize ourselves as a discontinuity” (*WD*, p.133).

However what reality are we avoiding if it is contingent and seemingly ‘made-up’ by us? This question raises the objection: if the in-itself is void of meaning and *we* are the only ones that constitute meaning, then we could still never be ‘wrong’ about the meaning of anything, or more specifically: there would be nothing but subjective belief that could not be weighed against any fixed truth; we could not surmise ‘what is really the case’, regardless of belief. That is, we could not deceive ourselves about a given situation; that is, be in bad faith, because our consciousness of the situation as ‘X’ would entail it as X. The untenable result would be that consciousness would be sufficient for all its *mental* objects, which would be the only things that had any meaning. We would be living in some dream world, radically disconnected from the in-itself, walking amongst a meaningless physical world, making up everything. This would only move the problem that the Jones objection raises, ‘further inside our heads’, so to speak, and we would lose the disconnection between what is the case and what we believe to be the case, nullifying responsibility.

This of course is not the case, for the distinction between the in-itself and for-itself, that I have relied on to criticize the conventional notion of responsibility, facilitates the dichotomy between *facticity* and *transcendence*. Strictly speaking, consciousness cannot constitute the occurrence or movement of the in-itself and thereby cannot be

sufficient for its occurrence, for example, for the physical abuse the abused woman suffers at the hands of her husband (the beating itself that is, strictly its physical properties) cannot be affected by her consciousness. Yet she is still responsible for this abuse. In other words, we constitute meaning, yet the insufficiency of this constitution to affect the objects of the in-itself while at the same time the objects of the in-itself being void of meaning, requires a way, within consciousness, that we can be 'wrong' about what is going on, that we can be in *bad faith*. This is made possible because the abuse that the woman suffers provides the physical ingredients that she makes up the *facticity* of the situation with, that it is precisely the meaning of the assault as 'abusive', *that she believes to be the case in order to hide it from herself in transcendence*. In order to pretend the situation is normal (to be in bad faith about it), she must have already constituted it as 'abuse', appropriating the in-itself with this meaning, making up its facticity. That is to say, the situation is still *real* as abuse, for it is based upon a "certain objective ensemble... (that) is a real system" (BN, p.349). *However it is the distance of the nothingness of her consciousness, that is, the nature of the for-itself, that allows her to both constitute such a situation in facticity and escape such a situation in transcendence*. In this case we retain the raw, meaningless nature of the in-itself while showing how we can lie to ourselves about what the situation *really is, i.e. what it really means*, and it is the abused woman in bad faith that dwells in the distance she has from the situation through her ability to transcend it.

The reason why she escapes the facticity of the situation is to avoid responsibility for the abuse, for its confrontation would reveal her responsibility for making up the



situation through her facticity<sup>13</sup>. Thus, we are able to hide from ourselves the way we really constitute the situation and create a meaning which acts as a façade, in the face of our radical responsibility that we avoid confronting. She is able to comfort herself in transcendence, saying it is ‘normal’, ignoring the facticity of the abuse, excusing *it* as ‘different’, or ‘an exception’ and *is able to do so precisely because the in-itself of the situation has no intrinsic meaning*, that is, precisely because consciousness *is not* sufficient for the physical aspect of the abuse. In this way we are responsible for the situation without consciousness being sufficient for the occurrence of the situation. If the situation had some intrinsic meaning, then for her to believe it is ‘normal’, she would have to be ignorant of some essential truth and not specifically *lying* to herself<sup>14</sup>. But this is not the case for we witness her hiding the abuse in her daily life, covering up bruises, excusing her husband, etc. in order to deceive not only others but herself. Without an inherent meaning of the abuse, she must be aware of the facticity of the abuse that she has constituted *in order to* hide it from herself; making possible the deception involved in her definition of her situation.

We can be ‘wrong’ about a situation in two ways that run consistently with the phenomenon of bad faith; these two ways of incorrectly assessing the meaning of the situation reduce to the same thing: avoidance of our absolute responsibility. One way we

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<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note that she could confront the abuse and therefore her responsibility for it, but then turn to bad faith once more. For example, she may confront the physical beatings as ‘abusive’ seeming to depart from her bad faith and take responsibility, however, just as there is always an opportunity for responsibility avoidance, there is consequently always an opportunity for bad faith and she could avoid responsibility for the abusive situation through some form of helplessness.

<sup>14</sup> Being ignorant of some truth, i.e. essential truth, *a priori* truth, etc. is different from lying to oneself for to lie is to be aware of the truth in order to hide it, it “implies in fact that the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding” (*BN*, p.87). While being ignorant of the truth implies a lack of knowledge. The person in bad faith possesses quite the opposite, knowledge in order to lie.

live in bad faith is to hide in our transcendence; we hide from ourselves the meaning that we actually give the situation based on its events, for example, the abused woman in denial of the abuse, who hides the fact that she is aware of the situation as 'abusive', but does not want to recognize this due to the weight of responsibility for such a situation. She hides from herself the facticity of the situation, she hides the 'pattern of abuse' and constantly excuses the situation as 'different' or 'unique'; she avoids taking responsibility for the situation *as it is* and for partaking in such a pattern. She instead finds her solace in transcendence, always believing that she can transcend the most horrible conditions. She lives as 'abused' while denying it as 'abuse'; we could imagine her looking at another woman in the same situation and calling it 'abuse' while excusing her own situation as 'different', allowing herself to believe it is 'normal'.

The second way of being 'wrong' about a situation is to hide one's transcendence of the situation and to take the facticity of the situation, giving it the permanence and character of the in-itself, denying one's authorship. For example the abusive husband in the current example, may deny his ability to stop abusing his wife, believing his actions exist as an effect from the fact that he was abused when he was young, he may say 'I can't help it, it was the way I was brought up', denying his ability to transcend the abuse he suffered in order to make of it something that he no longer allows to act as a 'cause'. But he hides the fact of his transcendence from himself because he does not want to take responsibility for constituting such a facticity; it cannot be his fault if something else *caused* him to be that way. Or our 'terminal cancer' patient who takes the doctor's diagnosis as a part of the physical disease, or believes the disease to itself *be* a 'lonely

disease' or a 'scary disease' giving these meanings facticity, denying his ability to transcend and make up *what* the disease *is* as his situation and he does so in order to shirk responsibility for 'terminal cancer', to deny it is completely *his*.

These two aspects of bad faith reduce to one in the same in as far as they are both a way of departing from our fundamental responsibility by either taking refuge in facticity or transcendence. The wholly responsible agent will recognize that both aspects are always present and he is thereby always disconnected from the in-itself as for-itself, making up reality and taking it on as his. The person fleeing responsibility, in bad faith, denies his awareness of this disconnection and tries to either flee the in-itself all together, as if the events were not occurring, taking solace in his transcendence or tries to bind himself to the in-itself, through facticity, as if the meaning of the situation came with the event, or was caused by the event and is therefore not of his authorship. This kind of responsibility therefore, in this respect, is not of the conventional kind: *this kind of responsibility is disconnected from the physical causes of events as the for-itself is disconnected from the physical causes of events*, thus making possible responsibility without efficient causality or making responsibility possible without consciousness being 'uniquely sufficient for its objects'. However, this absolute responsibility retains consciousness as that which is sufficient for *human reality*. This means that we are responsible for every situation that we are a part of, as every situation is given meaning to by us and is made to exist as such, through us, just as our cancer patient's disease exists through him and is inevitably integrated into situation by him, for he is the one who "causes a world to exist" (*BN*, p.383).

Aside from avoiding the responsibility for various overwhelming situations, such as the cancer we are suffering from, there is something more fundamentally related to our existential condition that makes us flee responsibility in bad faith. This may not always show itself when it comes to morally insignificant cases of bad faith; however, in order to recognize our absolute responsibility we inevitably confront our existential *anguish*. We may find that this anguish in the face of absolute responsibility is underlying all cases of responsibility avoidance

### Chapter 3: The Ethic of Responsibility

In the context of this thesis, I am separating the two logical counterparts of freedom and responsibility via a categorical difference: the fact of our freedom is first and foremost ontological, the fact of our responsibility is first and foremost moral and psychological; the fact of responsibility must be realized ontically. I am not completely alone in this sort of separation, others have separated Sartre’s theory in order to ‘articulate’ his argumentation, albeit not for my purposes, but it nevertheless echoes my sentiment. For example, Pern writes, “One level is ontological, that is, it describes reality and its basic structures... it furnishes the conditions for the possibility of everyday experience... The second level... (is the) everyday, ontic world, whose meaningful constitution is ontologically grounded in the first level of reality” (Pern, p.37)<sup>1</sup>.

Responsibility and freedom are logical counterparts. Therefore responsibility would seem to be first and foremost ontological along with our condition of freedom. However, freedom is primarily ontological because it provides the conditions by which there is a ‘world’, i.e. it is the nothingness that consciousness erects in the midst of being and thereby causes a human world to exist. As Sartre says, “human freedom precedes essence in man and makes it possible; the essence of the human being is suspended in his freedom. What we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the *being* of ‘human reality’” (BN, p.60). This in turn shows us that we must be responsible, ontologically

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<sup>1</sup> Pern distinguishes these levels in order to get away from the everyday definition of bad faith as ‘self deception’ and illuminate its ontological aspect that we engage in when choosing a project of bad faith. I am making a similar separation (in as far as it is between the ontological and ontic level, although the ontic level, for me, has as its focus moral-psychology), however, my purpose is to bring out responsibility as the most immediate and pressing existential revelation due to its immediacy on the ontic level and yet ground it in Sartre’s ontology, which was the function of Chapter 1.

speaking. Nevertheless, responsibility takes up its place as primarily moral and psychological, because it is what we are confronted with when we flee anguish in bad faith. In this functioning of bad faith we avoid responsibility; while bad faith's goal is to escape our existential anguish, our method of achieving that goal is responsibility avoidance. That is, the *moral-psychological avenue for the denial of our fundamental condition is responsibility denial*. Secondly, responsibility must be accepted in order to make, what is our *ontological* freedom, into *my free choice*; that is, responsibility must be confronted if we are to facilitate *concrete* freedom. In the concrete situation, in deceiving ourselves, we utilize our ability to deny responsibility, and reciprocally, in denying responsibility we deceive ourselves, making this a pressing moral-psychological issue present *within our human reality, not only ontologically conditioning our human reality*.

### **I: Anguish**

Sartre asks at the end of *Being and Nothingness*, will I, the ontological entity that is freedom “situate itself so much more precisely and the more individually as it projects itself further *in anguish*...and accepts more *responsibility* as an existent by whom the world comes into being?”. He says this is a question that can find “(its) reply only on the ethical plane” (*BN*, p.798, my emphasis). Here I am pursuing such a question, however it is a question prompted by the phenomenon of bad faith, in that responsibility arises as what to accept when we escape bad faith, for bad faith is the avoidance of the responsibility for making the world come into being. Therefore, I am pursuing an answer to the question Sartre here asks, and its answer is facilitated via a departure from deceiving ourselves in bad faith. In the movement into anguish a lack of bad faith keeps

it running toward absolute responsibility for the fact that there is a world. Sartre implies the correlation between anguish and responsibility in this quotation. This correlation is indicative of the correlation between responsibility and bad faith: if responsibility acceptance for making ‘the world come into being’ is inherent in our existential journey into anguish, then bad faith, as an avoidance of anguish is also an avoidance of responsibility, therefore, getting out of bad faith implies getting out of responsibility avoidance, i.e. the recognition of our fundamental responsibility<sup>2</sup>.

Sartre must have thought that freedom could be realized, for the definition of anguish is the *recognition* that I am free: “anguish then is the reflective apprehension of freedom by itself” (*BN*, p.78). However the distance from the world that we feel in anguish and the contingency of what we are that is revealed in anguish is made possible by responsibility.

Anguish “appears at the moment that I *disengage* myself from the world where I had been engaged” (*BN*, p.78, my emphasis). This disengagement is created by the distance of recognizing responsibility for our authorship. That is, responsibility for ourselves implies a distance from the world we could not have before such a revelation. In bad faith the world immediately made its appeal to me through a cause, with responsibility comes a distance from that world as it is revealed as contingent, no longer making me be; it is in this sense I disengage from that world and engage myself as the author of the world and anguish comes over me. Responsibility for my authorship

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<sup>2</sup> Bad faith is an avoidance of anguish in that anguish is the recognition of our nothingness, but more importantly that it is a recognition that this nothingness constitutes my responsibility, which requires seeing ourselves as ‘what I am not and not what I am’, which bad faith precisely denies retreating to either transcendence (denying ‘*being* what I am not’) or facticity (denying ‘*not being* what I am’).

implies the distance between me and the world that is created contingently through my transcendence. On the other hand, when we are 'caused' to be what we are, the effect immediately follows the cause and any distance is absolved in external determination.

The feeling of anguish does not arise easily: "we should not however conclude that being brought on to the reflective plane and envisaging one's distant or immediate possibilities suffice to apprehend oneself in *pure* anguish" (BN, p.78). For example we can reflect on freedom without coming to terms with such a possibility, we can admit of freedom without experiencing anguish<sup>3</sup>. Responsibility for what we are and for the world *as it is* however, intensifies our disengagement through its rupture from reality *as we know it*. This is similar to Roquentin, who takes responsibility for defining his own being only in a moment of rupture with what was *already* authored by him<sup>4</sup>.

Sartre's example of the climber who is on the path which goes along the precipice will illustrate this immediacy and intensity of responsibility recognition. The climber first experiences the fear of falling, but he then realizes that it is a possibility that he could throw himself over the precipice, that the motive for staying on the path is not determinate and hurling himself over the precipice becomes a possibility as staying on the path is a possibility. However, the future action of hurling himself off the precipice, which would seem to be an expression of his fundamental freedom, may not be sufficiently unhinged from his present reality in order for him to experience anguish. If it

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<sup>3</sup> This is an individual assumption of taking 'freedom-by-itself' that I mentioned in the introduction (see, p.14).

<sup>4</sup> In this case his hand, see Chapter 1.



is not it is indicative of the fact that it is only responsibility recognition that can distance us from the concrete reality of *what I am* (as opposed to what I will be).

Sartre appropriately writes, “if *nothing* compels me to save my life, *nothing* prevents me from precipitating myself into the abyss” (*BN*, p.69). The fact that Sartre wrote this in a conditional form illuminates my point here: the antecedent to experiencing the *nothing* that prevents me from jumping off the cliff (an expression of absolute freedom), is experiencing the *nothing* that is wedged between my current compulsion to not jump (responsibility for such a compulsion). This current compulsion of mine is derived from what ever project I have created that makes up who I am. Thus, the wedge of nothingness comes between not what *I could do* (e.g. jump off) and my consciousness, it comes between what *I am doing* and my consciousness (e.g. saving my life). It is the latter that responsibility contends with, for when I realize that saving my life is constituted by me as a need and is not some inherent human quality for example, it becomes a possibility as much as jumping does, fundamentally no more pressing or important. Thus, the revelation of responsibility in this sense, eludes the distance of ‘future free choices’ that abstract freedom falls into by coming up to meet them as possibilities through the distance that is revealed between my consciousness and my *current* choices, between my consciousness and *what I am*. The distance is that of nothingness and it arises when I recognize that *nothing* compels me to stay on the path just as nothing compels me to jump. Responsibility then becomes the condition that makes possible our revelation of our contingency and thereby the arbitrariness in the

authorship of our possibilities, i.e. our freedom. It therefore exposes our fundamental anguish in the face of these possibilities and carves out a path to authenticity.

As I stand above the precipice I may believe it is 'a self-preservation instinct' to not jump off, i.e. something that causes me to *be*, something exterior, some sort of 'human nature', because I have yet to accept my complete responsibility for constituting, for making up the desire to not jump. Once I have realized that I am responsible for who I am, the distance from 'who I am' results, becoming something *I* made, something contingent, no longer strictly identified with 'who I am' as it becomes 'what I authored'. My consciousness is no longer the person saving their life; it is instead *not* that person, *because* it is responsible for that person. Therefore 'I' become the man who does not want to fall, in the mode of not being that man, for I am rather the consciousness that is responsible for what that man is and the fact that he does not want to fall. Only then does the possibility of jumping off the cliff become a possibility on equal footing with not jumping off, and therefore, only then is anguish triggered and my fundamental condition exposed.

If we took the possibility of jumping off as a realization, it is quite possible that the fear of it could take hold, or even a fleeting moment of anguish. This disappears once the climber settles back into the bad faith of his 'self-preservation instinct' and an adherence to a project of 'who he is', as if it provided him with some safety in causality or human nature. Thus we see that the possibility of freedom may exist and be consented to, without the constitution of the present, of who I am in the mode of not being who I am, arising. Thus, Sartre gives us the above quotation as a conditional. Because it is

only when the climber can first take responsibility for what he is and confront the anguish that results from realizing that what he is, is contingent upon his authorship, held up by the *nothing* that is his consciousness, that he can then experience concrete freedom, in this case the freedom to jump. The nature of this contingency and the revelation of responsibility is that my possibilities depend “on *me* alone to sustain them in their existence” (*BN*, p.72).

This is why responsibility is morally primary to freedom, for it is the path out of bad faith or an incorrect belief that ‘I am what I am’. For we may entertain the possibility of being otherwise all we like, but these possibilities never take hold, never have the weight of responsibility until they are put on level with what I currently am. For the fact that these possibilities (already past possibilities that I have lived up to) are revealed as contingent and solely my responsibility, brings future possibilities the same level of reality, the reality of having already been lived. If what I have lived is at a distance than the distance of future possibilities could also be lived. Therefore only in recognizing responsibility in anguish can we realize “that freedom is, in its being, in question for itself” (*BN*, p.65).

As I said above, the revelation of our responsibility for current situations, meanings, or possibilities elude the distance of ‘future free choices’; responsibility brings our future possibles closer because relative to what I am now they suddenly are not distant, when we see the distance that I currently hold myself at. Responsibility for what I am exposes the fact that this distance does not provide us with solace in the face of anguish and we cannot rely on the distance of future free choices to escape anguish into

bad faith, for the distance is between consciousness and reality and what we are cannot get any closer, it cannot become identical with us. That is, when we realize our responsibility for all that we are and all that the world is, we see first hand that this distance does not imply a lack of reality, *for reality is constituted at this distance*. On the other hand, the freedom claim that any possibilities are mine in the future, does not reciprocally turn toward these embedded possibilities, situations and meanings and liken themselves to these current ones, therefore never erecting themselves as possibilities that cause anguish. Therefore, this view toward freedom will not be sufficient on its own to escape bad faith and experience anguish. In short, the possibility of hurling myself off of the cliff is not enough to cause anguish, for anguish we require in addition to that (and antecedent to that) the possibility *that we do not jump off the cliff as a possibility*, not as a necessity, not as human nature or ‘the way I am’, which we often do. Responsibility hurls us back to the choices we have already made, to what I *am*, while freedom points forward, able, without its antecedent, to tip toe over what I already am and leave it in bad faith. Thus, in escaping bad faith, in this case the bad faith of believing that my instinct stops me from jumping (i.e. I am caused not to jump), it is clear that the acceptance of responsibility is of primary importance in escaping from this bad faith, and concrete freedom follows along, made possible by the revelation of responsibility. Secondly, this responsibility reveals my fundamental condition as a consciousness distant from *what I am*, making it up arbitrarily, and thereby exposing me to existential anguish.

Thus, for the climber over the precipice, when he realizes the distance that he has from what he is in responsibility, what he has made himself be (in this case ‘one who has

a self-preservation instinct’), he realizes that “The for-itself can never reach the in-itself nor apprehend itself as *being* this or that, but neither can it prevent itself from being what it is – *at a distance from itself*. This contingency of the for-itself, this *weight* surpassed and preserved in the very surpassing – this is *Facticity*. But it is also the past. “Facticity” and “Past” are two words to indicate one and the same thing” (*BN*, p.173). It is his facticity that the climber distances himself from in responsibility, ensuring that he could not dwell in it in bad faith, and is thereby confronted with his existential anguish.

Sartre discovers that if anguish is to be possible it must be something that we are aware of and thereby flee, we are “anguish in order to flee it. This attitude is what we call bad faith” (*BN*, p.83). For we are anguish and we are responsible, in order to flee that responsibility we venture into bad faith; we are not free not to be free but we deny our responsibility in bad faith. The ‘anguish’ of anguish would not weigh so heavily upon us without responsibility, for responsibility is difficult to realize. It may be that Sartre took for granted the logical connection between responsibility and freedom and therefore assumed the weight of the revelation of freedom, but to be specific, the weight comes from responsibility. Every event that we encounter, we intend in some way; every event is an opportunity or a chance to change, or to realize this being that is in question or to reject it and in this sense every event must be recognized as our responsibility. This is why Sartre says, “the responsibility of the for-itself extends to the entire world as a peopled-world. It is precisely this that the for-itself apprehends itself in anguish” (*BN*, p.711), indicating the pervasive moral importance of responsibility.

## II: The Primacy of Responsibility

The fact that responsibility makes possible our existential anguish is one way that responsibility gains its moral-psychological importance. However the theoretical grounding of responsibility in the moral-psychological realm also indicates its confrontation in our life that facilitates concrete freedom. This point is indicative of responsibility's place as primarily moral-psychological as opposed to our ontological condition as freedom and is echoed by Jeanson, who writes: we achieve 'genuine choice' "only after a purifying reflection which takes it on as its own" (Jeanson, 1980, p.189). In the process of this 'purifying reflection', this taking on as our own, what we are doing is taking responsibility. That is, we are consenting to the life lived that is ours and this is a moral-psychological process, not an ontological one (despite its ontological grounding), because this life-lived is an individual, concrete one. Jeanson helps here to separate freedom and responsibility for my purposes: in this taking on as our own, we are not only choosing what is to constitute my self (as we are in ontological freedom), but if we are to take responsibility, as Jeanson puts it, "I must still also choose myself" (Ibid.). That is, I must admit that this already constituted life is *my* life, i.e. choose what *I am*. We may be freely constituting our selves, but the awareness, the revelation, that we are doing so, which manifests itself as 'this life is wholly mine, for I am the author, I *made* it', is the existential and moral-psychological revelation of responsibility. This is intertwined with bad faith because bad faith is either denying our ability to author our situation or denying the fact that we already have authored the current situation. They are both a denial of

responsibility and therefore, when we accept our life as wholly ours, when we accept responsibility we, correlatively, are not in bad faith.

This means that, *the condition for the possibility of the individual, concrete psychological recognition of one’s fundamental freedom is the revelation of responsibility*. Otherwise the individual remains in the condition of bad faith, constricted by exterior determinates and fraught with self-deception. Sartre says that *we are not able not to be free* (BN, p.625), for it is an ontological fact. However, in an effort to hide freedom from ourselves, the only way to do this if we are fundamentally free, is to come up with other causes and motivations that are outside of us, in essence to say ‘I am not responsible’, for responsibility will imply our authorship<sup>5</sup>. The ontological fact of our freedom is the *condition* for a consciousness “of anguish and of responsibility” (BN, 597). We deny freedom’s logical counterpart and by doing so escape ontological freedom in concrete terms. Therefore the escape from bad faith and the acceptance of responsibility is a moral-psychological act; it is our consciousness which must contend with the lie to oneself and the responsibility implicitly denied by it in the concrete, but our consciousness may not ever have to deal with the ontological fact of our freedom if it continues to hide it in bad faith.

Nevertheless, every mode of our ignorance of the ontological fact of our freedom is a mode of bad faith, thus in the escape from bad faith we will be able to realize our freedom. However, the necessary element in getting out of bad faith is the acceptance of

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<sup>5</sup> Something being an ontological fact is not a sufficient condition for making it a psychological fact, a fact that reveals itself in an individual’s life. The phenomenon of bad faith is enough to show this to be the case. Although in this case, ontological freedom, as our consciousness, is a necessary condition for bad faith.

responsibility for what we are or what we have done or what has happened to us<sup>6</sup>. The reason for this is that conventionally, in departing from what I have concretized as 'what I am' for example, I attempt to depart from it as something that is a *fact* like a fact of the in-itself. Thus, in order to depart from it, it is not enough to claim 'I have the freedom to be different', for that says nothing itself about the facticity of the particular, existing characteristic, or about my belief that this characteristic is in-itself somehow natural. That is, the claim to freedom does not necessarily say anything about what I am to be different *from* or the fact that *I am* not different in its pointing toward future possibilities.

I am not brave for example, but always cowardly. I am free to be brave, I may say, without disrupting the permanence or the facticity of my cowardice. That is, to continue to follow through on actions which constitute a facticity of cowardice for me, denying that I am a coward, pursuing bad faith by hiding my facticity and taking refuge in my transcendence, denying responsibility for making myself a coward. When I say 'this characteristic of cowardice that I have always believed I cannot transcend, that I have decided is the way *I am*, *this* characteristic is what *I made myself be*. I am *responsible* for *being cowardly* and it is not the effect of some cause'. It is then that we

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<sup>6</sup> Sartre says that the past can "appear to me in the form of 'empirical knowledge'" and that "it is fixed" (*BN*, p.580) and therefore could appear in a form of irresponsibility, being pointed at as 'that thing – me in the past' as I would point at the in-itself and not something I authored, i.e. it can be objectified. Despite this I am not here concerned about the language I have used, equivocating 'what *I am*' and 'what *I was*', for in concrete responsibility the point is precisely to avoid this and to take on as mine the totality of what I am that I have authored. Despite the past being easily objectified it still represents the manifestation of the project of what I am, i.e. my facticity, whereas freedom directs itself toward a future and therefore risks concretizing the past as the past-in-itself that it is distinct from, only revealing what it is as it chooses. Thus, in regard to ontological freedom we are free as our own nothingness, distinct from what we choose to be through our consciousness of it as *not* being it. However, responsibility confronts that which we chose to be, whether it is past or present and reveals the contingency with which we are and with which we fundamentally author what we are in order to facilitate the revelation of such a freedom, i.e. that such a past must have been chosen as it is ours because it cannot be any other's past.



disrupt the permanence of the characteristic of cowardice that we were formerly 'afflicted' with. While the assertion of freedom in the face of this concrete cowardice escapes too easily into the abstract, for it posits itself immediately as *not cowardly* by its very ontological structure as nothing and risks missing the ownership of the facticity of what *I am*. Because the permanence of the characteristic itself is upheld by the belief that it is of the in-itself, and is inextricably tied to 'what I am', when we realize that it is only mine and thus mine to accept or reject, the characteristic loses this permanence and slips into possibility.

The possibility of freedom without responsibility becomes impossible. For that sort of change requires an effort we cannot make, that is, to act as the exterior cause did. I have to somehow impact myself, *cause* myself to be different, for the question of 'what caused me to be cowardly in the first place?', whose answer should have been claimed by responsibility, is left unanswered. In this case my claimed freedom is left fighting for the possibility of being brave while my belief that I am cowardly remains entrenched, not to be transcended because it is not of my authorship.

This common sort of freedom claim, paradoxically, ignores the very ontological reality that it is trying to realize: that *I could just as easily be brave as cowardly*<sup>7</sup>. The realization of such unbiased possibilities only comes when we claim responsibility for the cowardice and take the place of the struggle against 'what I am'. When I struggle against 'what I am', I speak as if I am not free. Whereas the revelation of responsibility that tells

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<sup>7</sup> It is true that, fundamentally, the possibility of being brave is as likely as being cowardly, however it is the case that, in living up to my project, my characteristics of who I am, it is very difficult to recognize being brave as an equal possibility. Nevertheless, as it is a fundamental possibility, it is there to be realized, and once I have realized my complete responsibility, only then can I recognize the possibility of being brave, until then it is a battle not to be won.

me the cowardice is *mine*, does not tell me this in terms of causality. If it is wholly mine, I do not change as an exterior event would cause me to, rather I will be either cowardly or brave. Which one is not a question of *change*, I do not need to change some thing because I am no thing. No longer will it be a ‘struggle’ to try to recognize the abstract nothingness of freedom that ‘I am not actually cowardly’. Once I have accepted responsibility for my cowardice there will only be the question of what I will *do* and how I will make myself the moment to follow. Paradoxically, I must accept what I am as ‘mine’ before I can realize that it is not actually ‘what I am’ in the sense that I *am* what I am not, and only then can I determine myself freely. Thus, “it’s a question not just of *recognizing* that one has no excuse, but also of *willing* it. For all my cowardices, all my stupidities, all my lies, I bear responsibility” (*WD*, p.113) and “if I admit – and wish – never to have any excuse, my freedom becomes *mine*” (*Ibid.* p.114).

The possibility of claimed freedom without responsibility illuminates the primacy of responsibility recognition, at least for its role as a necessary condition for the recognition of freedom and its moral-psychological necessity for avoiding self-deception. By recognizing my authorship of my self as a coward, transcending my actions and giving them their meaning as ‘cowardly actions’, I nihilate the concretization of myself as a coward. In this nihilation I cannot conflate the negation that opens the future up to me (freedom) with the negation that distances the present from me (responsibility), because the two do not occur together. Because I cannot identify myself with what I am *going to be* until I distance myself from what I am, i.e. “distinguish myself from a given set of facts about me” (McInerney, p.677). What we are able to realize in this distance from

our selves is that the only thing that inhibits my change is not, as formerly thought, the way I have been caused to be, or the permanence of 'what I am', what inhibits my ability to be brave instead of cowardly is the obligation to my past choices. This obligation is contingent and renewed at each moment I am cowardly and therefore does not have to be. When I take responsibility for the fact that I author what I am at every moment, the obligation not to change, firstly under the guise of 'causal' factors and later as simply an obligation to others and even myself, falls away. Once I become the author, when situation X is wholly mine, I am then able to negate X and arrive at the possibility, *not-X*.

After this revelation of responsibility, freedom may then have its psychological impact. Responsibility must first extract us from the situation of bad faith; it must extract us from what we formerly contended was *not our responsibility* in order to recognize our fundamental freedom; for freedom will always be disguised as long as we avoid the recognition of its past manifestation, the recognition of its past manifestation which is, responsibility. This recognition of authorship hurls us into this existential reality; the anguish of this recognition is a testament to such a reality. Responsibility is the recognition of the fact that I have been the author of everything that I am up until this point. I avoid responsibility in fear of confronting, not 'freedom' in general, but freedom's manifestation in my life, which is freedom's immanence and it is what causes anguish. It causes anguish through its weight, the weight of lived contingency and thereby the contingency of my existence.

This is why we are able to claim we have freedom to choose, while still being in bad faith, while still believing what we have believed before, that my cowardice is a fact

about what I am, for example. It can be abstracted and therefore detached from our lives in the midst of the world. “Thus we begin to catch a glimpse of the paradox of freedom: there is freedom only in a *situation*, and there is a situation only through freedom” (BN, p.626). We can only recognize this freedom in situation when we have taken it on as our own and made evident our possibilities in regard to it. It is in situation that we distance ourselves from the situation through our recognition that we are responsible for the situation as authors of the situation. Once we have achieved this absolute responsibility we can point ourselves toward possibilities, determine ourselves, aware of our free authorship. At the same time the fact that “there is a situation only through freedom” echoes Sartre’s ontological structure that consciousness is freedom. This is the facticity of our freedom: that we cannot *not* be free. But once manifested in a situation this ontological fact is morally and psychologically useless unless we recognize our full responsibility for the situation, *we must recognize our responsibility to facilitate the moral-psychological recognition of the facticity of freedom*. The consciousness of ‘doing otherwise’ (freedom abstracted) can remain directed toward a future that will never come; it can remain an empty affirmation. While responsibility anchors itself in the world, ‘*this world is mine, I have made it be*’; suddenly our consciousness is directed on what is now and ‘what I am’ and we are forced to take it as our responsibility.

Thus, responsibility mediates our existence with the ontological fact of our freedom. We do not realize our freedom because we choose to avoid *responsibility* for our selves, it is the denial of responsibility that is our escape *from freedom*, and again responsibility becomes the primary issue to contend with. For example, if we take the

conventionally depressed person, harbouring meanings of her life that she 'suffers' from, in bad faith believing that she is afflicted with depression – that it acts on her<sup>8</sup>. She may search for a solution, the meaning of her depression staying with her, thereby finding some counter cause to fight the affliction, for example drugs of some kind. She may find satisfaction in such solutions, yet she will still be in bad faith about her depression, it existing as an effect. Now the claim to freedom cannot help her here until the depression itself stops retaining the character of some exterior cause, for freedom cannot go back and unhinge that believed cause, it implicitly is directed toward the future.

Responsibility must reveal her current meaning of depression as her fault, her authorship, her ownership. Only then can she entertain changing it without bad faith. As an affliction, the depression can only be run from and never solved.

When one says 'I was *free* to do x', the impact of it only arrives with the recognition of its counterpart responsibility. For example, the man who carries the past, his wedding vows with him in his fundamental project must be making some choice concerning the ends aimed at, for example "to have an 'honorable life'" (*BN*, p.640). Now if we confronted this man to say 'you are freely making this choice, you could choose otherwise, you could leave your wife, etc.' he may respond, 'yes, I know, of course I *could*', saying this with a note of irony, while still feeling the weight of institutions, family, etc., which have contributed to 'making up what he is', that have 'caused' him to be the person he is. In this sense he could not imagine defying his

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<sup>8</sup> This example assumes that there is no brain dysfunction of any kind, chemical or physiological, thus, I call it 'conventional' depression, sadness, pessimism, etc., merely clinical symptoms that may prompt a psychiatrist to give it a diagnoses, calling it a disorder for example.

current project, despite the explicit recognition of his freedom to do so, he does not take responsibility for the limits that he has placed on himself, rather his freely chosen project retains the permanence of facticity; implicitly, 'this is the way I am, an honourable man, and could not be anything else'. For it would be too difficult of a battle to go against all that he is and even if he did, it would seem self-betraying to ignore and repress 'who he is'. On the other hand, when this man says, 'I am responsible for this commitment, I am responsible for living this past (the way he was brought up, etc.) through my current project, I made this project', he unavoidably must embrace himself as creator and dismiss the other 'causes'.

As creator, the contingency of these constituted meanings arise, no longer the natural result of his circumstances they become unhinged from what he is; as creator he could as easily be destroyer, the institutions no longer standing in his way. The 'causes' that formerly remained in spite of his admittance of freedom to do otherwise, suddenly fall away under the recognition of responsibility. *He* becomes the 'cause' because *he* chose to have his past as an influence (to see it as causing him to want an 'honorable life'), the formerly thought of causes become *his*, he owns them and they are solely *his* responsibility. Freedom can tread lightly, responsibility has a heavy foot; freedom can include exterior causes (e.g. 'causing me to choose'), thus, retaining bad faith, responsibility excludes exterior causes (i.e. I caused it, I authored it, thus, nothing else could have). One can look toward a free future, while denying his freedom in the past and never living this freedom, seemingly denying while affirming his freedom. However one cannot both recognize responsibility for what he *is*, while denying responsibility for

what he is. This man illustrates the possibility of freedom as only through the acceptance of responsibility, for one cannot recognize the contingency of 'what I am' until one recognizes the responsibility I bear for 'what I am'. Responsibility mediates the revelation of freedom on the moral-psychological level and thus, brings freedom to the concrete.

### **III: Freedom**

Many would not agree with my differentiation of responsibility and freedom based on our moral-psychological existence; however, it accomplishes a focus on responsibility that has not previously emerged because it has been subject to the same analysis as freedom. What I have provided is a substantiation of responsibility as a concrete moral-psychological concept in tandem with bad faith and to that degree independent of freedom. The criticisms levied against Sartre's radical freedom have taken a proposition of concrete freedom, based on our ontological condition as intentional consciousness, and then turned back on absolute responsibility, subjecting it to the same conclusions. What I have proposed here is that this concrete freedom, as a consciousness of our ontological freedom, requires more than to simply be asserted. For in determining ourselves in the concrete it has become apparent that we cannot be in bad faith (our effort to escape our fundamental condition) and therefore must take responsibility for our inevitable authorship. From a moral-psychological point of view, until the condition of absolute responsibility is met, concluding *what* concrete freedom would look like may be difficult and insufficient.

Thus, such criticisms may commit the error of considering freedom in isolation from the consequences of responsibility and bad faith. As a theoretical concern, that would be to take the significance of responsibility for granted. The previous section reminds us that we cannot consider radical freedom outside the context of its concrete manifestation, i.e. absolute responsibility, and to be mindful of Sartre’s structure of consciousness. When considering a picture of radical freedom in isolation from responsibility we are led to analyses such as Charles Taylor’s, for example. Taylor seems concerned that radical freedom, due to its spontaneity and arbitrariness, makes it insufficient in regard to real moral choices. In his essay “Responsibility for Self”, Taylor considers freedom as morally void and incapable of providing a framework in which to base one’s moral decisions. He argues that this is because, if we adhere to a theory of radical choice then even our values themselves “issue ultimately from a radical choice” and therefore issue from a choice “which is not grounded in any reasons” (Taylor, 1976, p.289-290) disabling us from understanding responsibility for such reasons. It is this definition of radical choice that Taylor pursues that permits the criticism of radical freedom as he formulates it. It also does not consider the effect of the weight of responsibility on our moral-psychological selves. In light of responsibility it can not be the case that “radical choice... (is that) we choose without criteria” (Ibid, p.296) because when we choose it is *not* by “simply declaring one of the rival claims as dead and inoperative” (Ibid, p.291).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Others have contended that this criticism of Sartre’s radical freedom as ‘spontaneous’ is not permissible as well, for example, Peter K. McNerney writes, “the notion of random spontaneity belongs in a different framework from Sartre’s” (McNerney, p.664).



Despite the fact that Taylor thinks that radical choice implies a lack of obligation to either side of a moral dilemma, I contend that it is quite the opposite. For when we recognize responsibility for our evaluations we also must confront our obligation to them; in recognizing our responsibility for authoring the evaluations themselves and therefore authoring what we are and recognizing our distance from them, we do not then absolve such evaluations of their moral significance. This is because we not only are responsible for making some moral obligation an *obligation*, we are also responsible for altering that obligation through some radical choice, i.e. deciding to take an action that we believe to be that of a ‘morally corrupt person’ for example and thereby authoring anew *what we are*.

In being radically free we do not arise out of nothingness in the sense that we have nothing weighing on us, for the self that we have created weighs on us as what we have lived up to and what we will radically change if we do not live up to it. It is therefore tied to our freedom in that what we are (in the mode of not being it) is a manifestation of this very freedom. Therefore, what is “the path of duty” in *contrast* to “selfish indulgence” (Ibid, p.291) is, in part, constituted by *what* we have chosen to be, for each of these concepts *mean* something according to what I have authored them as. Recognizing responsibility for such a contrast is simply recognizing the fact that ‘duty’ is not in-itself ‘duty’; that it is not a moral obligation that comes to me ‘from the outside’ or ‘from God’ but instead something I have authored. Therefore it is true that in absolute responsibility we also recognize that I am not actually ‘a dutiful person’ or ‘a selfish person’ but in fact that I *authored myself as* one or the other as a consequence of my

inevitable authorship of what I am, in the face of existing in a world and that I am, as a consciousness, in fact nothing. I am 'dutiful' in the mode of authoring it and therefore not *being* it. However, I must choose in light of what I have authored as the *meaning* of my being and when I realize my distance from it, it does not imply that its appeal to me necessarily falls away into the nothingness that I ontologically am.

Therefore it is true that in radical freedom "no formulations (of self-evaluation) are considered unrevisable" (Taylor, p.296) and that we could even choose spontaneously, 'without reason', for that is the fundamental structure of consciousness: that we do not have an inherent morality because values are not external to us, but rather created by us. However this is not to say that our choices are not saturated with what we responsibly desire to be, i.e. desires that we are aware of our responsibility for creating. Therefore our moral dilemmas and moral desires to *be* a certain way do not originate at some inchoate, "inarticulate limit" as Taylor believes (Ibid, p.297), but instead originate in the very choices that I have made in the past as to *what I want to be*. "Thus we choose our past in the light of a certain end, but from then on it imposes itself upon us and devours us" (BN, p.645). Therefore, when Taylor contrasts "radical choice" to "looking at our most fundamental formulations" of how to be, he has ignored that, according to Sartre's radical freedom, radical choice implies looking at and more importantly, taking responsibility for, these *most fundamental formulations*, illustrating the connection between freedom and responsibility within the structure of consciousness. Thus, it is our absolute responsibility that we are confronted with in these moral dilemmas because

these ‘fundamental evaluative formulations’ are precisely what I have authored and what I am responsible for, and therefore *what I must contend with in light of my decision*.

Taylor recognizes that in our self reflection “the self is in question” (Ibid, p.299). This being an explicit recognition of the fact that we do not come ready-made, that we author what we are, and that provides the ontological conditions for absolute responsibility. “In my being, my being is in question. This means that nothing comes to me which *is not chosen*” (BN, p.638). It is apparent that this choice is not made in isolation from what I am, rather it is the very stuff of *what I am* that I have to contend with in making moral choices and I have to contend with it in light of it being *mine*, in light of my moral-psychological commitment (or lack of commitment) to *what I am*; while it is necessary to emphasize that it can still remain the case that the possibility of radical change rests on the requisite recognition of my absolute responsibility for what I am and therefore the distance from what I am.

Taylor’s criticism is of freedom’s manifestation as radical choice. Nevertheless it is still a criticism of our ability to exercise radical freedom. It is apparent that the problems with such radical choice point us toward our moral-psychological existence and the prevalence of responsibility as a condition of radical freedom. In similar fashion to Taylor’s criticism, the charge of the ambiguity of Sartre’s freedom is revealed when we take what we perceive to be freedom by-itself. However it should be evident that concrete freedom, whatever it may look like, deserves to be directly derived from the condition that absolute responsibility and its ontological foundation provide. Therefore the following may be a digression from the investigation of responsibility, however if it

has an impact on the absolute responsibility here argued for then it will be a fruitful digression.

If we consider Sartre's fundamental freedom we would assume a concrete freedom which necessarily is not limited by external conditions, for its ontological freedom is in its necessary transcendence of such conditions. In fact, these conditions *are what they are* through that very transcendence. The assertion, therefore, that some external condition such as oppression 'cuts me off from my future' and 'imprisons me' (de Beauvoir, III, p.5), would, strictly speaking, be an assertion in bad faith; bad faith that would rely on escaping responsibility for *being* oppressed through an objectification of my self as a thing. However, we can not assume it to be this simple, for it is this very interpretation of freedom-by-itself that leads to its criticism. Because it seems to be that we *feel* cut off from our future and imprisoned at various times and simply 'recognizing freedom' does not enable us to consequently feel free under the meanings heaped upon us by others. There is a more complex dynamic at work here in which we have to detach from our current situation, i.e. take responsibility for what we are, before we can expect the assertion of freedom to have a significant individual impact.

Nevertheless, "The other can not be the meaning of my objectivity" (BN, p.366) because "my being-for-others is not an ontological structure of the For-itself". Instead, in making myself distinct from the other, the me-as-object "is mine and I claim it" making me "perpetually *responsible* for it in my being" (BN, p.380). In bad faith we may be tempted to objectify ourselves according to the other, to take on the meaning of my being-for-others, which is at a distance from my consciousness. However, to the degree I

realize my self as free is the degree to which “I am responsible for the existence of the other” (*BN*, p.382). Because in shedding my object-ness in light of the other’s transcendence, “I apprehend myself as being responsible for the Other’s being” (*BN*, p.383). Therefore, unfairly to some, “I am responsible for my being-for-others, but I am not the foundation of it” (*BN*, p.475), which reiterates the separation of responsibility and freedom: for we are also responsible for a world we are not the foundation of and that has its own being; it is pervasively our responsibility because we make it what it is. Thus, in situation we may encounter the other, but in responsibility his transcendence is encountered as an element of *my* situation, just as the chair is encountered as an element in my situation. Therefore, strictly speaking, any assertion that the other ‘makes me be’ in some way is an assertion in bad faith by denying responsibility for objectifying the other and instead objectifying ourselves by taking on our being-for-others as in-itself.

Thus, the situation of oppression thrives off this dynamic, for the oppressed takes on the oppressor’s meaning as objective, in-itself and therefore inescapable. It is only when the oppressed person takes responsibility for *being* oppressed that he or she can *initiate* change, because responsibility for *what I am* is a necessary condition of concrete freedom. I would argue that that is what seems to be the case historically as well, for when the oppressed believe they can change the situation, it is implied that they do not believe the situation has the permanence of the in-itself. That is, they are no longer in bad faith about their conditions and have taken responsibility for them, enabling them to author them differently. The possibility of different conditions arises on the basis of the realization that their current conditions are mere possibility. However, this is not to say

that one could simply change the situation, for the conditions that exist are also upheld by many others’ meaning-constitution (possibly the majority) as “correct”, “enduring”, “my right”, etc. It may remain a struggle to *act* freely under the conditions of overt oppression even in responsibility. However that does not free us from responsibility for the oppressive situation. Because it is the case that we still, inevitably, *make it what it is*. On the other hand, the struggle in the face of oppression does not change the fact that responsibility is a necessary condition of ever being able to act freely. For the oppressed, they must believe that change is possible in order to change anything. Change *becomes possible* under the recognition of my authorship for the oppressive situation, seeing it in its contingency, upheld by the Other. The oppressed must see that ‘being oppressed’ is something “that I can never be united with” (*BN*, p.173).

What is more important to this current discussion of the ambiguity of practicing freedom is that even if we cannot change the objective conditions that made up “oppression” for us, this does not relieve us of responsibility for the situation. It also does not detract from the argument that the recognition of responsibility provides the possibility for practicing freedom. As we saw in chapter 1, we are responsible for even ‘objective’ conditions or physical conditions because we *make them what they are through our conscious apprehension of them*. The person that cannot ‘break the chains of oppression’, in responsibility recognizes that she is not what the oppressors define her as, she is free of such objectification. In bad faith, she carries with her the weight of the Other’s definition of her. Whether she is able to emancipate herself from the constructions made up by the ruling, oppressive power or how long it will take, is

indeterminate. However it remains that she could not have emancipation as a possibility until she recognizes her responsibility for making herself 'the oppressed'.

Thus, the ambiguity of freedom that de Beauvoir asserts, i.e. that man is that which "no external power can take hold" and yet "he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things" (de Beauvoir, I, p.1), is an illustration of what one may experience as the permanent possibility of bad faith. For de Beauvoir agrees that our fundamental condition is as an intentional consciousness that 'remains at a distance from himself' (Ibid, p.4), yet de Beauvoir presents as ambiguous the fact that 'willing oneself free' does not seem to have meaning "since at the beginning we are free" (Ibid, p.10). In light of this 'ambiguity', de Beauvoir decides that to will oneself free is to establish "a genuine freedom *on the original upsurge of our existence*" (Ibid, my emphasis). We have seen that this 'genuine freedom' arises through our responsibility for what we are. Therefore to 'found myself' in this way is dependent on recognizing that I already have 'found myself', as it is my fundamental condition. de Beauvoir describes this as "adhering to the concrete and particular movement by which this spontaneity defines itself" (Ibid, p.11) and thereby prevent ourselves from becoming "a thing" by 'ceaselessly returning to it and justifying it in the unity of the project in which I am engaged' (Ibid). Thus, we recover ourselves in responsibility, realizing that what I am is what I authored. However, the ambiguity of freedom is dependent on the fact of our 'permanent possibility' of denying responsibility for our condition as authors; one "may falsely assert oneself as being, or assert oneself as nothing...ness" (the two aspects

of bad faith) or “one may realize his freedom only as an abstract independence” (freedom void of responsibility).

We see here that de Beauvoir's analysis is consistent with Sartre's ontology, however the divergence arises when de Beauvoir indicates her objective, she asks: “how could men, originally separated, get together?” (Ibid, p.6). In saying this de Beauvoir is firstly concurring with our fundamental alienation. However, she also makes explicit her departure from this thesis. I am concerned here with how this fundamental condition of responsibility represents our escape from bad faith. I am concerned with how human beings contend with themselves in light of this. To conjoin political interests to such a concern is not only unnecessary, but it confuses the moral-psychological issue at hand and ignores the work being done on responsibility here.

The condition of realizing our radical freedom cannot be an easy process and in fact may not be possible at all, for it requires the recognition of a condition that detaches us from the world and ourselves, alone, and hurls us into anguish. Thus, how could I entertain the possibility of a freedom that has maybe never been realized? Instead I choose to here focus on what may be the source of various problems of self-deception and argue for responsibility acceptance that may provide the solution. Responsibility in this context, forces one to contend with a very moral-psychological issue and not a political issue, that is, our belief about ourselves, about the world, what is right, wrong, good or bad *and how* these beliefs are integrated into self-deception and moral-psychological discontent. This should come previous to our political concerns because we first must contend with ourselves. That is, our consciousness or for-itself mediates



this relationship with the world including that of others. I am therefore forced to contend with my self in all my endeavors. This is what is implied by Sartre's radical freedom, my consciousness transcends the world, giving it meaning and making it what it is. No other can infringe upon my intentional consciousness that makes me absolutely responsible for the world that I reveal.

Thus, what our concrete freedom may look like may be indeterminate, for it requires an absolute recognition of our condition, an absolute responsibility, in order for me to determine myself in concrete freedom. However, if we are ever to achieve such a proposed freedom that is our ontological condition, it seems fitting to begin here with the very recognition that precipitates it, instead of imagining what the ontological freedom proposed by Sartre would look like in the concrete or hypothesizing what might constitute a 'real' limit to my concrete freedom. What is of interest here is how the moral-psychological individual contends with this ontological condition, *because we* often feel our freedom taken from us because we always have ways of avoiding it in responsibility denial.

I take this criticism of the ambiguity of freedom to come in two possible forms: either the criticism is *a posteriori* to Sartre's ontology, considering the contingent conditions of an individual person that seem to limit freedom but are not intended to alter Sartre's fundamental structure, which is what I have been arguing against thus far. Or the criticism is *a priori* to Sartre's theory so to speak, that is, it is asserting that ontologically, freedom cannot be absolute and there is an element or a structure of consciousness that

creates this paradox because we are fundamentally inclined to live according to the limitations of others.

Concerning the *a posteriori* criticism: this is not contradictory to my thesis, for it is pointing out is that we are influenced by others and we may well be in bad faith, which is what I have already addressed. The important point, however, is that this may be the case: we may live at the hands of the Other’s conception of us, correlatively we may be in bad faith quite regularly, but this does not change the fundamental structure of intentional consciousness that I have explicated here; we make up the world because our consciousness is directed upon the world, all the meanings that come to us from the Other are still subject, and must be, to our construal, consent, ignorance; in short, our fundamental transcendence and meaning creation.

Concerning the *a priori* criticism: if one claims that this possibility of a lack of freedom in the face of external meaning is somehow contrary to the ontology of consciousness and being, then one is saying that in light of the difficulties we have in feeling concretely free it must transcendently indicate a need for an amendment to Sartre’s structure of consciousness. This is not wholly objectionable, for this thesis assumes a Sartrean structure of consciousness in order to erect the significance of responsibility in relation to self-deception. However, the intricacies of the theoretical alteration are bound to be extensive and complex, something which I could not entertain here.

The problem with this ‘paradox of freedom’ is that it refuses to consider such an impact, or the possible role of such limitations within the very heart of the theory it is

criticizing. It seems in this regard to be obviously motivated by other interests and very legitimate interests: for the person preoccupied with such 'paradoxes of freedom' is concerned with our political freedom and what we are, realistically, capable of attaining. Although even that may be too general of a characterization; it seems more likely, especially within the context of de Beauvoir's essay, that she is concerned with the conditions of oppression and objectification and the state of the oppressed, which she also described in *The Second Sex*. It is not surprising that her interests led her to questioning how our fundamental freedom is manifested, although considering her regular defense of Sartre's theory of existentialism it seems de Beauvoir is taking the *a posteriori* approach. Thus, we are fundamentally free, yet in daily life, we do not seem able to realize this freedom, considering such conditions of objectification and oppression. Of course this is not surprising, I do not know of anyone who has achieved the absolute responsibility (authenticity) that I have argued for here, thus, we should not expect that there is anyone who has achieved radical freedom; for "the challenge to live authentically is the highest human challenge" (Moran, p.362). What makes possible this ambiguity is that we are free to deny our absolute responsibility. Thus, the ambiguity of freedom is no ambiguity at all, for it is our condition as ontologically free that makes possible our flight from it in the concrete. Bad faith is *made possible* by the structure of consciousness, by the fact that "human reality... must be what it is not and not be what it is" (BN, p.112). If we were not free to adhere to facticity in bad faith or escape in transcendence we would *be what our condition is*, we would be what we are and thus no perceived ambiguity could arise. But we deceive our selves and deny our condition as free through our denial of our

responsibility quite regularly only because we are absolutely free. The perceived ambiguity of freedom is merely a description of what our struggle *for it* looks like and the seeming injustice it embodies. The difference I am claiming here is that this struggle is constituted *by us* through bad faith and it exemplifies the purpose of a more in depth discussion of the moral-psychological recognition of responsibility.

#### IV: The Other

This is not to say that Sartre was an isolationist, Sartre recognizes that all phenomena of human reality, as well as bad faith, is conditioned by the *mit-sein* (being-with others in the world)<sup>10</sup> and it is bad faith as a *situation* that induces its responsibility-denial. It is in existence that the nothingness that is our consciousness nihilates Being and creates reality; “we define man only in relationship to involvement” (*EH*, p.44). More specifically, if we are to be responsible for a situation, we must recognize that the situation is erected in our engagement in the world. As Sartre says, the relation of being and the being of consciousness “is an original emergence and is part of the very structure of these beings”. This is a “totality which is man-in-the-world” (*BN*, p.34).

Our consciousness ensures that there are other consciousness' that exist. For example, Sartre uses the example of shame, that is “in its primary structure shame *before somebody*” (*BN*, p.302) and “is the *recognition* of the fact that I *am* indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging” (*BN*, p.350), therefore recognizing the inevitable existence of other consciousness' that objectify us and to this degree impose upon how we may regard ourselves. However it is our facticity, as consciousness that is

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<sup>10</sup> Sartre borrows this from Heidegger, *BN*, p. 88, footnote 1.

distanced from our ‘selves’, that facilitates, not only our being an object to ourselves, but also this condition of appearing as an object to others. This appearance to others as an object provides an opportunity to escape responsibility for ourselves in bad faith, relying upon the concretization of the Other’s definition of what we are in order to escape *our own* transcendence of what we are.

“We encounter the Other; we do not constitute him” (BN, p.336) and we encounter him as an object, however the other-as-object refers to the “permanent possibility of *being-seen-by-him*” (BN, p.345). Being seen by the Other refers us to ourselves as objects and thereby refers us to the Other as a subject and it is thus that we run into the possibility of bad faith, believing that we *are* that objectified self that is pinned down as *that thing* by the Other’s transcendence. This does not interfere with the project at hand, because it is still the case that we author what we are and in this authoring we make the other *be what they are for us* and reciprocally, the Other makes me be in my being-for-him (BN, p.351), but this being-for-the-other is either separate from me as constituted by the Other, or it is mine to consent to as being what I am. It is the latter that runs into the problem of responsibility denial through bad faith because it is actually “not my possible” (BN, p.351). The Other fixes me as what-I-am and strips me of my transcendence, the Other therefore constitutes my being-for-others as “he *in the midst of the world* in so far as he escapes me” (BN, p.353). Therefore the problem of the Other is subject to the same conditions that guarantee that I am only what I am in the mode of not being it. I cannot be what I am or what the other makes me, due to the structure of consciousness.

What remains is that another dimension of objectifying ourselves is through the look of the Other, for my being for Others is “my Me-as-object” (BN, p.380) which I cannot realize, and reciprocally, our objectification of the Other is also of our authorship and is not *them*. Therefore to not be in bad faith in regard to the Other I realize that I am not what the other confers on me and the Other is not what I confer on him, and secondly that I am *not* the Other. This is a recognition of the structure of consciousness as nothing. Alternatively, I may be what the Other confers upon me through my transcendence of it and embrace it as mine, responsibly, being it in the mode of not being it, recognizing my authorship through consenting to it, again referring me to the issue at hand, for “the object is that which is not my consciousness” (BN, p.365).

We are beings that “exist only as *engaged*” (BN, p.387), steeped in a world with others, and yet absolutely responsible for such a world. “Hence, let us announce the discovery of a world which we shall call intersubjectivity; *this is the world in which man decides what he is and what others are*” (EH, p.38, my emphasis). In light of this we see that our absolute responsibility for ourselves and the world we make come into being remains explicable without explanation of the transcendence of the Other. Because on a fundamental level one’s situation in totality, that he or she is responsible for, represents one’s “engagement in the world” (BN, p.806) which must include others, however, “*human-reality at the very heart of its ekstases remains alone*” (BN, p.336, my emphasis) and it is alone that we venture into bad faith, denying our responsibility for what is created in my engagement in the world.

If we ever are able to recognize such freedom, *under any conditions*, we must recognize our absolute responsibility for all that we are and all that the world is, i.e. our responsibility for creating such conditions. This may be an impossible task for the individual. Nevertheless, the dynamic of bad faith and responsibility recognition remains the same. The structure of consciousness creates the conditions by which we are subject to responsibility and bad faith. In order to escape bad faith we must recognize that we created the conditions in which we live because no one else, fundamentally, defines this for us, for they cannot. The Other cannot transcend my transcendence, more specifically, the Other can only do so under the condition of bad faith in which I take on my being-for-others and objectify myself according to them. Authenticity and absolute responsibility demand that we recognize this transcendence and not be nailed down as *being that thing*; therefore I will move on with the discussion at hand. I will now focus on the concrete possibility of one's moral-psychological revelation of such responsibility and how that might be accomplished.

## **Chapter 4: Escaping Bad Faith**

If our absolute responsibility is brought to the concrete via the escape from bad faith then this paper would not be complete without an effort to *show how* this might be possible. For responsibility is something we tacitly confront in our denial of it every time we exercise bad faith. The first three chapters provided the total conditions for the possibility of bad faith and absolute responsibility. The first chapter provided the ontological conditions for bad faith (i.e. the structure of consciousness) which must be in order to make bad faith possible. The second chapter provided the moral-psychological condition for bad faith, which is a consciousness that is confronted with such ontological conditions that evoke anguish and responsibility we wish to flee. The third chapter described the theoretical necessity of responsibility, i.e. the necessity of responsibility acceptance if we are to escape bad faith and realize our freedom or effectively change. Thus, if this responsibility is met with in our escape from bad faith, or if it is knowingly denied in bad faith, how, practically, is it possible to realize our absolute responsibility and escape bad faith? I explore some answers to this question in the following chapter<sup>1</sup>.

### **I: Psychological Analysis**

The problem of others that we just investigated (see Ch.3, sec.IV) reminds us of our seeming lack of responsibility for who we are, because upon being thrown into this

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<sup>1</sup> Why more work has not been done on such a practical goal I do not know, the reasons could be many. To speculate: it could be that the ontological focus of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and thus, the ontological context in which bad faith was described. Despite Sartre's lucid descriptions of bad faith in action, it may have resulted in more theoretical discussion of the phenomenon of bad faith as opposed to addressing it as a real, concrete moral-psychological phenomenon. It seems that "Sartre's interest in discussing bad faith in *Being and Nothingness* is mainly ontologically oriented" (Zheng, p.265). In addition to that, what may have been Sartre's venture outside of the ontological interest in bad faith, his "Existential Psychoanalysis" was incomplete and in fact, never completed (see introduction, p.1-2).



world, “I find myself engaged in an *already meaningful* world which reflects to me meanings which I have not put into it” (BN, p.655). We are not monadic meaning creators in this world, inevitably the other is the center of reference to which many meanings refer (BN, p.654). In the same way that we objectify the projects of others, others objectify us. The other brings to life “certain determinations which I *am* without having chosen them” (BN, p.671). These determinations, Sartre says, are suffered without *being existed* (BN, p.671). They result in “a way of being which is imposed on us without our freedom being its foundation” (BN, p.672) and yet we are still responsible for them. The problem is that these meanings become concretized, they are presented to us with indifference, as the in-itself is; the meaning “is made a *thing* and is not distinguished from the *quality* of the in-itself” (BN, p.655). The problem of the others in this sense exemplifies the problem of bad faith: everywhere we turn there are opportunities for bad faith; for deceiving ourselves into believing that what is subject to our transcendence is actually a facticity imposed on us, authored by an Other and not our responsibility. These opportunities for bad faith also present themselves in the form of already constituted meanings that are the result of concretized ‘causes and effects’. I call them opportunities because they act as an opportunity to escape our anguish in the face of our overwhelming responsibility, each time we ‘give a cause for’, or ‘accept the influence of’ something or other, we provide ourselves with such an opportunity.

If we take an example of someone who has surrounded themselves with such opportunities for bad faith we may be able to discover something about how one may be able to escape this bad faith through responsibility acceptance. For example the woman

with ADHD<sup>2</sup> embodies these two opportunities for bad faith, both a meaning imposed by the Other and a meaning constituted by the 'effect' of some 'cause' are presented to her. These present themselves as an opportunity to objectify herself as a 'thing' and to be determined as a 'thing'. Specifically, she receives the meaning of her 'disorder' in the form of accepted effects it causes and she receives it as something agreed upon by most doctors and psychiatrists. She is then able to *be* the ADHD woman based on the evidence she receives, trying to realize the unrealizable affliction that she *is* ADHD, while reinforcing this unrealizable, given to her by her psychiatrist, through a causal explanation referencing brain function, explaining her 'disorder' in terms of being-in-itself and thereby being herself without fault.

In this process, her ability, in fact the nature of her consciousness, is ignored when the nature and meaning of the 'disorder' becomes a 'fact' for her. The fact that she transcends whatever physical determinate process is occurring and the fact that she transcends the doctor's meaning of the 'disorder' is offered as something she can avoid. She gradually (or immediately, depending on her desire to avoid the responsibility for her actions or her facticity) is able to deny responsibility for her actions as long as they are *caused by* the ADHD and she is able to fix the meaning according to that of the Other, denying her authorship and responsibility for what she makes of her situation. She is in bad faith in regard to her life as 'having ADHD' and all that it means.

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<sup>2</sup> ADHD stands for Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder. It is a diagnosis growing in numbers that is diagnosed symptomatically according to behaviour such as forgetfulness, an inability to concentrate, feeling unfocused. The drug Ritalin is often prescribed to quell the symptoms as it is believed to be chemically caused.

Sartre calls the meanings that are conferred upon us *unrealizables*. They are an ensemble of structures that are made up of the limits that the other confers on me, made up of the meanings from the ‘outside’ that I recover in my being-for-others. These unrealizables are such because we can never actually realize them; I who *am* them can not realize them (*BN*, p.675). The for-itself is only intentional consciousness which cannot be ascribed qualities to be concretized, it is our fundamental project which takes on these qualities and is objectified, for we cannot ‘subjectivise’ a characteristic of who we are. Unrealizables are the “origin of bad faith which has for its ideal a self-judgment” (*BN*, p.676), that is, bad faith relies upon these judgments of who I *am* as facticity, it requires them to be recovered as concretized, thus bad faith deceives itself into believing unrealizables to be precisely what they are not: realized. While what is actually the case that I hide in bad faith is that I am these unrealizables in the mode of not being them. In responsibility I recognize that I cannot *be* them because I authored them, this distance implicitly affirming the fact that, as consciousness, I cannot *be* anything, but rather I am *being* these things through transcending these things. It is the case that they are for the other, but “they can be for me only if I *choose* them” (*BN*, p.677) and in order to recognize the choice I must take responsibility for the choice.

This illustrates a subtle, yet pivotal aspect of absolute responsibility: it is not that the ADHD woman will not *choose* to remain as she was, in as far as it is *what* she responsibly authors her self as, i.e. that it could be the way of being she chooses to retain, but the fundamental difference is in her recognizing responsibility for being ADHD as opposed to believing she is inextricably ADHD, or naturally ADHD, i.e. that the reality

of her ADHD is fixed and necessary as dictated by the diagnoses and the inferred physical determinates. This difference may seem so subtle that it is inconsequential, however the language of responsibility, more importantly her belief that she *is* responsible for her ADHD can have significant effects on her moral-psychological well-being and the integration of her 'affliction' into her life. More specifically it implicitly confirms her freedom in regard to the ADHD, as I have been explaining throughout, because it distances her from the ADHD in its objectification of and responsibility for the ADHD. Nevertheless, the subtle point remains: this does not necessarily entail that she will change in regard to the 'ADHD', for in the individual responsibility that she has for making up *what she is*, we cannot make ethical assumptions about what *she should be*. Despite this, it is a fair assumption to say that if she recognizes her authorship in regard to the ADHD and *what the ADHD is* for her is undesirable, then she *will* begin to author it otherwise. That is to say, if she continues to live according to it, yet has recognized her responsibility in regard to it, we can assume that she *chooses* to be that way, or *wants* to live according to such an affliction.

Bad faith is a lie to oneself about some *thing* and in order to get out of bad faith we must recognize that deceit by taking responsibility for that *thing*. Our woman, Sally, in bad faith says, 'I have ADHD, therefore I am a person who clutters my house'. In such a case of bad faith this 'I am' that the ADHD determines to be such, takes on a homogenous connotation, for it is given as 'X (ADHD) causes *one* to be Y (cluttering behaviour)'. Thus, I am a person just as a chair is a chair, this 'person' who is determined becomes part of the causal network that operates on the level of the in-itself,

that ignores consciousness’ nihilating character and its nature to transcend. In this case “we can no longer find ‘the one’ to *whom* this or that experience has *happened*”, instead we encounter “a dust of phenomena bound together by external connections” (*BN*, p.717). This ‘dust of phenomena’ replaces Sally’s whole self that is involved in her unique situation and brings it to life everyday. Thus, in escaping bad faith, Sally will recognize that ‘I author myself as Y because I have made this ‘thing’ X and I have made X a thing which determines one to be Y’, and here, being Y due to my authorship, I inherit as mine.

Instead of the formulation in bad faith of ‘I have ADHD therefore I clutter my house’, the responsible formulation would be ‘I choose to clutter my house because I define my ADHD as disabling me from keeping on top of things’. The ADHD of course is not itself the propensity to clutter, it is subject to her definition, for she *lives* it as no one else, as the responsible rephrasing emphasizes. What her ‘compulsion to clutter’ becomes for her is distinct from the in-itself conditions of the situation. The compulsion to clutter must be recognized as a possibility among many others and as a possibility, cluttering is caused by the nothing that is consciousness; that is to say, authored by her. For the cluttering behaviour is wrapped up with meaning that is not inherent in the in-itself conditions of ADHD (if there are any). The diagnoses of ADHD and the human reality that it is, even if it were to be strictly chemical and causal would be her responsibility. As Sartre says, “the nerve is not meaningful”, and neither is the cell or the neuron as each “can be described in itself and... does not have the quality of transcendence” (*BN*, p.716). Thus, anything that connoted a meaning upon the chemical

process and the meaning of her 'affliction' and her frustration with it, are all her responsibility, as hers to accept or constitute, and therefore of her authorship and her fault<sup>3</sup>.

I will assume here for the sake of argument that the compulsion to clutter is not a specific chemical effect of the ADHD. Thus, it is distinguished by nothingness, distinguished by her consciousness, for it is her consciousness which transcends and therefore constitutes this 'compulsion'. With the revelation of responsibility she must realize that as the foundation of her clutter as a 'compulsion', this compulsion achieves the status of contingency; an effect without a determinate cause, *she does not have to be compelled to clutter*, or better put *nothing* compels her to clutter. She only was compelled when it seemed the effect of a cause, steeped in the in-itself, as difficult to transcend as the physiology that apparently coincides with ADHD, she does not have to be compelled when she recognizes herself as author, for that implies that nothing compels her, that 'nothing' being consciousness. This is the prerequisite for her to empower change in regard to her ADHD.

If we assume for a moment that the ADHD *physically causes* 'cluttering behaviour' in the same way sand in the eye causes it to water, this makes no difference to the argument at hand. The argument follows along the same lines as our terminal cancer

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<sup>3</sup> And this is radical, for even the acronym ADHD carries with it all sorts of meanings and implied values about what sort of person it makes one with the 'disorder', therefore even the term itself should be shed by the 'sufferer', because it implies meanings that provide an opportunity for bad faith in the face of it. This fact is indicative of the conclusion of this thesis in terms of moral-psychology and responsibility: the ways in which we describe ourselves should be as individualized as people themselves in order to quell such opportunities for bad faith as well as encouraging responsibility acceptance by virtue of making more explicit one's authorship of meaning (through these individualized descriptions). Clinically, the therapist should encourage autonomous authorship of analysis.

patient, therefore I do not want to reiterate extensively here. But it will suffice to say that if the woman is physically caused to clutter, it is still her responsibility because she brings that physical effect into the world through what it means: what role it plays in her life, how she defines it (e.g. dysfunctional or functional, bad or good, funny, etc.), everything that *makes up what it is* to her is still authored by her and she will take responsibility for it in departing from the bad faith of believing it is what it is only according to that very causality.

In bad faith we relieve ourselves of the responsibility of being-in-the-world, “that is, (we relieve ourselves) from the being which causes there to be a world by projecting itself beyond the world toward its own possibilities” (*BN*, p.100). What the woman with ADHD does in bad faith, is avoid the fact that she is the foundation for the world and thereby avoid the possibility that she may *not* clutter her house, or more immediately, that she is solely responsible for cluttering her house for it is only a possibility<sup>4</sup>. For upon the realization that she is completely responsible for the clutter the possibility *not to* clutter arises, just as it did for the man on the precipice. Substance is only a caricature of what the woman with ADHD is; the unity that is her, “must be a unity of responsibility” (*BN*, p.717).

Thus, the diagnosis of ADHD “simply fails to explain what makes the individuality of the project under consideration” (*BN*, p.714), i.e. ‘it rejects the pure individual who has been banished from her pure subjectivity into the external

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<sup>4</sup> Recall the man on the precipice who had to realize his responsibility for *not* jumping to his death *as a possibility*, before he could embrace the anguish inherent in the possibility of jumping to his death, Chapter 2, section III.

circumstances of her life' (*BN*, p.714). In her individuality why does Sally not produce a need to change jobs every three months? Or bite her nails? Why did ADHD manifest precisely as cluttering her home, unable to 'get on top of it'? This not only expresses the contingency of individuality and how she constitutes herself, but it recognizes that defining her according to 'ADHD' does not lend itself to discovering anything about *her* and presents her with an opportunity to explain it externally and irresponsibly.

The problem underlying this, Sartre thinks, is that the explanations "refer us ultimately to inexplicable original givens" (*BN*, p.715). In that way the moral-psychological process of her therapy unfortunately comes to rest, for at the foundation of ADHD is some in-itself irreducible given fact. Thus, responsibility is abandoned at the outset with the expectation of such a 'discovery'. This Sartre says, is a "refusal to push the analysis further" (*BN*, p.715). However we have seen that the make-up of given things is just that they are, they have no meaning in themselves, thus if Sally's ADHD is *meaningful* and her clutter is *meaningful*, - i.e. they play a role in her moral-psychological life, possibly as a source of frustration, possibly as integrated in some way with the totality of *what she is* - then we cannot treat them as givens. Sally's ADHD "is meaningful (and) therefore it is free" (*BN*, p.716) and we can therefore say that her 'physiological condition' does not account for *what the ADHD is*.

This 'unity of responsibility' is the collection of Sally's being through "jealousy, greed, love of art, cowardice, courage, and a thousand contingent, empirical expressions which always cause human reality to appear to us as *manifested by... a specific person*" (*BN*, p.723). Thus, Sally's frustration in the face of her cluttering behaviour, her



cluttering itself, is part of the reality she brings into existence by herself. This reality is the very *particular* and unique reality of Sally and her expression of her authorship in the concrete world. Thus Sartre says that we are to subject the individual to the analysis of her individual authorship, despite being “established by an ontology... its results are on principle wholly outside the possibilities of an ontology” (*BN*, p.726). Thus we venture into the psychology of this moral-psychological investigation of bad faith and responsibility.

## **II: Existential Psychotherapy**

What I have tried to show is that our absolute responsibility is overwhelming at times because it hurls us into anguish, but in particular concrete situations, responsibility also can be difficult to accept because of the weight of something being our ‘fault’ that we may not like or may not believe we created. This is its more clinical, everyday manifestation and pertains to more specific problems, while the avoidance of anguish is fundamental and does not always become explicit for the individual. What we are responsible for is our life as it is and as it was, i.e. who we are. In various forms of bad faith we develop a symptomatic narrative that indicates and induces moral-psychological problems or dysphoria. For example the depressed woman or the woman with ADHD who cannot saddle the responsibility for her compulsion to clutter her living space, while she detests her ‘affliction’ for ‘causing’ such disorder and produces a feeling of self depreciation, depression, helplessness, etc.. Such instances are distant from a pure existential anguish; however, they are representations of an avoidance of experiencing such anguish. It is not only the responsibility for the clutter that she avoids, that is

soothed through existing as 'not her fault', but the recognition of responsibility for her cluttering behaviour indicates and sheds light upon the behaviour from a distance. What was once necessarily *her* becomes something that is only *a possibility for her*; that is her in the mode of not being her, but authored by her. This brings to light questions concerning 'why' she authors herself that way and may unhinge very deep rooted beliefs about 'who' she is. Indirectly she reaffirms her being as a being that is in question, in this way touching upon her fundamental condition. Thus, we are motivated to ask, how does she take responsibility for her ADHD and discontinue her project of bad faith that announces her ADHD as the *cause* of who she is? What could dislodge her from her project of bad faith?

In the clinical context, taking responsibility often means overcoming various versions of dysphoria; taking responsibility, in many ways is the first step to changing oneself from something one finds undesirable. Irvin Yalom's book, *Existential Psychotherapy* provides valuable clinical insight into the nature of responsibility, something which he defines simply: "responsibility means authorship" (Yalom, p.218). Responsibility is of overwhelming importance in the clinical situation, as Yalom says: "for the patient who will not accept such responsibility, who persists in blaming others – either other individuals or other forces – for his or her dysphoria, no real therapy is possible" (Ibid). Yalom also recognizes the anguish of responsibility acceptance, saying, "both to constitute (to be responsible for) oneself and one's world and to be aware of one's responsibility is a deeply frightening insight" (Yalom, p.221). Nevertheless, in concurrence with this thesis, the method of *how* to escape responsibility avoidance or bad

faith is not exactly conclusive or agreed upon. It seems there are various versions of simply telling people to accept responsibility, thus, leaving us wondering just how successful any of it is; i.e. we cannot expect that simply telling another to take responsibility, because it is theirs, will be overwhelmingly successful. Nevertheless, I have argued that we all employ bad faith in our daily lives and yet it is favourable to realize what we really are. We are things (consciousnesses) that reveal being and in doing so make the world and our self what it is. We do not want to be in bad faith, i.e. we do not want to deceive ourselves thus revealing the other side of bad faith to ourselves: responsibility recognition.

However in the clinical situation the therapist has the advantage of the confidence (usually) of the patient that he/she is some sort of authority on such matters, therefore possibly evoking an increased effort on the side of the patient to take responsibility, i.e. to believe the therapist that it is true that their life *is* their responsibility. However, I would not expect that this would suffice to show how we take responsibility if our usual project relies upon bad faith to ‘cope’ with our anguish outside of the therapeutic context. Nevertheless it does seem to be clear that the effort to couch one’s life in terms of responsibility is an indispensable step to taking responsibility for oneself. As I have shown through the examples in this thesis, there is always a ‘responsible’ version of any situation that can be explicated. Similarly, in the clinical situation, Yalom remarks, “the therapist must continually operate within the frame of reference that a patient has created his or her own distress” (Yalom, p.231) and therapists regularly ask the patient to “own” his or her situation and rephrase it as such. It could be that responsibility acceptance

involves merely a lot of practice in rephrasing one's situation and life in such terms. This was a technique advocated by Fritz Perls, who wanted his patients to follow every statement about themselves with "and I take responsibility for it" (From Yalom, p.246). However, the problem with such clinical examples is that they assume a certain dysphoria or psychological distress and a patient who is *requesting help* in the matter, therefore such verbal prescriptions are embraced as a 'technique' to 'get better'.

Another problem with techniques prescribed in order to achieve responsibility acceptance is that it runs the risk of having the opposite effect, that is, of producing people who actually do not take responsibility and allow the guidance of the one who is prescribing the technique to supplant their own responsibility. For example a group and technique called 'est' started by Werner Erhard, advocated, what looked like a very Sartrean absolute responsibility, stating, "you are the sole creator of your experience" (From Yalom, p.255, 257). However, what the group produced was a very dependent, irresponsible group of people: the instructions on what sort of 'responsible' life to live was so regimented and conformist that the result were people who failed to embrace themselves as responsible individuals. Instead they mimicked their leader and allowed themselves to avoid responsibility through blind following (Yalom, p.259). The urge to embrace Erhard's authority on the matter functioned as a way for the members to avoid their anguish in the face of their responsibility and instead find satisfaction in relinquishing their authorship to the Other.

In light of these clinical examples, it is obvious that the absolute responsibility derived from Sartre's theory is not one that can be brow-beaten into someone. However

it still remains the case that clinically, genuine “responsibility acceptance, in psychotherapy, leads to therapeutic success” (Yalom, p.261). Nevertheless, even if this is the case, it is yet to be conclusive *how* we get out of bad faith and what it means to be struck with the anguish of responsibility.

The problem presented by these clinical examples may in part arise because the definition of responsibility, even in the fairly radical context of Yalom’s existential psychotherapy, is still somewhat conventional. Despite the fact that Yalom embraces a very existential version of responsibility and frequently quotes Sartre himself on the matter, he still, in talking about the limits of responsibility, resorts to language such as “we can’t have control over certain things, and therefore cannot be responsible for them”, and in fact uses the example of cancer to illustrate this (contrary to my interpretation of Sartre’s absolute responsibility and contrary to the entailment of the ontological structure of consciousness itself). Therefore, the limits that Yalom explicates hurl him back into this conventional responsibility which allows for various opportunities for bad faith.

The problem is that both versions of responsibility are a slippery slope of sorts, however sliding in different directions, because they express a fundamental and structural difference in what responsibility is. The conventional understanding tends, in bad faith, to extend itself into areas that are obviously one’s own responsibility, for example how our visitors to Burkina Faso view the meaning of the village they pass through. Similarly, absolute responsibility can extend itself into areas that are not so obviously one’s responsibility, for example our man with terminal cancer who must take responsibility for the cancer itself. Therefore, contrary to Yalom, the two are mutually

exclusive in that they will contradict one another in various perceptions of one's life, step on each others toes, so to speak. Therefore they cannot be blended together risking confusion about what one is actually responsible for. Therefore, in light of this thesis only absolute responsibility can be the case, for it accounts for its domain and justifies its nature through its consistency with the structure of consciousness. Secondly, it makes itself apparent and relevant in moments of moral-psychological dilemmas in which we retreat to a project of bad faith. The problem for Yalom is that he concedes that 'some things cannot be one's complete responsibility', conflating the two versions of responsibility, therefore allowing the conventional criteria for responsibility to leak in and be utilized in responsibility avoidance or bad faith. Because he allows that cancer, for example, is out of one's control to a certain extent and therefore not one's responsibility, he implicitly allows that anything that can be shown to 'be out of one's control' can then escape our pervasive responsibility. This undermines Yalom's own very existential attempt at radical responsibility acceptance. Thus, our recourse is to conclude that responsibility really is absolute *and must be* to avoid Yalom's problem of having to permit certain things that are 'out of our control' and slide down the slippery slope of bad faith. Therefore, the first step in the acceptance of responsibility is to reconceptualize it, to make of it a condition of our existence, to realize our intentional structure. In turn this will allow opportunities to identify moments of bad faith, which will provide us with the opportunity for real moral-psychological work.

Thus, Sally, our ADHD woman in her fundamental reconceptualization of responsibility and what it entails for her, produces a change in her 'affliction'. The

physical aspects (if there are any) fall to the background as *what she makes it* rises to the top. She recognizes in conjunction with her responsibility acceptance that she was actually in bad faith about her 'affliction', believing that her clutter was caused externally and her behaviour was not her own, but the cold, in-itself effect of some physical cause. In her responsibility acceptance the behaviour itself becomes somewhat objectified, that is, distant from her as something she *made* as opposed to what she inextricably *is*. It is her being, but it is her being in the mode of *not being it*; such are the illuminating moments of authenticity. What she achieves is an empowering sense of authorship in regard to her 'affliction' that could never have come before.

This process is not unlike Sartre's process that he outlined in his section "Existential Psychoanalysis"<sup>5</sup>. He said that Sally's frustration, or her cluttering behaviour, acts as material on which to "take an objective attitude" (*BN*, p729) toward this particular *way of being* in its irreducible concreteness. This will refer her to her distance from it as it is objectified as particularly *her* way of being and is 'presented to her as if she were seeing herself in a mirror' (*BN*, p732). In this process her responsibility is facilitated, she can begin to see this particular way of being as only originating in herself. It is only then that Sally can begin to alter her cluttering behaviour, as Sartre says: only when she is detached in this way can she "pass on from the investigation proper to the cure" (*BN*, p.732). Thus, despite the fact that Sartre notes that because of the individuality of each person, "the method which has served for one subject will not necessarily be suitable to use for another" (*BN*, p.732), he also contends that it is

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<sup>5</sup> This section is from p.712-734.

a method meant to achieve responsibility for ourselves, or recognition of our authorship for *what we are*. He writes: “it is a method destined to bring to light... the subjective choice by which each living person *makes himself a person*; that is, makes known to himself what he is” (*BN*, p.734, my emphasis).

Thus, it does not seem sufficient to invoke responsibility recognition by telling another ‘take responsibility because that is the reality you are confronted with’. In this reconceptualization of responsibility we also see that it is the condition that is evoked through our escape from bad faith, therefore the way that we come to responsibility recognition is not only through recognizing the ontological fact of it, it also erupts inherently in one’s departure from bad faith. That is, one’s effort need not be directed at responsibility itself, one merely needs to have the goal of not lying to oneself and through the achievement of not deceiving oneself one begins to recognize his/her absolute responsibility. This is because the lie to oneself has the structure of a denial of responsibility, because as we realize that, for example, I am lying to myself in believing that I am cowardly by nature, or that my depression is ‘who I am’, they reveal themselves as disconnected, not gaining their reality from anywhere until they are anchored by our authorship. For if it did not come from nature, or from some in-itself cause, than where did it come from? The answer has to be *me*. Thus, our authorship and responsibility are confronted.



## Conclusion

Embedded in Sartre's structure of consciousness I believe we can derive a theory of personal responsibility that is absolute. There is no doubt that this theory of absolute responsibility is radical and hard to digest for many. Nevertheless, what is important to see is that it is only absolute according to its own definition. That is, because of the nature of authorship that emerges from the intentional consciousness, that is set against the world, which is *something* and distinct from the world as nothingness, it entails its own responsibility for making this something come to be as it is. Now what this responsibility is, we have seen, does not radically alter our power to affect the world due precisely to its distinction from the world. However it is capable of radically altering our constitutive ability in regard to how the world presents itself to us. It really is then a fundamental reconceptualization that reveals itself as markedly moral-psychological, for it has consequences for the individual in his or her life, while not proclaiming to necessarily have consequences in the physical processes of the world. Thus, we see how Sartre's soldier can be responsible for the war and his recognition of this fact could radically alter his whole *Weltanschauung*, similarly how our cancer victim could become empowered by his recognizing his responsibility for his disease despite his complete inability to alter the advancement of his cancer cells toward his eventual death.

Viewing responsibility as this absolute, pervasive and yet disconnected concept is indicative of its separation from freedom that I argued for. Before we can entertain the possibility of freedom we must understand the context in which it is free, and it would be much too convenient to proclaim our radical freedom false according to the limitations

that the physical, causal, being-in-itself world places on it. Sartre has made it clear that we are absolutely responsible *as a consciousness* and it is our ontological delineation as unable to preclude the causal network of being-in-itself.

Nevertheless, it is the conception of reality, i.e. what constitutes it, that becomes the sticking point once we accept the realms of being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Reality is protested by many to be made up of things in the world that constitute themselves, what they are and what they mean, independently of conscious authorship. This conception, if it first does not rely on some sort of essentialism or idealism or God, quickly encounters the logical fact that if transcendence is required to create meaning then consciousness must be what creates meaning, because an object itself cannot transcend another object or transcend itself as *not being what it is*. As Sartre says, being-in-itself just is. Nevertheless it may seem that there is some inherent meaning in the world that ensures we apprehend each object in basically the same way. However when we begin to examine precisely what the object is, we see that for each individual it is a complex, robust thing that is integrated into their project in a very unique way. This is because of the rich meaning that is accumulated in the 'thing' through the authorship of the individual; nothing ever retains a purported 'basic meaning' but *becomes* what it is in light of the for-itself apprehending it. Thus, it is through the meanings that we attribute to each thing that we encounter that they become what they are in their fullness and in their reality.

Thus, this authorship of reality reveals to us the immense responsibility we have for reality, encompassing ourselves and the situation we are in. This responsibility is

hidden: not only is it an immense responsibility to shoulder but it also confronts us with our fundamental condition as a being that is separate from the world and even from its self that it makes-up. I make the world *what it is* and therefore I am detached from it as always *not* what it is. In regard to my self, I am detached from it as it *is* only through my authorship, which equates to being my self in the mode of not being it. Illuminating this condition is the cause for a destabilizing anguish that we attempt to avoid by finding evidence for reality being what it is in light of it not being *ours*. What we discovered was that this process of bad faith implicitly indicated responsibility through its attempts to avoid it, precisely because responsibility is the 'other side' of bad faith. Thus, our avoidance opens the theory up to investigation of responsibility itself, it is indicated by bad faith as bad faith is the desire to not realize it. We could say bad faith *is* absolute responsibility in order to hide it from ourselves, this is the bad faith of bad faith. Thus, in every circumstance of bad faith we see an element of trying to escape our very fundamental condition.

What we also see is the primacy of responsibility, for it is confronted head on in our daily lives as it is always present as that which I avoid in bad faith. Meanwhile, freedom can be consented to abstractly, precisely because it does not have what I am as its object. It points toward the future and posits itself, while making no promise; if it necessarily promised itself as real freedom then it too would reveal our bad faith. However we see that people consent to such freedom in bad faith and are only able to do so by abstracting it. Thus, responsibility as the other side of bad faith and as the indication of our fundamental condition itself is what makes it possible to recognize our

concrete freedom. Made possible because if freedom by-itself cannot create a rupture with what I am right now, or what I have been in the past, then it cannot assert itself as concrete freedom: conscious of itself as a freedom in its continued action. Whereas responsibility creates this rupture with what we are necessarily because it indicates ourselves as something we authored as opposed to something we are that we passively accept. We become, through responsibility recognition, active participants, in fact active authors, i.e. conscious of ourselves as authors, which is exactly what is required for concrete freedom and what is missing from freedom in abstraction.

This indicates that responsibility is requisite to realizing our concrete freedom and therefore I feel it is unjustifiable for the argument to venture into a real defense of freedom itself. As we saw with Taylor as an example, critics have been too hasty in assessing radical freedom, distorting its manifestation essentially because of our inexperience with it. What freedom may look like, if it is preceded by our responsibility may not be quite what we hypothesize. On the other hand this hastiness in assessing freedom could take the discussion away from the concerns raised by Sartre's complicated theory of consciousness and responsibility and risk forgetting about responsibility completely, conceiving of freedom only in its spontaneity. This is not to say that freedom is not a spontaneity, for it is. However in our moral-psychological lives we do not experience it that way, or we do not at least until we have somehow dislodged ourselves from our life that weighs so heavily upon us. As a moral-psychological issue, the preoccupation with concrete radical freedom is overly speculative and risks betraying the very theory that conceived of it. Therefore this theory is developed in part, in order to

intimate the fact that Sartre's theory needs to be reexamined in order then to better understand his contentious theory of radical freedom. It is this theory of responsibility and bad faith that reengages us with Sartre's ontology and brings his theory to the concrete via the individual, moral-psychological struggle with bad faith and responsibility.

There are two practical indications that point to the need to redevelop Sartre's theory in *Being and Nothingness*. One is that responsibility has become a necessary recognition in the development of many psychotherapies in which the patient contends with various versions of bad faith in their depression, anxiety and dysphoria. Secondly, Sartre's undeveloped Existential Psychoanalysis itself, which began to point the way to realizing our fundamental condition although never was able to come to fruition.

Despite the argument defended in this thesis, it still does not come to any conclusive theories about how one may accomplish this recognition of our absolute responsibility; however, the point is more in its pointing, so to speak. That is, whether it is possible or not for the individual to achieve such a responsible state is not as important as what kind of picture this creates for the person in bad faith, or the person escaping bad faith. It provides a structure in which to understand their self-deception and their moral-psychological existence. In the departure from bad faith every person must confront their individual project, what they have hidden from themselves, what causal explanations they have relied upon to escape anguish and what facticity they have constituted through their actions that they deny responsibility for through transcendence. These must all be different and therefore their ability to accept responsibility for the world must be

different. Therefore, I am satisfied to say that I cannot give a 'way out' of bad faith specifically, and the ability to escape must remain either a clinical issue or an issue through one's own meditation, as it should be. What *is* existentially universal is that this concrete problem has its solution in recognizing the fact that any instance of avoiding or not recognizing one's responsibility for any situation one is in, implies a project of bad faith and any instance of bad faith is a form of responsibility avoidance. This theory offers no quick moral-psychological solutions, it instead has elucidated the relationship between bad faith and responsibility, erected responsibility as a pressing moral-psychological issue, and clarified the conditions which have to be met in order to precipitate change through determining ourselves.

This may seem like a bleak outlook on our existential condition and our daily lives considering that it is quite possible that we can never achieve a state of complete responsibility acceptance, i.e. a condition of authenticity. If we cannot then we are relegated to a continual struggle between lying to ourselves and taking responsibility for ourselves. However, if there is to be any optimism about such a moral-psychological situation it is to be found in the direction that responsibility acceptance takes us, for even if some sort of permanent authenticity is impossible, the fleeting moments of authenticity, the moments when the condition of our existence is revealed through the taking-on of responsibility, when we realize that what we are is something that we authored and we are therefore nothing and are therefore spared the weight and substantiality of our lives, this is the condition by which Sartre's ontological freedom can then touch us, that all becomes possible because I have only ever been a *possibility*. Thus, the end goal of

existential psychoanalysis for Sartre “must reveal to the moral agent that he is *the being by whom values exist*. It is then that his freedom will become conscious of itself” (*BN*, p.797). Although this is its theoretical possibility that has authenticity as its goal, at this point, I am content to conclude that ontological freedom is a “constantly renewed obligation to remake the *Self*” (*BN*, p.72), while concrete responsibility is what enables us to recognize that we make the self in the first place.

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